

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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- ❖ *Domaine Hubert et Laurent Lignier's Superb, Classically-Styled Red Burgundies.* (pages 1-16)
- ❖ *Château Latour- The Médoc's Longest-Lived First Growth.* (pages 17-39)
- ❖ *A First Look At the Excellent 2016 Beaujolais Vintage and More Late-Released 2015s.* (pages 40-71)
- ❖ *The Legendary 1974 Vintage in California- The Cabernets and A Few Zins Drinking Very, Very Well At Age Forty-Three.* (pages 72-91)
- ❖ *Domaine Ferret's 2015 Bottlings of Pouilly-Fuissé.* (pages 92-98)
- ❖ *The Bi-Annual Champagne Report- Getting Caught Up On More Great Wines .* (pages 99-132)
- ❖ *Saumur's Star, Clos Rougeard, Also Makes Superb White Wines.* (pages 133-143)

Coming Attractions

- ❖ *Another Full Roster Of Magical Mature Wines From Piemonte- Bruno Giacosa, Bartolo Mascarello, Marcarini, Giacomo Conterno, Produttori and Many More.*
- ❖ *The Short Crop and Excellent 2016 Burgundy Vintage.*
- ❖ *Anselme Selosse of Champagne Jacques Selosse- Paving the Way in Avize.*
- ❖ *Ric Forman's Iconic Winemaking Career- Charting the Course For California Greatness From Stony Hill to Sterling, Newton and Forman Vineyards.*
- ❖ *Some Stars Of the 2016 German Vintage, Château Pichon-Lalande, The Hill of Corton, Champagne Bruno Paillard, Nicole Chanrion, Château Ausone, Off the Beaten-Path Italian Wines, Château Montrose, 2016 Northern Rhône, Special Club Champagne, Catching Up On Sauternes, Aged Muscadet, Clape Cornas, Mature Loire Reds, the 2001 Bordeaux Vintage, Coche-Dury Corton-Charlemagne and a Special Feature on Chambertin and Clos de Bèze.*

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DOMAINE HUBERT ET LAURENT LIGNIER
GREAT TRADITIONAL BURGUNDY IN MOREY ST. DENIS



Hubert Lignier, one of the great winegrowers in the Côte de Nuits, last year celebrated his eightieth birthday in Morey St. Denis. His son, Laurent Lignier, who has run the family domaine with Hubert now for several years, commemorated his father's landmark birthday with a couple of tastings in their cellars in Morey St. Denis, with a wide array of wines served from the many decades of his father's career. Hubert Lignier and his family have long lived on the main thoroughfare in Morey St. Denis, which runs up from the Route Nationale to the church and the Clos de Tart at the top of the hill in the village, with Hubert's home on the right hand side of the road as one climbs the hill, right next door to the Truchot family. For most of his career, Monsieur Lignier's cellars lay beneath his home on this street, but as his younger son Romain began to handle more of the winemaking responsibilities in the mid-1990s, the family moved their cellars around the corner to a fine location underneath the hotel and restaurant, Castel Très Girard for a few years, and eventually to their present location, beneath their lovely bed and breakfast right on the Route Nationale in Morey St. Denis. Hubert's older son, Laurent Lignier, has been in charge of the cellars and vineyards for the family domaine since 2006, taking over after the tragic passing of his brother Romain in 2004, but his father Hubert still remains quite active at the family winery, taking a hand in the cellars and very often to be found

welcoming visitors or sharing a glass of the family's beautiful and very classic examples of Burgundy.

Though the Lignier family has long had an excellent reputation for the quality of their wines, their journey through the last couple of decades has not been without much sadness and more than a bit of controversy. Hubert Lignier began to groom his younger son, Romain, to take over the direction of the family domaine back in 1992, as his older son, Laurent, was already working with one of the large *négociants* in Beaune at this point in time. Romain was to be the heir apparent for the family domaine, but his life was tragically cut short by cancer, which eventually took his life in the autumn of 2004. Romain Lignier was an immensely talented *vigneron*, as well as one of the nicest people one could ever hope to meet in the firmament of Burgundy, and when he passed away at the age of thirty-four, it left the succession plans at Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils in shambles. As Romain became weaker in his battle against cancer over the course of 2004, Hubert stepped back in to shoulder more of the farming and cellar responsibilities, initially aided by his daughter-in-law, Kellen Lignier, who began taking oenology courses at the University of Dijon and planned to assist in the running of the family domaine until hers and Romain's children, Lucie and Auguste Lignier, would be old enough to carry on the family winegrowing tradition. I remember well visiting with Hubert and Kellen in the family cellars back in the spring of 2005, tasting their 2004 vintage out of barrel and sensing the hope for the future that competed with pervasive sadness that was left in the wake of Romain's passing a few months earlier. Unhappily, the initial plan for the domaine was not to come to fruition, as Kellen and Hubert Lignier eventually had a falling out and this led to one of the sadder family disputes in recent times in the Côte d'Or, which has not been without similar contretemps in the ranks of other Burgundian families throughout its history.

As is so often the case these days in Burgundy, the dispute between Hubert and Kellen Lignier eventually ended up in court for an extended stretch of litigation, so that I did not taste any wines from the domaine in the 2005 vintage (I believe that Kellen Lignier controlled all of the family vineyards at this time and made this vintage under her own label, which is named for her two children, Lucie and Auguste), but by the spring of 2008, I was able to taste a few of Hubert's own wines from the 2006 vintage, as the court had finalized some sort of preliminary split of the domaine's vineyards between the two parties and Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils was up and running again after a brief, forced hiatus. Understandably, Hubert and his older son Laurent Lignier prefer not to talk about this chapter too often and as I try to be understanding, I did not ask further questions in the preparation of this article. In the long history of excellent wines from the Lignier family, this small window of court struggles is hardly noteworthy, though I have no doubt that it caused Hubert a lot of sadness. Eventually, the situation was finally settled and Hubert and Laurent could again turn their attention to producing world class Burgundies in the heart of Morey St. Denis. As Laurent Lignier has been working with the *négociant* firm of Bichot in Beaune during the early stages of his career, I did not meet and taste with him at the family domaine until I arrived to taste through the 2009 vintage here in November of 2010, but he was already working alongside of his father on at least a part-time basis in 2006, while wrapping up his affairs with Bichot. In any event, it was not until the 2009 vintage that I was able to taste the full roster at Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils again, which was augmented, after the splitting of some of the family parcels with Kellen Lignier, by several new and outstanding

bottlings made from purchased grapes and rented parcels, so that today, the lineup of cuvées at the domaine is wider and deeper than it was before the family dispute with Kellen.

Hubert Lignier was born in 1936, and like many of his generation of winegrowers in Burgundy, he started out his career selling most of his production off to *négociants* in the region and only bottling a small percentage of his wines for family consumption and a handful of private clients. The domaine is now being run by its fifth generation, as the Lignier family can trace their origins in the Côte de Nuits all the way back to when Jacques Lignier purchased a few parcels in the village back in 1880, though he resided in Flagey-Echézeaux at the time. Jacques Lignier eventually passed on the domaine and its parcels of vines to his son Jules Lignier, who oversaw the replanting of the vineyards in the wake of phylloxera and expanded the number of family holdings, so that by the late 1920s, the domaine owned four and a half hectares of vineyard land. Jules Lignier in turned passed on part of the estate to Hubert's father, Henri Lignier, with another portion of the family's vineyards going to Henri's brother, which would eventually form the genesis of their cousin's domaine, Georges Lignier. Hubert Lignier first joined his father at the domaine in 1959 and assumed the direction of the estate in the 1960s, with the family's vineyard patrimony built up to about eight hectares by the time Hubert took the reins of the estate. The expanded holdings remained primarily in their home village of Morey St. Denis, but by this time also included a bit of Chambolle *villages* land and a parcel in the premier cru of les Baudes, as well as small and prime slices of both Charmes-Chambertin and the Gevrey premier cru of aux Combottes. For much of the first couple of decades of Hubert's career as head of the family domaine, the majority of his production was still sold off in cask to *négociants*, with the firm of Maison Pierre Bourée in Gevrey-Chambertin amongst the lucky recipients of casks of wines from the Lignier cellars. Starting in 1970, Hubert Lignier began to bottle a small percentage of his production for sale in bottle and by the late '70s he had started to export some of his wines, with his American importer commencing with the domaine in the 1978 vintage, when Hubert bottled a bit of Morey AC, Morey St. Denis "1er Cru Vieilles Vignes" and Clos de la Roche for shipping to the US. Over the decade of the 1980s, Hubert slowly expanded the amount of wine he sold in bottle, but it was really the impetus brought on by the full-time arrival of his son Romain to the winery in 1992 that allowed for all of the production here to be estate-bottled.

While the quality of the Lignier family's wines has been consistently excellent during the transition from first Hubert to Romain, and then on to Laurent starting in 2006, the style of the wines gently shifted during the respective eras of each Lignier at the head of the family domaine. Hubert Lignier has always believed that the best extraction for the wines takes place during the fermentation, so he was never a proponent of the Henri Mayer method of cooling the cellars and allowing a bit of pre-fermentation maceration to take place prior to the onset of fermentation. This changed a bit when Romain Lignier began to take over more of the decision making in the cellars, with the wines seeing a bit of "cold soak" prior to the start of fermentation, and this has continued under the direction of Laurent Lignier since his return to the family domaine in 2006. The family has always used indigenous yeasts to start the fermentations, and this has been one constant as the cellar stewardship passed from Hubert to Romain and then to Laurent Lignier. Hubert was also very much part of his generation when it came to the use of new oak, so as more new wood became fashionable in the wake of Henri Mayer's remarkable success in the 1980s, Hubert did not jump on the new oak bandwagon full tilt, preferring to use a relatively moderate

percentage of new wood for his own wines. This would typically be around twenty percent for his village wines, a third for his premier crus and forty to fifty percent for his grand crus by the time he was beginning to prepare hand over the reins to Romain in the early 1990s. As was also true at several other domaines making generational transitions in the early to mid-1990s, Romain Lignier decided to use a bit more new wood for his wines, so these percentages moved up a bit during his decade at the helm, and there was also a bit more toasting of the casks during his era. Therefore, the wines from the 1993 to 2002 here are quite a bit more new oaky in personality than had been the case during Hubert's times. Romain Lignier was certainly not unique in starting to increase the percentage of new oak used during his tenure, as this was a pretty universal trend in the decade of the 1990s in the Côte de Nuits, with more new wood and a bit more toasting of the barrels very much the calling card of many red Burgundies from 1993 to the late '90s.



Laurent Lignier, in the family's cellars underneath their lovely Bed and Breakfast on the Route Nationale in Morey.

With the return of Laurent Lignier to the family domaine in 2006, the new oak component in the family's wines has once again reverted back down to the range that Hubert utilized during his long career, and the toastiness of the barrels has also diminished. Part of this reflects trends that one has witnessed at several other important domaines that made similar generational transitions around the same time (Domaine Jean Trappet immediately comes to mind as having followed this same evolution in the use of new wood and toasted barrels), but it also

reflects on Laurent Lignier's desire to produce more elegant and soil-driven wines during his stewardship of the family estate. Laurent still uses a short "cold soak" prior to the start of fermentation, which was first practiced by his brother Romain here, but ferments his wines quite gently and uses less new wood during the *élevage* these days, so that the wines harken back stylistically more to the wines that Hubert produced in his era, rather than the slightly more extroverted examples made by Romain. His father always destemmed his grapes (this was the trend for most of his generation), but Laurent Lignier has started to use more whole clusters for his fermentations as he has settled into the cellars here in the last decade. This is one of the most interesting aspects of the history of winemaking here at Domaine Hubert Lignier, as each person has made very successful, classic, *terroir*-specific wines during their era at the helm in the cellars, but each has also made wines that had their own distinct personalities at the same time. In fact, as Laurent Lignier was putting together the lineup for his father's eightieth birthday tasting, he was quick to include several wines made during Romain's tenure at the head of the domaine, and these wines were every bit as excellent as the ones that he made himself, as well as the wines from his father's era.

The family's lineup of bottlings has expanded rather dramatically since Laurent Lignier returned to the domaine in 2006, as he has been quick to augment their traditional range of cuvées by leasing vineyard parcels or buying in grapes from some well-farmed plots of vines. In Hubert and Romain's days, the lineup *chez* Lignier included a very fine Bourgogne rouge, *villages* level bottlings from Gevrey, Morey and Chambolle and premier crus in these same three villages. The premier crus were Chambolle "les Baudes" (vines planted in 1958 and sandwiched between Bonnes-Mares and les Sentiers at the northern limit of the vineyard), Morey "Chaffots", "la Riotte" and a Morey Premier Cru "Vieilles Vignes" bottling from two vineyards just below Clos de la Roche (thirty-three *ares* in les Façonnières- planted 1947 and 1960- and just down the slope in the vineyard of Chenevery, twenty *ares*, with this parcel having been planted between 1936 and 1943!) and a small parcel in Gevrey-Chambertin "aux Combottes", which is located right at the very top of the slope of this vineyard and was planted in 1957. At the grand cru level, there was a small slice of Charmes-Chambertin and one of the very finest bottlings of Clos de la Roche produced. As a percentage of each of these parcels has reverted to Kellen Lignier and her children, Laurent Lignier started looking for more parcels to farm or buy grapes from to augment their diminished lineup and has done marvelously well in this regard, adding bottlings from Pommard, Nuits St. Georges, not to mention further premier crus in both Chambolle and Gevrey, as well as a small slice of Griotte-Chambertin in the last couple of vintages, so the lineup of wines *chez* Lignier these days is far deeper and broader than was the case in earlier times.

What I find most intelligent about Laurent Lignier's expansion of his lineup of wines in the last half dozen or so vintages, is that he has not turned his nose up at excellent *villages* level parcels, if they are planted with old vines, and he has searched hard to find interesting *terroirs* to work with at the premier cru level as well, so the range of wines that are more affordable than many grand crus these days is deep and wide *chez* Lignier. Today, to augment the three *villages* bottlings from Gevrey, Morey and Chambolle that the domaine produces from their own vines, Laurent Lignier has added two lovely Pommard AC level bottlings, one from a friend's parcel in the *lieu à dit* of En Brescul, which sits up high on the slope above Pézerolles and close to the Beaune border, as well as an extremely old vine parcel (planted between 1931 and 1937) in the *villages* section of the vineyard of Chanlins. Both wines are excellent and great values. I should

mention that the 2015 vintage was the last of the Chanlins for the conceivable future, as all of the non-stop hail damage in Pommard in the last five years eventually destroyed these old vines and they had to be grubbed up, so get out and search the market for previous vintages! There is also now a *villages* level bottling from Nuits St. Georges in the Lignier's portfolio, this one hailing from a parcel of 1947-planted old vines the *lieu à dit* of les Poisets (also listed on some maps as Les Poirêts), which lies just downslope from Les Cailles. In Morey St. Denis, Laurent has added a bottling from the *lieu à dit* of Très Girard (Cécile Tremblay also makes a lovely example from this vineyard) and a Gevrey-Chambertin "la Justice" cuvée (made from purchased grapes and debuting in 2009). In 2009, Laurent Lignier added another Gevrey AC bottling, from the *lieu à dit* of les Seuvrées, located right below Mazoyrès-Chambertin, and another Chambolle *villages* labeled as "Vieilles Vignes". With the addition of all these excellent new *villages* level wines, Monsieur Lignier has decided to change the names of two of the AC wines produced from the domaine's original holdings, to keep from confusion, so the Chambolle AC now has the name of its *lieu à dit* on the label- les Bussièrès (on the Morey border and next door to Domaine Roumier's Clos de la Bussière) and has started to label the Morey *villages* bottling as "Trilogie" to reflect the three different *lieux à dits* that the wine is blended from. Today, Laurent Lignier's range of *villages* level wines is probably the red wine equivalent of the great lineup Jean-Marc Roulot bottles in Meursault on the white wine side of the ledger.

At the level of premier crus, there are also several new and noteworthy bottlings *chez* Lignier in the last several vintages. These include a lovely new Chambolle premier cru to augment the very, very tiny production that the domaine has always produced from their twenty *ares* of vines in les Baudes. This is the excellent les Chabiots, which debuted in the 2010 vintage, with the vines Laurent purchases grapes from lying on the southern end of the vineyard, right above les Amoureuses. These vines are now twenty-five years of age and just coming into their prime. In Gevrey-Chambertin, the domaine's own superb version of aux Combottes has been augmented by another excellent new premier cru: la Perrière, where Monsieur Lignier purchases grapes from a twenty *are* parcel of vines that were planted half in 1955 and half in 1986. La Perrière is always a very black fruity and mineral example of Gevrey and is a beautiful counterpoint to the more plummy and spicy Combottes. In Morey St. Denis, there are a couple of very small, *négociant* bottlings of premier cru as well, which I have never had a chance to taste. These are another bottling of Chenevery, made from purchased grapes from the parcel right next to the domaine's old vines here, and Clos Baulet, which is the smallest premier cru in the entire village, situated just below Clos des Lambrays. The new lineup of premier crus *chez* Lignier in the last half dozen or so years is concluded with a regular purchase from the Hospices de Nuits of the Cuvée Didiers, which he splits with his good friend Romain Taupenot each year. It is always a bit more marked by its toasty oak than the other wines in the Lignier cellars since Laurent returned to the domaine in 2006, but he will always rack this wine out of its new barrels (the Hospices de Nuits makes everything in new oak) after the malo is completed into three and four year-old casks, so it is never an over-oaked wine. I have consistently liked the Hospices bottling from the Lignier family, since I first tasted it in the 2009 vintage and expect it will age beautifully.

At the grand cru level, Domaine Hubert et Laurent Lignier have always made excellent examples, with the old days of only a very small quantity of Charmes-Chambertin and a larger cuvée of Clos de la Roche having now been augmented by a couple of casks of Griotte-

Chambertin, which was just added to the domaine's lineup in the 2014 vintage. The Charmes is produced from a tiny slice of the vineyard- nine *ares*- that are located in Mazoyrès-Chambertin. The Clos de la Roche, which is always one of the very best examples produced, is made from just under a hectare of vines located in two of the *lieux à dits* that make up this grand cru: sixty-two *ares* in the section of Monts Luisants in Clos de la Roche, which is the steepest part of the vineyard with a twenty-five degree slope. This parcel of vines was planted between 1955 and 1965. The other section of Clos de la Roche owned by the Lignier family is their twenty-eight *ares* of vines in les Fremières, which were planted between 1953 and 1960, so all of the Lignier Clos de la Roche is now planted to old vines. This is, year in and year out, the greatest wine in the Lignier family's cellar, and this was reflected in Laurent and Hubert Lignier offering up so many fine vintages of Clos de la Roche for their eightieth birthday celebration back in March of 2016. The new addition of Griotte-Chambertin, made from purchased grapes, is another small cuvée, as there are only two casks of this wine in the Lignier cellars each year, with the wine raised in one new cask and one five year-old barrel.



As I mentioned above, Laurent Lignier has dialed back the percentage of new oak used for his wines in comparison to what his brother Romain used during his tenure, so that today, one will typically find the *villages* wines here seeing between fifteen and twenty percent new oak, the premier crus from twenty-five percent to one-third, and the grand crus from forty to fifty percent new oak in any given vintage. He is also using some whole clusters in his wines, particularly in

riper vintages such as 2015, but generally one does not see more than twenty percent whole clusters used for any given wine. As his father Hubert always destemmed completely, I would imagine that the fermentations temperatures were just a bit higher in Hubert's day than is the case today, and he probably would punch down the cap more often than pumping over during the fermentation, as Hubert always maintained that the best extraction took place during the primary fermentation. With both Romain and now Laurent utilizing a short "cold soak" prior to the start of fermentations, the wines are a bit more gently extracted than in their father's era- this is particularly true today with the wines that Laurent is fashioning, but the stylistic chord from Hubert's wines to those of both his sons is also very easy to see in the wines from both Romain's and Laurent's era. This was particularly evident at our celebration of Hubert's eightieth birthday and the wines that Laurent presented, back in March of 2016, which form the basis of this article.

In addition to the red wines which I have described in detail above, the domaine also produces a couple of white wines as well, which I assume are mostly for family consumption and a few private clients, as I have never seen on the market here in the US or in France. These include a Fixin Blanc that Hubert began producing with Romain back in the first vintages of the new millennium, which was made from purchased grapes and which I think I first tried in the 2002 vintages in the cellars here. There is also a bottling of Saint Romain "Sous Château" that Laurent Lignier produces from purchased grapes in more recent times; the first vintage of this wine that I tasted in the cellars was the 2009 vintage. I do not taste either wine with regularity during my annual visits to the domaine, and with the lineup now so exquisitely packed with new red wine cuvées, I do not ask to try the white wines each year, as the tasting is already plenty long for the amount of time I allocate for each visit. But, on the infrequent occasions that I have tasted each white wine here, I have found them to be lovely examples of their respective appellations, with the Fixin Blanc in particular quite interesting, as it is chardonnay planted on soils typically designated for pinot noir in the village, making for a quite unique blend of soil and fruit.

Domaine Hubert et Laurent Lignier is one of Burgundy's greatest domaines, and the amount of family tragedy that this father and son have had to overcome in the last dozen years is just extraordinary. With Hubert now eighty-one years of age, but still active and often to be found around the domaine when I visit, I am sure that he is very happy today to see how Laurent has continued on the legacy of the family domaine, with the wines as good today as they have ever been in the long and illustrious history of this fine estate. Romain Lignier's legacy at this domaine is also very important, as it was clearly under his direction that the domaine reached its present day level of recognition amongst Burgundy lovers the world over. Hubert is from that generation of *vignerons* who made the transition for selling almost everything off to *négociants* to bottling the family domaine's production at the estate and selling everything in bottle. This was an very important moment of transition in the landscape of Burgundy, with Hubert's contemporaries, such as Jacky Truchot, Louis Trapet and many others of their generation, making this same shift to domaine bottling in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s and paving the way for the Burgundy that we know today. Hubert Lignier has been blessed with two equally talented, thoughtful sons to carry on the family domaine since he has reached the age of retirement, and though fate ungraciously took Romain Lignier from us at far too young an age, his brother Laurent has picked up where Romain left off and continued the fine-tuning of the wines at the estate since his return in 2006. Today, the wines from the Lignier family have never

been better and the trusteeship of these great *terroirs*, called into question during the tumultuous years following Romain's tragic death, has been instituted with great *élan* and fidelity to the classical side of great Burgundy by Laurent Lignier. Perhaps, there is no greater tribute that a son could pay to his winemaking father than the already brilliant string of vintages that Laurent Lignier has crafted since he has taken the helm at the domaine, and one has to imagine that at age eighty-one, Hubert Lignier can look back on a great chapter of the family estate during his days in charge and take great pride in what Laurent has done in the last decade here as he begins in earnest to write his own chapters.

I should note that I have listed all of the wines below as hailing from Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils, but the domaine has now officially changed their name to Domaine Hubert et Laurent Lignier. I have used the prior iteration on the labeling, in case folks find bottles in the auction markets, which may also simply be labeled as Domaine Hubert Lignier.

2014 Morey St. Denis “Trilogie”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

This is Domaine Lignier's Morey *villages* bottling from their own vineyard parcels. The 2014 version is quite lovely and is already approachable if not given too long in decanter, as the wine actually closes down with extended aeration right now. The bouquet is pure and nascently complex, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of red plums, cherries, raw cocoa, gamebird, a hint of beetroot, a fine base of soil and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full and already getting velvety on the attack, with a sappy core, fine focus and grip and a long, moderately tannic finish. This is still a young wine and the oak tannins here build a bit with air, but this is simply a function of their not yet being fully buried in the wine. I would opt for giving this at least three or four years in the cellar, but when confronted with it on a wine list in Burgundy, it is already pretty easy to drink. 2017-2045. **91.**

2013 Chambolle-Musigny “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2013 Chambolle V.V. from Laurent Lignier is a lovely wine that is starting to show very nicely in its youth, offering up a lovely young nose of red and black cherries, plums, cocoa powder, woodsmoke, hints of fresh herbs and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance, modest tannins and fine emerging complexity on the long finish. Very tasty juice. 2017-2035+. **91.**

2013 Morey St. Denis “la Riotte”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2013 la Riotte from Laurent Lignier is a very red fruity version, delivering a lovely bouquet of cherries, strawberries, a bit of bonfire, salty soil tones, coffee, mustard seed and a gentle framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and tangy, with lovely transparency, impressive focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This will be a lovely middleweight in the fullness of time. 2020-2045+. **92.**

2013 Morey St. Denis 1er Cru “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The old vine bottling of Morey Premier Cru is excellent in 2013, with the proximity to Clos de la Roche very much felt in the personality of this young wine. The nose jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, *pigeon*, bitter chocolate, complex soil tones, plenty of smokiness, cedar and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent in profile, with a good core, refined tannins and excellent length and grip on the tangy and promising finish. All this needs is time! 2023-2060. **93+.**

2013 Gevrey-Chambertin “la Perrière”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2013 Perrière is showing very well out of bottle and has clearly not lost anything since I first saw it out of cask back in November of 2014. Today, the wine is very pure and black fruity in personality, offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, black minerality, mustard seed, woodsmoke, espresso and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and focused, with a good core, excellent soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and a beautifully balanced and tangy finish. This is going to be excellent. 2022-2055. **93+**.

2013 Gevrey-Chambertin “aux Combottes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2013 Combottes is equally outstanding and will make a lovely bookend with the Perrière in this vintage. The nose is pure, suave and already quite complex, delivering a fine blend of red and black cherries, plums, cocoa, gamebird, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows a nice touch of sappiness at the core, with impressive transparency, fine-grained tannins and a very long, vibrant and promising finish. 2024-2060. **93+**.

2013 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2013 vintage of Charmes-Chambertin *chez* Lignier is really lovely and just loaded with red fruit in this vintage. The complex bouquet delivers a constellation of cherries, strawberries, red plums, complex soil tones, mustard seed, *pigeon*, coffee and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, impressive soil signature and a very long, seamlessly tannic and tangy finish. This is going to be lovely. 2025-2075. **95**.

2013 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2013 vintage of Clos de la Roche from the Lignier family will be simply brilliant when it is ready to drink, but it is still nearly a decade away from starting to blossom. The nose remains young, but shows plenty of nascent complexity in its mix of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, fresh herb tones, raw cocoa, a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off nice sappiness still in the core, with a very soil-driven personality, ripe tannins and a long, tangy and beautifully focused finish. A beautiful and very elegant vintage of Lignier Clos de la Roche in the making. 2025-2075. **95+**.

2012 Morey St. Denis “la Riotte”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2012 la Riotte from Laurent Lignier is going to be an excellent example of the vintage in a few more years' time. The bouquet is very pure and impressively transparent, offering up scents of cherry, pomegranate, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of mustard seed and hints of the autumnal shadings to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very soil-driven in personality, with a sappy core, suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is still a puppy, but will start to drink with only a handful of more years in the cellar. That said, its real apogee is still a decade down the road. 2020-2050. **92**.

2012 Gevrey-Chambertin “aux Combottes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2012 Combottes from the Ligniers is absolutely beautiful already on the nose, wafting from the glass in a perfumed constellation of cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, gamebird, lovely soil tones and a bit of coffee in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and tangy, with a sappy core, great soil inflection, ripe, seamless tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. A great Combottes in the making. 2022-2060. **93+**.

2012 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2012 Charmes from Laurent Lignier is another magnificent example of the vintage. This is a very elegant wine that is sappy and transparent at the same time, delivering a superb, youthful bouquet of cherries, red plums, complex soil tones, *pigeon*, raw cocoa, gentle smokiness, crushed roses, a bit of vanillin oak and a lovely spread of discreet herb tones so typical of young Charmes. On the palate the wine is pure, seamless and full-bodied, with a lovely core, refined balance, impressive focus and grip and a long, moderately tannic and soil-driven finish. This is one of the finest young vintages of Charmes-Chambertin I have ever had the pleasure to taste *chez* Lignier, but it is still a young wine and needs plenty of bottle age to really blossom. 2025-2075. **95+**.

2012 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2012 Clos de la Roche from the domaine is equally profound, with enormous potential already very much in evidence, despite the wine's still quite youthful character. The bouquet is a sappy blend of black cherries, plums, roasted quail, very complex soil tones, mustard seed and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with impressive complexity beginning to really build from the mid-palate back. The core is rock solid, the tannins refined and buried in fruit and the very long finish is transparent, seamless and stunning in its length and grandeur. Magical juice in the making, just be patient! 2025-2075. **96+**.



Laurent and Hubert Lignier on a cold winter's day, in the shelter of their welcoming Gîte in Morey.

2010 Morey St. Denis 1er Cru “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2010 Morey Premier Cru Vieilles Vignes bottling is going to be an excellent wine, but it is still on the young side and demands many more years of bottle age before it will really be ready to start drinking. The bouquet offers up a fine, youthful blend of red and black cherries, raw cocoa, a touch of mustard seed, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full and still quite tightly-knit, with a fine core, tangy acids, very suave, ripe tannins and a very long, nascently complex and presently quite closed down finish. This will be a great vintage for this wine in the fullness of time, but patience is required. 2025-2060+. **92+**.

2010 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2010 Clos de la Roche from Laurent Lignier is a great wine in the making, offering up a deep, pure and sappy nose of red plums, cherries, raw cocoa, a complex base of soil, gamebirds, woodsmoke and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and still fairly primary on the attack, with a plush core of fruit, tangy acids, lovely transparency, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly balanced, seamless finish. All this brilliant wine needs is more bottle age! 2030-2080. **95**.

2008 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2008 Charmes from Domaine Lignier is starting to stir and is really quite a lovely drink today, if given proper time in decanter to blossom. The bouquet is already quite beautiful, wafting from the glass in a pure blend of cherries, red plums, gamebirds, gorgeously complex soil tones, a touch of cinnamon, mustard seed and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with outstanding transparency, moderate tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and tangy finish. This is still climbing and I would not touch a bottle for another five years, but with its exquisite balance, it is already very easy to drink. 2021-2060+. **94+**.

2007 Morey St. Denis 1er Cru “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The Lignier family’s 2007 Morey Premier Cru Vieilles Vignes is really lovely and just starting to open out into its secondary elements on both the nose and palate, though in the context of many other 2007s, this is still a tad youthful for primetime drinking. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of plums, gamebird, nutskin, woodsmoke, incipient notes of *sous bois*, fresh thyme and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tangy, with a good core, impressive complexity, modest tannins and a long, bouncy and very well-balanced finish. Lovely juice that is already quite tasty, but really just starting its journey. 2017-2040. **92**.

2007 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils (served from magnum)

As readers already know, I am a huge fan of the 2007 red Burgundies, and the Lignier Clos de la Roche is likely to prove to be one of the very finest examples of the vintage. Out of magnum, this is still a puppy, but also pure, nascently complex and marvelously perfumed at the same time, offering up scents of red and black cherries, venison, autumn soil tones, coffee, mustard seed and a nice touch of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and focused, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive soil signature, fine-grained tannins, excellent focus and grip and a long, fairly youthful finish. It is not that this wine is not already very tasty in the glass, but there is so much waiting here to unfold that it borders on a crime to be opening bottles now (except for Hubert Lignier’s birthday!) and I would leave it snoozing for at least another five to seven years in regular-sized format, and a full decade in magnum. 2022-2060. **94**.

2002 Chambolle-Musigny “les Baudes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2002 Chambolle “Baudes” from Domaine Lignier was made when Romain Lignier was still the winemaker at the estate, so the wine is a bit more new oaky in style than the wines of either his father before him, or Laurent Lignier after him. Nevertheless, it has aged very nicely and is really drinking well today, offering up a complex and vibrant bouquet of red and black cherries, gamebirds, *sous bois*, woodsmoke, mustard seed and a generous serving of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core, lovely balance and a long, vibrant and complex finish. Good juice. 2015-2035. **91.**

2002 Morey St. Denis 1er Cru “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2002 vintage of the old vine bottling of Morey Premier Cru was made by Romain Lignier prior to his getting ill, and the wine has aged beautifully from its early, fairly new oaky days and is now really quite classic in personality. The bouquet is wide open and very classy, delivering a fine constellation of plums, baked cherries, venison, a touch of chocolate, *sous bois* and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very suave on the attack, with a good core, lovely length and grip, melting tannins and a long, tangy and well-balanced finish. Lovely juice. 2017-2040. **93.**

2002 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 2002 Clos de la Roche from Romain Lignier has also done a marvelous job of eating its generous serving of new oak from its early days and is now a glorious, quite classical expression of this magical *terroir*. At age fifteen, it is really starting to drink well, albeit still in climbing mode and will be even better with further bottle age. But, if you have more than a few bottles, this is not a bad time at all to try one! The stunning nose soars from the glass in a vibrant blend of plums, black cherries, gamebird, nutskin, a touch of cocoa powder, complex, autumnal soil tones, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with modest tannins, great acids, laser-like focus and a very, very long, very refined finish. Great juice. 2017-2050+. **96.**

1996 Morey St. Denis 1er Cru “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 1996 Morey old vine bottling is still showing more of its new oak component at twenty years of age than the 2002 version, despite the latter being six years its junior. Perhaps Romain Lignier used a heavier toast on the barrels back in '96? In any case, this is still a good wine, but I wonder if it will ever fully integrate its dose of new oak. The bouquet is complex and classic under its veneer of toasty oak, offering up scents of desiccated black plums and black cherries, cigar ash, autumnal soil tones, chocolate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full, black fruity and tangy, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, lovely soil signature and a bit of wood tannin still sticking out on the long and complex finish. My guess is that the oak is never going to be better integrated here than it is today and one is going to always have to work around it just a bit on both the nose and palate. But, that said, it seemed less marked by its new oak when tasted at the domaine in the spring of 2016 than it did a few years ago, when I was doing my report on the 1996 vintage, so maybe further bottle age will allow the wood to recede even more! The wine is still quite good, but could have been magical with less wood. 2017-2035+. **90.**

1996 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

This note hails back to my report on the 1996 vintage in 2010. The 1996 and 1997 vintages were probably the most “new oaky” that Romain Lignier produced at the family estate during his all too brief tenure, and they probably have not aged quite as well as a result. The '96

Charmes shows plenty of the sappy fruit and beautiful base of soil that Romain's wines were renowned for at this point in his career, but the wine is perhaps just a tad pinched on the backend from the level of lumber. The nose offers up a complex and sappy blend of black cherries, plums, herb tones, game, some nice, briary notes and a fair bit of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with good focus and complexity, moderate tannins, tangy acids and good length and grip on the finish. The backend here is just a tad clumsy from the wood treatment. 2010-2030. **88.**

1996 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils (served from magnum)

With a bit more inherent depth than the above, the 1996 Clos de la Roche from Romain Lignier is carrying its new wood component even better, and though this too is pretty new oaky in personality, I like the overall balance a bit more here. The bouquet is superb, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, plums, forest floor, espresso, gamebird, woodsmoke, mustard seed and cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a rock solid core, beautifully integrated acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, modestly tannic and complex finish. There is just a bit of oak tannin on the backend here as well, but there is better fruit stuffing to eventually bury it completely and all one needs is a bit more patience for the wine to completely into harmony on the finish. 2020-2060. **93+.**

1995 Charmes-Chambertin- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

I really like the balance of the 1995 Charmes-Chambertin from Domaine Lignier, which is starting to drop its tannins nicely and will have a long and classy run at its plateau of maturity in the coming decades. The bouquet is excellent, delivering a complex constellation of cherries, red plums, *sous bois*, coffee, venison, mustard seed and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and elegant in profile, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, tangy acids and impeccable balance on the modestly tannic, complex and classic finish. I would guess that this saw a slightly lower percentage of new oak than the Clos de la Roche in 1995, and this has allowed the wine to really age gracefully. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2040. **94.**

1995 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

I have a bit of the same issue with the 1995 Clos de la Roche as I do with the 1996 version, as the new oak component has not been fully absorbed into the wine, and at this point in time, I wonder if it ever will. Certainly the bouquet is lovely here, with a far more red fruity profile than in the 1996, delivering scents of red plums, forest floor, cherries, gamebird, coffee, nutskin and plenty of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure on the attack and impressively sappy at the core (particularly for a 1995!), with fine focus and grip, but a bit rigid in profile from the mid-palate back, due to the overtly generous serving of toasty new oak. The wine has good length, but remains a bit chewy from wood tannins and I wonder if this will eventually blossom as well as the 1995 Charmes has done, or will always remain a bit rigid from the casks? If it eventually absorbs its wood tannins completely, the wine should place at the high end of the range. It will still be very good either way, but this is one wine from Romain's day that may have been a bit overoaked. 2020-2050+? **90-94?**



1993 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 1993 vintage *chez* Lignier is a great, great success and the '93 Clos de la Roche is their finest wine in this year. The bouquet is deep, pure and nicely starting to show some secondary development in its nose of plums, black cherries, grilled venison, dark chocolate, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature, ripe, beautifully-integrated acids and a very long, complex and still fairly youthful finish. Like many of the very top 1993s, this wine is approachable now, but it is still climbing and it would make a lot of sense to leave it alone in a cool corner of the cellar for another five to ten years and really let it blossom properly. 2022-2075. **95+**.

1991 Morey St. Denis 1er Cru “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

I loved Hubert Lignier's 1991s, which I had a chance to drink with some regularity back in the first few years after they were released, but I do not cross paths with them too often anymore. This most recent bottle of the Morey Vieilles Vignes was stellar, offering up a deep and complex nose of plums, dark berries, venison, bitter chocolate, a nice touch of fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full and vibrant, with lovely complexity and grip, a good core, fine soil signature and a long, modestly tannic, complex and perfectly focused finish. Just a lovely example that is now into its apogee, but with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2013-2035. **92+**.

1990 Morey St. Denis “les Chaffots”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils (375 ml.)

The 1990 les Chaffots is drinking very nicely still out of half bottle, with a fine, tertiary and autumnal personality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fully mature mix of desiccated cherries, grilled venison, cinnamon, forest floor, woodsmoke and a nice touch of porcini in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and beautifully resolved, with a good core, melted tannins and pretty good complexity on the long and very nicely balanced finish. There is nothing roasted or prune-y about this wine. 2016-2035. **90**

1989 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils (served from magnum)

Hubert Lignier made great wines in 1989 and I remember well tasting them with some frequency in the vintage's early days, as a good friend had a fine source for these wines and would often bring them to tastings. At age twenty-eight, the wine is into its plateau of peak maturity, but with decades of life still ahead of it. The bouquet is a beautiful blend of red plums, cherries, *sous bois*, coffee, roasted venison, mustard seed, bonfire and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and starting to really drink with generosity, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, tangy acids and a very beautifully balanced, complex and classy finish. This is really good- particularly out of magnum! 2016-2050. **95.**

1988 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils

The 1988 Clos de la Roche from Hubert Lignier is really a terrific example of the vintage, and is a wine that offers up excellent balance for a 1988, with the tannins perfectly integrated and buried in lovely fruit. The very complex bouquet offers up an excellent blend of dried cherries and strawberries, orange zest, mustard seed, venison, coffee, *sous bois* and vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very complex, with a blossoming core of red fruit, superb soil signature, fine focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic and still slightly chewy finish. Just a lovely 1988 that is at the cusp of its apogee of peak drinkability. 2013-2040. **94.**

1985 Morey St. Denis 1er Cru “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils (magnum)

The 1985 Morey old vine premier cru is really drinking well out of magnum, but the winemaking here in 1985 was probably not quite yet at the level that the family would reach in the decades of the 1990s and beyond. The bouquet offers up a great and classically autumnal blend of plums, coffee, cherries, venison, forest floor and a nice touch of upper register spice that gently recalls clove. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and vibrant, with a good core, melted tannins, good acids and a long, complex and quite finesseful finish. A lovely drink. 2012-2035. **91.**

1976 Clos de la Roche- Domaine Hubert Lignier et Fils (served from magnum)

Laurent Lignier very generously opened up this magnum of the 1976 Clos de la Roche for his father's eightieth birthday celebration, but I arrived a bit later in the festivities (having tasted in Chablis that morning), and the wine had faded a bit by the time I got a pour out of the last bit of the magnum. I am sure that the wine was very good when first opened, but with the constant pouring, kicking up of sediment and the several hours that it was open, it had faded by the time I had a chance to taste it. *C'est la vie.*

CHÂTEAU LATOUR BORDEAUX'S LONGEST-LIVED FIRST GROWTH



I have wanted to write an historical feature on Château Latour for several years now, as I have great respect for the legacy of timeless, profound wines that this First Growth has turned out down through the centuries, and the steady and very classically-styled course that the estate continues to chart under its current ownership and management. As readers are already no doubt aware, Château Latour has been famous for not only the superb quality of their wines, but also their near miraculous longevity, as it is the rare “off vintage” of Latour that does not drink well for fifty or sixty years, and in the great vintages, one hundred years or more of potential life in the bottle is far from out of the question. In an era of flux and change at the top of the Bordeaux ranks, where owners and directors seem so often to be casting about searching for some new magic recipe to garner ever higher scores and greater profits for their property- often at the very obvious costs of lesser quality and shorter lifespan for their wines- it is refreshing to see an estate such as Château Latour remain so rooted in its history and continue to fashion the same structured, pure and classic wines that have been the stuff of legend for three or four centuries. The current team at Latour has retained their foundations in their glorious past in an age where an increasing number of Latour’s neighbors on the Gironde have fallen from the ranks of the

traditionalist and adopted more over the top and modern styles of wines. Happily, for those of us who truly love classically-styled claret, Latour has not changed.

Contemporary winemaking history goes further back in Bordeaux than practically anywhere else in the world of wine, and Château Latour's history is one of the earliest in the region. The property was already figuring prominently in history back in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as the estate is very strategically placed, overlooking a wide sweep of the Gironde River and was of military value during the continual battles between the English and the French in this part of the world during the Hundred Years War. In fact, the tower from which the property takes its name was actually a watch tower and fortress for controlling naval traffic on the river in these very early days, which was originally built by the French, but which fell into British hands soon after its completion. The land where the Latour estate now rests ended up changing hands between the British and the French several times during the Hundred Years War, depending on the military fortunes of each side as the years went by in this long conflict fought for control of Gascony. There were already vineyards here by this time, but Château Latour did not really start its rise to vinous prowess until the seventeenth century, following the trail blazed by Château Haut-Brion. For all intents and purposes, the modern chapter of the estate as a great wine-producing vineyard did not really begin until the property was purchased by the aristocratic de Charravas family in 1670. It would stay, through many generations, within branches of this family all the way up until 1963, making for one of the longest-tenured ownerships of a classed growth in the Médoc over this nearly three hundred year span. Latour eventually passed into the hands of the Marquis Alexandre de Ségur (through marriage) in the 1680s; at the time, the Marquis was already the owner of Calon in Ste. Estèphe (which would eventually append his name to the property) and he would go on to also purchase Lafite in Pauillac in 1716. Alexandre's son, Nicolas de Segur, would become the most famous wine aristocrat of his era, known as the "Prince of the Vines" for his ownership of these three great wine-producing estates. Interestingly, as the Marquis de Ségur and his family already had sumptuous houses at both Lafite and Calon at this time, no château was erected at Latour until 1864 (nine years after its classification as a First Growth), and when the *maison* was finally built, it was constructed on a far more modest scale than originally envisioned by the architects, as the family could not agree on financing for the new château at Latour. Consequently, the château next door at Pichon-Lalande, which was completed in 1854, (built on a slice of the Latour property to house the Comtesse de Lalande, the mistress at this time of the Comte de Beaumont, whose family owned Latour), is far more grandiose in scale and detail than the more modest *grand maison* at Latour.

Far older than the *grand maison* and more recognizable to fans of this wine is the iconic tower that stands on the property and marks the spot where the old fortress and watchtower from the Hundred Years War once stood in the fourteenth century. The beautiful tower that now graces this spot, and which adorns the label of the *grand vin* at Latour, was built in the seventeenth century and is the landmark structure on the property, which also includes a fine *cuvée* and *chais* that are separated from both the small château and the tower. Like many great properties on the Gironde, Château Latour came under the watchful eyes of the revolutionary committees in the wake of the first French Revolution in 1789. The Marquis de Ségur had previously passed on part of the property to his two daughters at the time of their marriages, with a portion still retained by the Marquis. In the wake of the revolution, the Marquis de Ségur had fled the country and his portion of Latour was taken over by the state, but his daughters' parts of

the vineyard were left in their families' hands. Probably, the lack of a grand château on the property was a godsend for the owners in this regard. Eventually, in the 1840s, the portion of the property that had been confiscated by the revolutionary government was reacquired by the original owners, which through marriage was now the de Beaumont family. Château Latour would then remain in the hands of the de Beaumont family until 1963, when a majority stake was sold to the English investor, Lord Cowdray, who purchased fifty-one percent of Latour; an additional twenty-five percent stake was sold to Harvey's of Bristol at this time as well. Only the remaining twenty-four percent remained in the hands of the de Beaumont family from 1963 onwards and Latour began its quarter century under English ownership.

Going back a bit, the eighteenth century was an important moment in the establishment of Latour's reputation as a great wine-producing estate, as a momentary cessation in the near endless hostilities between France and England allowed for a wine trade to start to grow up properly between the two countries. Throughout the 1700s, the quality of Latour's wine began to be widely recognized and more of the estate was committed to vines to meet the growing demand for the wine from this prized Bordeaux property. In 1759, there were thirty-eight hectares of vineyards on the estate and this would rise to forty-seven hectares by 1794. By 1970, this had only grown to fifty-eight hectares of vines, so Latour is not a particularly large vineyard by the expansive standards of the Médoc and is far smaller than Lafite for instance. Interestingly, during this period, Latour was not officially part of the commune of Pauillac, but was still considered part of the small, neighboring hamlet of St. Lambert. It was not until 1790 that Latour was officially recognized as being within the commune of Pauillac. As mentioned above, Latour became predominantly English owned in 1963, when Lord Cowdray bought fifty-one percent and Harvey's a quarter stake in the property. The Harvey's portion of the ownership group at Latour would eventually be purchased by the large English drinks conglomerate, Allied-Lyons, and in 1989, Allied-Lyons would succeed in buying out the interests of both Lord Cowdray and some of the de Beaumont family's shares, so that in this year, Allied-Lyons would come to own ninety-one percent of Château Latour. This period of ownership only last four years, as the estate would return to full French control in the summer of 1993, when François Pinault's company purchased Allied-Lyons' shares of Latour.

Before turning to the important contemporary era at Château Latour under François Pinault, we should look a bit at some of the changes that were instituted during the British era for this First Growth. According to several sources, Latour was famous during the first half of the twentieth century for changing virtually nothing at the property. The cellars and *cuvée* remained much as they had been throughout the nineteenth century, which of course, probably made plenty of sense at the time, as the run of great wines at the estate during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was certainly a brilliant chapter in the property's history and there cannot have been a lot of impetus to change things. With the costs of replanting the vineyards in the wake of phylloxera (arriving in Bordeaux in the 1870s), there cannot have been a lot of money around as well for other investments in the winemaking facilities at this time. Remember, Bordeaux was considered the greatest bargain in the world of fine wine at this time (something we tend to forget in this era of very expensive claret pricing), and even though Latour was always one of the most expensive wines from the region, it was not all that expensive in today's terms and the age of great wealth generated by the top classed growths on the Médoc would not really arrive here until the 1990s. So budgets would have been considerably tighter in the first

half of the twentieth century for the owners of Latour, which was also by this time spread out amongst many cousins in the de Beaumont family, so that the annual income derived from the property was considered best distributed to the various cousins, rather than re-invested in the estate.

When English majority ownership was established at Latour in 1963, several changes were instituted at this time. The first was the creation of a second label for the estate's wine, the famed Les Forts de Latour, which debuted in the 1966 vintage and was first offered for sale in 1972. Les Forts de Latour is a very interesting second wine, as it is not necessarily just the young vine production of the *grand vin* (as has been the case with many other top growths who have a second wine), as the new owners of Latour in 1963 decided that only the vineyard parcels that had been part of the wine at Latour in the old registers dating back to 1759 would be used for the *grand vin* from that point forward. The previous owners had planted some other sections of the property to vines later on, and the new English owners decided that these parcels would serve as the backbone for the new Les Forts de Latour bottling. There are three *lieux à dits* that came to provide the foundation for this second wine at Latour, called *Les Forts de Latour*, *Petit Batailley* and *Comtesse de Lalande*. The *Petite Batailley* parcel is located in the commune of St. Lambert, adjoining vineyards owned by Châteaux Batailley, Pichon-Lalande and Leoville-Poyferré. The *Comtesse de Lalande* parcel, which as the name suggests, is a small plot that abuts the vineyards of Pichon-Lalande, and the *Les Forts de Latour* parcel lies on the northwest border of the core Latour vineyards from 1759. As the vineyards used for the *grand vin* were all old vines in 1963 and often in need of some replanting (or at least replacing of dead vines in the rows), the new English ownership also started a replanting project in this year, and some of the production from these younger vines would eventually find their way into the blend of Les Forts de Latour in certain vintages, as long as the ultimate quality of the Les Forts bottling was not felt to be compromised.

Other changes that took place during the English era at Latour included the wholesale revamping the cellars and *cuvée*, as well as swapping out the ancient oak fermenting tanks for nineteen temperature-controlled, stainless steel tanks, which was considered quite controversial at the time. The first vintage of Latour fermented in these stainless steel tanks was the 1964, with similar stainless steel fermenting tanks only installed at Haut-Brion as well for the entire cellar at this time and most other estates either giving them a try on an experimental basis (Lafite had only three in the latter 1960s) or still relying on their tradition wood fermenting vats. It is interesting to look back on English writers on Bordeaux during this era, as they infer that another of the changes instituted by the English ownership of Latour in this time period was to dial back the traditionally powerful and highly structured style of Château Latour, which they deemed somewhat anachronistic and not well-suited to “the days of high interest rates and expensive storage” writes David Peppercorn in 1982, for “everyone admired the wines of great years, but wondered when they would be ready to drink and if they would still be alive to enjoy them.” According to Mr. Peppercorn, the wines at Latour had changed style under the English owners beginning in 1964, with his observation based generally on how the wines showed out of cask both before and after the ownership change. Funny, but thirty-five years on from when he was writing, I would argue that there were no meaningful stylistic difference between the wines made in the 1940s or 1950s at Latour and those made in the 1964, 1966 or 1970 vintages here, which continue to age at a glacial pace and are still the youngest wines of their respective vintages by

quite some measure. While I am obviously not old enough to have drunk Latour out of cask from the 1950s or 1960s, I have certainly drunk my share of the wines from those two decades in their mature states and do not see any real change in structural style in the eras before and after English ownership at Latour.

However, one of the things that certainly did change here from 1963 forwards was an improvement in the yields out of the vineyards, which is primarily a reflection of the replanting that was undertaken from the start by the English ownership group. Clearly, vineyard husbandry was greatly improved in the 1960s and 1970s here, as the proprietors were not allowing the young vines into the blend for the *grand vin*, but yields, which were around twenty hectoliters per hectare in the decade of the 1920s (and even lower in the thirties), rebounded in the 1950s only to an average of just under twenty-eight hectoliters per hectare. Compare these numbers with the decade of the 1960s, under English ownership, when changes in farming resulted in an average of just over thirty-five hectoliters per hectare and mounted to over fifty hectoliters per hectare in the decade of the 1970s as some of the new plantings from the previous decade started to come on line. The better production in the vineyards during these last two decades allowed the team at Latour to be more draconian in selecting what would go into the *grand vin* here, so that during the 1970s, less than sixty percent of the production here was actually making it into the first label of Latour. One did not really see this same sort of strict selection processes at most other top growths in the Médoc until the latter half of the 1980s.

The present day chapter at Château Latour commences with the purchase of the estate by Monsieur Pinault's company in the June of 1993, as quite extensive renovations have been undertaken since this time to improve the storage facilities at the estate, fully modernize the *cuvée* and improve the farming to further increase the already very high standard of quality that prevailed at Latour under its period of English ownership. Today, the top manager in charge at Latour is Frédéric Engerer, who first joined the estate in 1995 and was promoted to managing director in 1998. After having redone virtually everything in the cellar and *cuvée* between 1999 and 2003, the team at Latour donned construction hats once again in 2012, when it was decided that the estate would no longer make their wines available through the traditional *en primeur* markets and would instead, institute a long-term policy of holding back each and every vintage of the *grand vin* for a quite extended period of time before releasing the wine onto the market. This was a revolutionary move in Bordeaux, which no doubt earned the ire of the traditional Bordeaux *négociants* and others in the wine trade who made money from selling and re-selling the young vintages of Latour several times over before the wine was even remotely close to ready to drink. The decision to age the *grand vin* for many years in bottle prior to release also meant that the château was going to need dramatically more storage space, if eight or even ten vintages were going to be aging at one time in the cellars, so major new cellar excavation was undertaken beginning in 2012.

Out in the vineyards, Château Latour has also been one of the leaders under the Pinault ownership in the move to a healthier form of farming, which had certainly not been a strong suit in Bordeaux in general in the couple of generations preceding the new regime's arrival at Latour. Much of the growing awareness of more sustainable farming practices in the Médoc was due to the trailblazing path to biodynamic viticulture charted at Château Pontet-Canet, but the team at Latour was one of the first properties to follow their lead and start to farm organically in their

own vineyards. Along these lines, the farming team at Latour reintroduced plowing by horse in the vineyards here starting in 2008 and in the following year, undertook the wholesale transition to organic farming in the estate's vineyards. The first certification from Ecocert came in 2009 for some of the parcels here and the entire property was certified as organic as of 2015. While the organic farming has been ongoing, the team in the vineyards at Latour, under the direction of Vineyard Manager Domingo Sanchez, has begun the transition from organic farming to full-blown biodynamics, with much of the farming now done along the lines of the lunar calendar and biodynamic preparations for the vineyards routinely applied to the vines. It will not be too many more years before biodynamic certification will take place at Latour, for from 2016 forwards, all of the *Enclos* portion of the vineyards (the historical heart of the property and the source for the *grand vin*) will be one hundred percent biodynamically farmed. This is a very laudable step which has been long overdue at a great many famous growths in the Médoc, and which should improve not only the biological balance of the vineyards and the planet in general, but, if the adoption of biodynamic farming techniques in other regions can serve as a guide to the Médoc, it will also contribute to even higher quality wines at Château Latour. That sounds like a win-win situation to me.



The intricate carving on the chais door at Château at Latour.

The *terroir* at Château Latour is a classic gravel mound formation of the very highest quality, and this is one of the very best *terroirs* to be found in all of Bordeaux. The estate sits

right on the southern boundary of present day Pauillac, with the vineyards of Château Leoville Las Cases bordering them to the south, the Gironde River to the east and Château Pichon Lalande's vineyards to the north. The main section of vineyard at Latour, forty-six hectares of vines that are known as *Enclos*, sits at an elevation of fifty feet above sea level, on a plateau that includes a thirty foot deep gravel mound, resting on a bed of clay. Almost all of the vineyards look down to the east towards the Gironde River, but there is one small sector that sits apart from the rest of the single large parcel of vineyard land; this parcel lies further to the west and is the *lieu à dit* of *Petit Batailley* and goes each year into the Les Forts de Latour bottling. Today, the vineyards are planted to seventy-six percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-two percent merlot and two percent each of cabernet franc and petit verdot. In recent times, Monsieur Pinault has bought additional vineyard land and the entire estate now extends to fully ninety-two hectares under vine, but these other vineyards, do not go into the *grand vin* and it is the forty-six hectare *Enclos* vineyard that is really are the source for the *grand vin* of Latour today. The vineyard of *Enclos* was engineered with a very fine drainage system as far back as the nineteenth century, which was "state of the art" at the time and could well have been one of the important, unheralded contributory factors to all of the great wines made at Latour in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This would have been of particular importance in so-called "off vintages", for which Château Latour has an unequalled track record of success, as rainy years would have been less hampering here because of the excellent drainage.

With the Pinault era renovations in the *cuvée*, the days of the nineteen stainless steel fermenting tanks are now long gone, as the technical team at Latour, now led by Hélène Gélén, has more than ninety stainless steel tanks of varying sizes to ferment the incoming grapes. This allows for specific parcels of vineyards, individual grape varieties or sections of the vineyard with similar vine ages to be vinified on their own and followed for some time prior to blending decisions. Racking is done into both stainless steel vats and casks for malolactic fermentation, with the first blending decisions not undertaken until malo has been completed. One of the changes instituted since Monsieur Pinault has purchased the property is that the *grand vin* today is now raised entirely in new oak casks. I do not have any statistics on the percentage of new oak used at Château Latour prior to his buying the estate, but I have to believe that it was certainly not one hundred percent new oak in the days of its English ownership. A young Latour will generally spend from twenty months to two years aging in cask prior to fining with egg whites and blending for bottling, with the duration of the *elevage* naturally dictated by the style of the vintage. With the change in aging procedures here in 2012, all three bottlings (in addition to Les Forts de Latour, the estate also produces a third wine called "Pauillac" and which is effectively the wine made from many of the younger vines on the property), a period of extended bottle aging has also been introduced for the wines here. The Pauillac bottling will be aged four to six years in bottle prior to release, Les Forts de Latour will see six to eight years of bottle aging at the property prior to its release and the *grand vin* will age a minimum of eight to ten years in bottle before it will be prepared for shipping.

It is still far too early to say if the new aging program at Latour can be termed a success, as there was certainly plenty of resistance from members of the Bordeaux wine trade at its outset in 2012, and the market presence of the property has fallen a bit in these early years after the program's institution, as there is much less wine being released from the property today than was the case when Latour was still part of the *en primeur* system. The ownership undertook this

decision to try and guarantee the provenance of their wines a bit more than was the case when the boxes were changing hands out in the open market, as the long-lived and structured style of Latour and its satellite wines meant that these cases have many, many years ahead of them before the wines are going to be ready to drink. As the prices for the very top of the food chain of classified growths in Bordeaux rose exponentially in the first years of the twenty-first century, the First Growths in particular, such as Latour and Lafite, became prime investment vehicles for the new wine trading firms that sprung up and filled warehouses with cases of these wines. By the time of my last recent visit to the region in 2013, it would not be unfair to say that the vast majority of cases of First Growths in the market were earmarked for just such wine hedge funds and the First Growths were essentially investment vehicles, to be traded between firms, rather than actually wines to be eventually drunk by connoisseurs. No doubt, the Latour ownership took a look at the prices they were paid for their production that they offered *en primeur*, compared it to what ten year-old vintages were valued at with the wine investment firms, and decided that they would do better financially to hold the wines themselves for this first ten years. The strategy will also have the added bonus of making both the Pauillac and Les Forts de Latour bottlings closer to ready to drink when they are released into the market, though of course a ten year-old vintage of Latour still has decades to go before it too will be ready to drink.

When trying to get a read on whether Latour's new aging policy for all of its young wines will ultimately prove successful, one has to temper today's position of the wine in the market by realizing that the first releases out of the cellars here have been for vintages that were already available out in the market from the original *en primeur* offerings back in the day. For example, the first release under the new project was the 1995 Latour, which came out of the cellars here in 2013 at a price that was higher than what the wine was fetching in the open market. No doubt, the proprietors at Latour reasoned that the guaranteed provenance of the newly-released cases of the 1995 would be worth a premium, but some long-time Bordeaux merchants did not buy the offering. The most recent release was the 2005 vintage of Latour, released ex-cellar at 670 euros per bottle (again, coming out at fifteen percent above what it was trading at already in the market) had rather mixed results. Some merchants who purchased the 2005 sold through it nicely, while others still have it sitting in inventory. This will of course change when the estate starts to release vintages that have never yet been out in the market, such as the 2012 or 2015, but my sense is that this program puts Latour out of synch with the rest of the First Growths in the market and this may hamper sales a bit. Traditionally, the Bordeaux market has benefited greatly from the hype that surrounds the release of a new vintage- particularly if this vintage is highly-touted- and the market generally calms down quite a bit after this initial bout of irrational exuberance at the start of the futures offerings. As claret prices for the top classed growths have gotten very high in this century, this has been particularly evident, as a strong *en primeur* campaign for a vintage such as 2009 or 2010 has generally not been followed up by a strong market for the vintage in subsequent years. Often, investors who have bought a highly ranked wine on futures could have bought the same wine in the open market a couple of years later for less money than they paid for their futures.

Latour's decision to opt out of the futures market means that they will miss this initial bout of market hysteria surrounding highly praised vintages, and it remains to be seen if they can garner their own frenzied buying of these vintages ten years out from the initial *en primeur* offerings of a given year. It of course will not hurt that in most top years, Château Latour is

likely to be one of the very finest wines of the vintage, and when a great young vintage of Latour is released at the ten year mark, it is likely that there will be some that will react very positively to the offerings. If we could travel back in time to the era of the 1982s, when claret pricing was very, very different, I have no doubt that offering the 1982 Latour exclusively ten years after the *en primeur* release of the other First Growths would have been highly successful, but claret was sold primarily to well-heeled wine lovers who intended to drink the wines back then. Today, with so many cases of the First Growths going to investment funds, it is hard to know how their reaction to a ten year-old, first release of Latour is going to do in the dog eat dog world of high finance. Certainly, the authenticity of the bottles coming out of the cellars at age ten from Latour will be guaranteed to a degree that would not be possible to replicate if the wines had already been changing hands from broker to broker for a decade, but it is not at all self-evident to me that authenticity of goods is something that really matters to some in the investment circles of the wine game.

However, while all this discussion of where Latour will fit or not fit in the world of high wine finance, given its new release program, is really a digression from the more important point that Château Latour continues to be a beacon of utterly classical claret, and probably one of the brightest stars in all of the region in this regard. I am sure that Messieurs Pinault and Engerer would take exception to my ranking Latour as “one of the brightest stars”, but pretty serious things are still going on at places like Pétrus, Lafite and Lafleur as well today. The wines at Latour remain as brilliantly made, and as true to the great traditions of property as was the case back in 1990, 1970, 1961 or 1928, and this is one of the most important aspects of the current history at this iconic estate. With the sad and mercenary promotion of both Angélus and Pavie to the St. Émilion equivalent of First Growths in the most recent classification of the commune (cheapening this classification dramatically in the eyes of many observers), it remains of great historic importance that an estate of such a grand legacy as Latour remains utterly classical in style and true to the great traditions of fine wine in Bordeaux. No matter who ends up ultimately buying the cases of Latour that will continue to come out from the cellars at ten year intervals from their respective vintages, there is no doubt that the wine in the bottles is every bit as full of potential for longevity and vinous magic at maturity as was the case when the legends of fifty or one hundred and fifty years ago were sold by previous owners of this great estate. That is the true magic of Château Latour today.

The notes that follow are divided into sections on Les Forts de Latour and the Grand Vin, with each section listed chronologically, following a bit of discussion of the style of the respective wines. I have included my barrel tasting notes on the wines from the 2009 to 2012 vintages at the start of each section, as I have not revisited any of these wines out of bottle and given the longevity of both Les Forts de Latour and Château Latour itself, these notes still will be plenty representative of the quality of the wines in bottle. Amongst each section, the tastings notes themselves of the wines in bottle are spread out over the last six or seven years, as I have been working on putting this report together for quite a while now. The age of each note can generally be spotted by the first year in the projected window of drinkability, assuming that the wine is old enough to now be ready to drink. A few tasting notes are older, as in the case of the 1945 Latour, as I have not tasted a sound bottle of the wine in a long time, but as it is a very long-lived vintage of this very long-lived wine, I have little doubt that my note from 1999 remains perfectly accurate of the wine today.



Les Forts de Latour

The main vineyard foundation for the Les Forts de Latour bottling is its eponymous *lieu à dit*, which happens to lie within the larger forty-six hectare vineyard of *Enclos*. Beyond this specific parcel, the wine is built up from production on some of the peripheral parcels of *Enclos*, as well as the specific *lieux à dits* that lie outside of this forty-six hectares, which include *Comtesse de Lalande*, *Petits Batailley*, *Piñada*, and *Sainte Anne* (all of which have been part of Latour's vineyard patrimony for more than a century), as well as a couple of new vineyard plots that have been purchased in more recent times. These include a seven hectare vineyard parcel in the commune of Artigues, located on a gravel terrace, and another five hectares of additional vineyard parcels that were purchased in 2012 by the estate. The Les Forts de Latour bottling is treated the same as the *grand vin* during the fermentation process, but it sees less new oak during its *elevage*, with the wine generally aged in fifty to sixty percent new wood each year. I have always loved the Les Forts de Latour bottling, which has consistently been the finest of the "second label" wines made in Bordeaux and this wine too, not surprisingly, has an excellent track record for aging. As the *grand vin* these days is generally composed of fully ninety percent cabernet sauvignon, there is usually more merlot in the blend of Les Forts de Latour than in the first wine, which gives the wine a bit more early appeal than its big brother, and it is likely that when the new policy for bottle aging Les Forts at the property for six to eight years prior to release, the new vintages will probably be starting to be drinkable when they arrive on the market.

2012 Les Forts de Latour (barrel sample)

The 2012 Les Forts de Latour has a lot more mid-palate depth than the 2012 Pauillac, as it has a lot more cabernet sauvignon in its blend (just over seventy-six percent), but, it too is still a relatively moderately-endowed example of this great bottling. The complex and quite refined nose offers up scents of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, gravel, a touch of tobacco leaf and a suave base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with fine focus and grip, good mid-palate concentration and a long, primary and ripely tannic finish. This will be a very good bottle in the fullness of time, but it will never be ranked up there with the greatest vintages of Les Forts de Latour. 2022-2045. **89.**

2011 Les Forts de Latour (barrel sample)

The 2011 Forts de Latour is an excellent and quite structured wine that will demand time in the cellar, but clearly reward those patient enough to tuck it away and forget it for twelve to fifteen years. Thirty-five percent of the blend this year is merlot, as more was relegated to the second wine than the *grand vin* in 2011. The bouquet on this superb Forts de Latour offers up a very pure, primary and classic mélange of sweet cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a touch of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and perfectly balanced, with a sappy core of fruit, excellent focus and grip and a very long, ripely tannic and powerful finish. I love the cooler fruit tones of the 2011 wines here, as with just a smidgeon over thirteen percent alcohol gives this wine a precision to its soil signature that is far superior to the more heady 2010 version. A very, very impressive second wine! 2025-2055+. **91+.**

2010 Les Forts de Latour (barrel sample)

The 2010 Forts de Latour is a deep and very powerful example of the vintage, with its 14.3 percent alcohol translating into some serious muscle, rather than overtly overripe aromatics of flavors. The deep and concentrated nose offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, espresso, cigar wrapper, gravelly soil tones, plenty of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, broad-shouldered and rock solid at the core, with plenty of firm, substantial tannins, notable acidity and superb length and grip on the powerful finish. This is a very well-made wine, but the slightly blunter style of the 2010 in comparison to the 2009 is quite apparent, and while in terms of sheer quality, the two vintages may be equivalent, I have a strong preference stylistically for the more precise and minerally 2009 Forts de Latour. 2022-2075. **91.**

2009 Les Forts de Latour (barrel sample)

The 2009 Forts de Latour is the spitting image of the *grand vin*, as it is deep, pure complex, broad-shouldered and quite structured. The bouquet is a very fine, quite reserved mélange of black cherries, dark berries, tobacco leaf, a great base of complex, gravelly soil tones and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tight, with a rock solid core of fruit, plenty of ripe tannins, very good acidity for the vintage and a very long, firm and classy finish. A superb Forts de Latour in the making. 2022-2050. **90-91+.**

2005 Les Forts de Latour

The 2005 Forts de Latour is a superb and very classic wine in the making. I last tasted this at the château in the spring of 2013, at which time it was still seven to ten years away from really starting to blossom. The bouquet offers up a pure and very promising blend of cassis, dark berries, espresso, cigar smoke, a fine base of dark soil and a deft framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively pure on the attack, with an excellent core of fruit, fine acids, ripe tannins, and superb length and grip on the still youthful finish. I would guess now that another five years or so should be sufficient for this wine to truly start to

open up and drink with a modicum of generosity. It will be excellent and long-lived. 2022-2060. **92.**

1990 Les Forts de Latour

The 1990 vintage of Forts de Latour is outstanding and is quite a bit more forward than the *grand vin*, albeit with the structure to continue to cruise along as well for many years to come. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, cassis, a touch of cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, smoke and a nice touch of fairly toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, ripe, suave tannins and a long, focused and complex finish. This is already quite easy to drink, but will cruise along effortlessly for at least a few more decades. 2014-2035+. **91+.**

1982 Les Forts de Latour

The 1982 vintage of Les Forts de Latour is outstanding and is drinking with style and grace at the present time. The bouquet shows a bit more red fruit in this vintage than is typical of this bottling, soaring from the glass in a fine constellation of red and black cherries, a touch of raspberry, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, cigar smoke, still a whisper of weedy cabernet overtones and a deft framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full and sappy at the core, with excellent focus and complexity, suave, modest tannins, gorgeous transparency and a lovely grip on the very long and classy finish. I love this vintage of Les Forts. 2016-2035+. **94.**

1971 Les Forts de Latour (served from magnum)

In my experience, Château Latour made the finest wine on the Left Bank in the 1971 vintage, and even their second wine, Les Forts de Latour, is excellent in this overlooked year. Out of magnum, the wine is absolutely singing today, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of sweet cassis, cigar smoke, a touch of red berry, menthol, tobacco leaf, a fine base of dark soil tones and a hint of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and very suave on the attack, with superb focus and balance, melted tannins and excellent length and grip on the poised and *à point* finish. 2015-2040. **93.**

1970 Les Forts de Latour

My last bottle in my cellar of the '70 Les Forts de Latour was undone by a bad cork and maderized, so I have to go back a few years to a note on the last pristine example that crossed my path. This is a superb wine that has been fully mature for a couple of decades, but possesses more than a passing resemblance to the *grand vin* in this year in terms of proper structure and will continue to drink well for many years to come. The nose wafts from the glass in a sweet and fully resolved blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, a hint of mint, singed tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, a nice touch of leather and a smoky upper register. On the palate the wine is full, pure and velvety on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, fine focus and balance, bright acids, impressive complexity and still plenty of grip on the long, elegant and meltingly tannic finish. Lovely juice and probably the greatest mature vintage Forts de Latour I have tasted. 2011-2030+. **94.**



The immaculately-tended, gravelly soils of the Enclos section of vineyards at Château Latour.

Grand Vin de Latour

Château Latour is indeed the longest-lived wine to be found in all of Bordeaux, and in the older days, it would often take thirty or more years to really get to the point when it was starting to drink within its plateau of maturity. That may seem like a long time to wait, but keep in mind that most good vintages of Latour would stay in this plateau for seventy or eighty years before they would even start to contemplate gentle decline, which could take another century to complete, so one certainly had a very, very long window of drinkability, once the wine started to blossom! According to old-timers, Latour used to be particularly hard and chewy out of cask and the wine was so bound up in its structure in its early years that no one in their right mind ever considered opening up bottles until the wine had slumbered for at least a couple of decades in the cellar. With the advent of global warming, perhaps this really recalcitrant style of Latour has softened up a bit, but the wine remains adamantly built for the long haul and I have no impression that the slightly more accessible side to Latour in its youth has in any way detracted from its almost herculean potential for extraordinary longevity. Certainly, the vintages which I tasted in cask at the property between the vintages of 2009 and 2012, when I was still covering the *en primeur* campaign in Bordeaux, were powerful and proudly structured wines with a century or more of potential life in the bottle ahead of them. So I think it very safe to say that global warming has not had any profound impact on Latour in a negative sense.

As I mentioned above and as the tasting notes below will confirm, I have a fair bit of experience drinking Latour in the latter half of the twentieth century, with the one real exception of the middle of the decade of the 1980s, where I have not tasted any of the vintages between 1982 and 1988 since their very early days in bottle. This is a gap in my coverage of the property that I am quite sorry about, as the wines from vintages such as 1983, 1985, 1986 are a bit less highly regarded in some claret commentary circles and I would love to have some firsthand experience in recent times to confirm or call into question these assessments. But, other than this gap, my tasting luck has held pretty well in the last decade and I have had more than my fair share of mature Latours in recent times, which made writing this article possible. Many of these bottles have been from friends' cellars and I am deeply indebted to them for their generosity with their old Latours. In particular, both Victor Lederer and Omar Khan have been extremely kind to open bottles of Latour that are far older than anything from the estate that still remains in my own cellar, and most of the recent notes that follow on the most venerable vintages are a result of the laudable generosity of one or the other of these two serious Latour connoisseurs. I should also mention my friend Franco Bassegio, who is a regular member in my most active wine tasting group and who had the ingenious (and rather devious) idea to serve a min-vertical of Latour double blind to our group a few months ago. The vintages that Franco chose for this mini-vertical: 1996 and 1896! A rather straightforward pairing, no? Needless to say, with a hundred years between the two wines, none of us guessed them as being from the same producer, but what a fun pairing when the wines were unveiled and what a brilliant showing of the 1896 Latour!

The decade of Latour that I have the most experience with is that of the 1960s, as I had the very good fortune very early on in my wine trade career to be offered a small cellar from a gentleman who had passed away and whose family did not wish to keep his wines, as no one else enjoyed claret. He was a very astute collector, and so he bought mostly the less expensive vintages of claret from the sixties and early seventies (or these were at least the majority of wines left in his collection when he passed away), and I was able to buy a very nice little parcel of Latours from 1962, 1964, 1967 and 1971. If I had possessed the experience then that I have today, I might not have drunk the wines quite as quickly as I ended up doing, as I feared that "off vintages" such as '62 and '67 would never hold up over an extended period of time (I really was not yet wet behind the ears when it came to Latour in those early days!), but a couple of mixed cases of these Latours was enough to develop a love for the property that has continued down to the present day. I will not torment folks with what I paid for those vintages of Latour, but it was probably one of the greatest wine buys of my entire life. Once I purchased the wines (and there were some other real Bordeaux gems in the cellar from similar vintages), I did do a bit more research on Latour and discovered that the property at this time (and for several decades previously) had the reputation of producing the very finest wines in all of Bordeaux in lesser years. As alluded to above, the institution of a superb drainage system in their core vineyards back in the nineteenth century was probably a very significant factor in this regard. In any event, the decade of the 1960s, which straddled the purchase of the property by its English owners in 1963, was a glorious ten year run for the property and showed no signs of dramatic stylistic shift to my palate, as I mentioned above.

Château Latour does not produce the most dramatic or flashy wine at the pinnacle of the Médoc, as it cannot vie with the magnificence of perfume of Lafite-Rothschild at its best, nor

will it ever be as silky and floral as the greatest vintages of Margaux. There is never quite here the same glorious celebration of its underlying *terroir* as is found in Haut-Brion in its most shining moments. Nor is Latour as exotic in bouquet or flavor profile as Pétrus or Cheval Blanc in their greatest iterations, and yet, I would never rank it behind any of these wines, as it is always majestically complex, poised and bottomless in its depth at the core, with a sturdy structural chassis that gives way over time to a wine of exquisite balance, purity and breed. One has to wait longer for Latour than for the other First Growths, but when the wine has reached its period of peak drinkability, it is always marked by sweet and beautiful black fruity tones, sometimes straying over into the red fruit spectrum in years such as 1964 (or that magical 1896), coupled with classic cabernet sauvignon elements of cigar smoke and ash, black truffles and a simply stunning reflection of the classic gravelly undertow of great Pauillac. To my palate, Latour simply has the greatest *terroir* in Pauillac, and it shows front and center when the wine is really ready to drink. There is also the signature element of walnuts that this wine shows in each and every vintage when it is truly mature. On the palate, the wine is powerful, but always seamless and impeccably balanced (even in balance-challenged years such as 1975), and there is a glorious sense of elegance to mature Latour that defines classic claret.

As is the case with all of the First Growths today, Château Latour is too expensive in my mind, and this will preclude young wine merchants from repeating the luck I had once upon a time, stumbling upon that nice little array of older vintages of Latour and being able to buy them on my very junior level salary and start to discover the magic of this property's wines. It is my distinct impression that this economically-enforced exclusivity will diminish, rather than enhance the mystique of Latour and the other First Growths for the generations to come. As more and more of the production ends up funneled into investment funds and not into connoisseurs' cellars, which is truly a shame for Latour in particular, its status as one of the beacons of claret classicism in the twenty-first century will become hearsay for the majority of wine lovers, rather than the stuff of legend that can be confirmed with a glass of the wine in one's hand. This is, of course, true for all of the First Growths, but as being the cornerstone of the wine investment fund world is certainly profitable for these estates, it seems far from likely that things will change anytime soon in regards to their prices. It is too bad, as a First Growth was an extravagant reach for a young member of the wine trade, but not something out of the realm of possibility for special tastings back in the mid-1980s, but I have a hard time imagining that a younger member of the wine trade today would even consider buying a bottle of mature First Growth when stretching the budget for a special bottle. However, as long as the wine investment world remains focused on the First Growth Bordeaux estates, and their "Super Second" cousins, the financial outlook for the properties themselves will remain robust. But, it would be nice, if it were possible, for a larger segment of the wine-drinking world could be able to sample firsthand the true magic of a glass of mature Château Latour, as it remains one of the most beautiful wine drinking experiences to be found on the face of the earth.

2012 Château Latour (barrel sample)

The 2012 harvest at Château Latour began with the picking of the merlot on September 24th (concluding for this variety on October 4th) and finished with the cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and petit verdot during the stretch from October 5th to the 16th. All three wines in the stable came in at a very classic 12.8 percent alcohol this year, and as the cabernet sauvignon was the most successful varietal, the 2012 *grand vin* is over ninety percent cabernet this year.

The bouquet is deep, primary and very pure and refined, as it wafts from the glass in a constellation of cassis, cigar smoke, tobacco leaf, complex, gravelly soil tones and a nice touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant on the attack, with a good core, suave and quite moderate tannins (particularly for a young Latour!), fine focus and impressive length and grip on the youthful finish. Clearly, the team at Latour did not want to risk over-extracting in this vintage, and the wine is certainly one of the most polite recent vintages of this great property. It should prove to be a lovely wine with sufficient bottle age, but this is one of the very few properties in all of Bordeaux where the trio from 2009, 2010 and 2011 tower over their 2012 counterpart. 2025-2060. **91+**.

2011 Château Latour (barrel sample)

The 2011 Château Latour is an absolute classic in the making. The wine is a blend of just under eighty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, fifteen percent merlot and a *soupeçon* of petit verdot this year and tips the scales at a very cool and “old school” 13.1 percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, brooding and classically reserved mélange of cassis, dark berries, coffee bean, gravelly soil tones, cigar smoke, a nice touch of youthful tobacco leaf and a very discreet base of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a rock solid core of fruit, very firm structure, plenty of chewy, but seamlessly-integrated tannins and a very long, powerful, soil-driven finish. A great effort in 2011, this is the finest wine to be found on the Left Bank in this vintage. It will be a timeless and utterly traditional vintage of Latour. 2030-2100. **95+**.

2010 Château Latour (barrel sample)

The 2010 Château Latour is another very, very powerful example of the vintage, and while the wine is impeccably balanced and does not show a single strand of hair out of place, at 14.4 percent alcohol, it must be at least three-quarters of a percent headier than the legendary 2009 Latour. The result to my palate is a wine that is even more powerful than its predecessor, but also less precisely mineral on the backend and a half step behind the 2009 as a result. The bouquet of the 2010 Latour is deep, ripe and very pure, as it offers up scents of sappy cassis, black cherries, espresso, a touch of dark chocolate, Cuban cigars, gravelly soil tones and a fine base of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, very powerful and ripely tannic, with impeccable balance, a bottomless core of fruit, very good balance and a very long, chewy and palate-staining finish. The ripeness of the 2010 vintage is most evident here on the backend, where the mineral lift of the much more transparent 2009 Latour is clearly absent in the 2010. This is still an absolutely superb wine by any stretch of the imagination, with no signs of heat or overripe flavors, but it is just a tad blurry and fruit-driven on the backend from the additional ripeness of the vintage. 2030-2100+. **95**.

2009 Château Latour (barrel sample)

Château Latour’s lack of graciousness this year was the talk of the journalistic circles during the week of the *En Primeur* tastings, as the estate was hell-bent on restraining access to tasting the 2009s here to only the best and the brightest. Naturally I was not on the short list of those allowed access (good lord, what would the world be coming to if I was on the list!), but thanks to the generous persistence of another wine writer (who shall remain nameless), I was eventually granted a brief audience with the Left Bank wine of the vintage. The 2009 Latour is a great classic and perhaps the best wine to issue forth from this great estate since the 1961. The wine offers up a fantastically complex and quite closed blend of espresso, cassis, black cherries, dark berries, tobacco leaf, a magical base of gravelly soil tones and a discreet framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite closed on the attack, with a rock

solid core of fruit, ripe tannins and an absolutely stunning finish of profound focus, length and grip. There are a boatload of tannins in the 2009 Latour and it will clearly take several decades before it even considers being enjoyable to drink, but this is a great classic in the making and an uncompromisingly brilliant and traditional vintage of Latour. A seamless powerhouse from the old school. 2030-2100. **96-98+**.



1996 Château Latour

The last bottle of the 1996 Latour that I tasted was part of a mini-vertical that was one of the most ingenious and generous flights of wine I have tasted in a long time, as my friend paired the 1996 Latour up with the 1896 Latour at a double blind tasting in February of this year! Needless to say, the one hundred years' worth of bottle age between the two vintages was sufficient to convince none of us that it was the same property, but both wines acquitted themselves beautifully. I was surprised at how well the 1996 Latour was starting to show, given that it is a classically-styled Latour from a very tannic and powerful vintage in the Medoc, but the wine is already starting to drink with some generosity. The bouquet is superb, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash a touch of tariness, gravelly soil tones, smoke and a whisper of balsam bough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with firm, still plenty chewy tannins, fine focus and balance and a very long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. This is nowhere near as unapproachable as I would have supposed the combination of Latour and 1996 would be, but I would be inclined to

give it another decade in the cellar and really let the fireworks get rolling properly. 2027-2085. 94+.

1995 Château Latour

Latour made a very good wine in 1995, but my gut instincts are that the property in the twenty-first century is making even better wines than was the case in the decade of the 1990s. The 1995 Latour offers up a complex, promising nose of cassis, dark berry, French Roast, Cuban cigars, gravelly soil tones and a well-done base of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and broad-shouldered in profile, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, chewy tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, still quite youthful finish. This is at least eight to ten years away from starting to drink, and probably at least twenty away from really hitting its apogee. 2025-2075. 93.

1990 Château Latour

The 1990 vintage from Château Latour is a superb example of this ripe and more forward year, with the torrid growing season having put its imprimatur on the wine a bit in its slightly more forward and plush style, without ever impinging upon the classic Latour house style. The bouquet is tremendously deep and expressive, offering up scents of cassis, blackberries, tobacco, gravelly soil tones, a hint of violets, cedar and a blossoming topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and simply packed at the core, with superb focus and grip, lovely complexity and a very long, ripely tannic and already fairly pliable finish. This wine has plenty of structure for the long haul, but it does not possess the classic sternness of vintages of Latour from the fifties or sixties, nor of wines made in the last decade or so. That said, it is probably the finest Left Bank wine of the 1990 vintage. 2016-2060+. 96.

1989 Château Latour

The 1989 Latour was really quite overlooked at the time of its release, with much of the wine world's focus absorbed by the 1990 vintage from this great property. However, at the Hart-Davis-Hart tasting, the 1989 Latour was the marginally superior wine of these two vintages, and also decidedly the younger of the two. The deep, youthful and very pure nose offers up a fine blend of cassis, dark berry, a touch of mint, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, fresh herbs and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with nascent complexity, great focus and transparency, tangy acids (notably higher than the more velvety 1990 version) and great length and grip on the old-fashioned, chewy and ripely tannic finish. This wine is developing brilliantly and is clearly going to be the longer-lived of the '89-'90 pair, and I would not be surprised to see the 1989 Latour open up its lead over its 1990 counterpart more profoundly as the years go by. A superb and very much under-appreciated Latour. 2020-2100. 94+.

1988 Château Latour

The 1988 Latour is a good, solid wine, but not in the league of the wines that were to follow here in 1989 and 1990. The bouquet shows a bit more new oak that was typical of the estate in this era, offering up a complex nose of sweet cassis, tobacco leaf, gravelly soil tones, cigar ash, fresh herbs and a fair bit of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seemingly fairly low in acid for this property, with a good core, still a fair bit of ripe backend tannin and good length and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. To be fair to this wine, which I last tasted five years ago, it could have still been in its period of hibernation, when Latour will often seem a tad lean behind its structure, in which case, my note will seem fairly conservative when the wine starts to stir. But, my gut feeling is that this will not quite match the quality of wines such as the '62, '67 or '71 when it is ready to drink, which is where I might have expected the '88 Latour to land on the scale of vintages once it was fully ready. Time will

tell and I would be delighted to see that I just caught this wine while it was still shut down and find that I have underrated it a bit. 2018-2050. **89+?**

1982 Château Latour

The 1982 Latour is a brilliant example of the vintage, which continues to show potential for long-term evolution, but is starting to drink with plenty of generosity at age thirty-two. The bouquet shows a bit of the veneer of the ripe and generous spirit of 1982, coupled to classic Latour power and depth, as it offers up scents of sweet cassis, black cherries, the first signs of black truffles, cigar smoke, dark, gravelly soil tones, almost a touch of meatiness and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with ripe, suave tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long, complex and gorgeous finish. This is not as classically Latour-like as a vintage such as 1970 or 1966, as the ripe style of 1982 is certainly prominently displayed here, but this is a great Latour by any measure. 2014-2100. **96.**

1976 Château Latour

This is from that era when Latour made good wines in virtually every vintage and the 1976 is an eminently satisfying and complete wine. There is not quite the customary mid-palate amplitude here as in most vintages of Latour, but the wine is poised, complex and very refined and is the star of the vintage, alongside Ausone and Lafite. The bouquet offers up a fully mature blend of backed cassis, cigar ash, gravel, tobacco leaf, a nice touch of walnut and trace elements of iron. On the palate the wine is full, complex and beautifully soil-driven in personality, with a good, but not great core, melted tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and beautifully balanced finish. A superb 1976. 2017-2040. **92.**

1975 Château Latour

The 1975 Latour is a very good example of the vintage, which was nowhere near as successful in the Médoc as it was in the Right Bank and Graves. But, in this era, Latour always seemed to rise above the general level of the vintage in more difficult years, and this was certainly the case in 1975. The wine offers up a fine, classic bouquet of sweet cassis, cherries, Cuban cigar wrapper, black truffle, dark soil tones, cigar ash and just a hint of petroleum jelly in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and now very elegant in profile, with a solid core, excellent acids and still a bit of tannin perking up the long and complex finish. The 1975 vintage was the highest ever measured for tannins and acidity on the Left Bank, up until the 2010 vintage came along, so for the Latour '75 to be so beautifully balanced forty years down the road is no small achievement! Fine juice and a sleeper vintage of Latour. 2015-2050+. **94.**

1971 Château Latour

As I mentioned above, the 1971 vintage of Latour was in that first small cache of the estate's wines that I bought back in the mid-1980s, and I have searched out and drunk this wine with great regularity up until only a couple of years ago, when the wine market woke up to its excellence and prices started to move up rather dramatically. It still looks like a stunning value when one considers that the still very backward 2005 was released ex-cellar for 670 euros a bottle, and only a few years back, this gorgeous wine could still be found around \$200 a bottle. The wine is classic Latour, offering up a black fruity bouquet of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, walnuts, gravelly soil tones, a nice touch of meatiness and a plenty smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now wide open and fully mature, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, melting, suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. The 1971 Latour is now fully mature, but probably will cruise along on its impeccable balance for at least another thirty years! 2016-2050+. **95.**

1970 Château Latour

Château Latour back in 1970 was still the longest-lived, most consistently excellent and backwards château to be found in all of Bordeaux. For many years after release, the 1970 Latour was one of the few examples of the vintage that was not particularly charming to drink, and it has taken a full thirty-five years for the wine to really blossom and begin showing its true quality. Today it is clear that the 1970 Latour is clearly one of the top three or four wines of the vintage, which has just now begun to emerge from its customary thirty years of hibernation and show itself in all its splendor. The stunning bouquet offers up sweet notes of black cherries, cassis, some grilled meat, cigar box, plenty of Pauillac soil, a bit of chipotle pepper, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and powerful, with a rock solid core of fruit, modest tannins, outstanding acidity, and tremendous length and grip on the endless, soil-driven and profound finish. Just a great bottle of Latour. 2006-2050+. **96+**.

1967 Château Latour

There are a few wines from the 1967 vintage that simply transcend the growing season (Pétrus, Trotanoy and Latour immediately come to mind) and this is another vintage of Latour that used to fly below the radar and offer up outstanding drinking to those savvy enough to look for the wine. The bouquet on this most recent bottle was complex, classic and wide open, wafting from the glass in a fine, meaty blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, gravel, black truffles, cigar smoke and a nice touch of coffee bean in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely suave on the attack, with excellent purity and soil signature, a fine core, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and still nicely tangy finish. I have been drinking this wine since the mid-1980s with great pleasure, but it continues to cruise along without a care in the world and has many decades of life still ahead of it. 2015-2040. **94**.

1966 Château Latour

When I read that the British ownership group had started to “soften up” Latour’s structured and powerful style just a bit after the purchase in 1963, I immediately thought back to this utterly classic 1966 version as persuasive evidence that the assertion was simply the misperception of commentators at the time! To my mind, this is one of the great, forgotten legends produced at Latour in the twentieth century and this wine remains very close in quality to the twin towers of 1959 and 1961 that preceded it by half a decade. The wine is now into its plateau of peak maturity, but in classic Latour style, still with structure to carry it many more decades down the road. The bouquet offers up a superb blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, black truffles, cigar box, gravelly soil tones, still a bit of tobacco leaf and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really retains a lovely core of almost sappy black fruit, with great focus and grip, modest tannins, tangy acids and superb backend mineral drive on the very long and very complex finish. One of my favorite vintages of Latour. 2011-2050+. **96**.

1964 Château Latour (served from magnum)

As I mentioned back in 2007, in my article on this vintage, the ’64 Latour is the finest wine made in the Médoc in this year, as the grapes were all picked before the rains arrived in October. Back in the day, this was one of the vintages of Latour that I used to drink with quite a bit of frequency, as this fact was generally not known, so the Latour was often lumped together with the other ’64 Médoc wines and not priced particularly high. Sadly, those days are now long, long gone down the road. In any event, this most recent magnum of 1964 Latour was utterly brilliant and even better than a regular-sized bottle served at the same event, offering up a lovely veneer of red fruit tones to go along with the classic smoky, black fruity Latour signature nose.

The bouquet is a deep and complex blend of cherries, red and black currants, a nice touch of meatiness, walnuts, a brilliantly complex base of gravelly soil tones, incipient notes of black truffles and still a wisp of cabernet-based tobacco leaf tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and superbly structured, with bright acids, modest tannins, great depth at the core and a very, very long, complex finish that closes with perfect balance and plenty of old school Latour grip. A great '64 with decades of life still ahead of it! 2014-2060+. **97.**

1962 Château Latour

1962 is one of my favorite vintages of Latour for current drinking, but I have not drunk a bottle in several years. The last example tasted was excellent, offering up a classic bouquet of cassis, cigar ash, gravelly soil tones, black truffles, plenty of cigar smoke and a topnote of walnuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch less suave structurally than either the 1966 or 1964, with a bit of chewy tannin still perking up the finish, fine depth at the core and a long, complex and smoky finish. This remains one of the really fine values for a mature vintage of Latour still out on the market and the wine has plenty of life still ahead of it. Classic, old school Latour from a golden age at the property. 2011-2050. **94.**



1961 Château Latour

I have been fortunate to drink the 1961 Latour on a handful of occasions over the years, and this has always been my favorite wine from the Left Bank in this glorious vintage. I have always found it a bit more elegant, but equally bottomless and powerful as the 1959, but the two wines are very close in quality. I have always dreamed of drinking the two side by side, just to see which I really preferred, but it has yet to happen and the years continue to roll by. The 1961 Latour is a brilliant wine that is at its absolute zenith of maturity today, soaring from the glass in a complex constellation of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, dark, gravelly soil tones, a hint of black truffle and a classic topnote of walnut. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and almost sappy at the core, with great soil signature, suave, moderate tannins and stunning focus and grip on the very, very long, very complex and vibrant finish. The balance here is simply impeccable, and though this wine is at its apogee, I can envision it cruising along out of the reach of time flown by for another century! Perfection. 2013-2100+. **100.**

1959 Château Latour

It was only a bit of bad luck that allowed us to savor the 1959 Latour at our tasting at Crystal Springs in February of 2017, as a bottle of the 1945 Latour selected for the flight was the victim of an old cork and was not in good condition (and was the last of the '45 vintage in the cellar) and the 1959 was suggested as a replacement. This is a great, great vintage of Latour from an era where the estate was at the absolute top of its game and made one of Bordeaux's best wines year in and year out, with a track record of consistent excellence that no other First Growth could match. Given the longevity of Latour in this era, it is not surprising that the 1959 is still a tad on the young side at age fifty-eight and takes some extended time in decanter to fully blossom, but once it has opened up, its brilliance is very easy to see. The bouquet is complex, ripe and beautiful, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, sweet cigar wrapper, a very complex base of soil, tobacco smoke and a nice touch of Latour nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful, with a rock solid core of plush fruit, great focus and grip, really impressive acidity for the ripe '59 vintage and a very, very long, complex and utterly soil-driven finish. This is a great, great vintage of Latour that comes very, very close to matching the perfection of the 1961 vintage here! 2017-2100. **99.**

1949 Château Latour

The 1949 vintage of Latour has been stunning for as long as I have been in the wine trade, and at age sixty-eight, it is at its absolute summit of peak drinkability. The beautiful bouquet soars from the glass in a fine blend of sweet cassis, black cherries, walnuts, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a bit of petroleum jelly and the faintest hint of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and marvelously vibrant still, with a suave core of fruit, great focus and grip, melted tannins and a very, very long, soil-driven and *à point* finish. This is a beautiful synthesis of the very elegant profile of 1949 and the broad-shouldered and muscular style of great old Latour. I would be happy to drink it anywhere, anytime! 2017-2045+. **95.**

1945 Château Latour

My last note on the 1945 Latour goes back more than fifteen years ago, but I can still taste the wine today if I close my eyes! This was the very first "great" old vintage of Latour that I ever drank, as a friend in my wine tasting group at the time served a bottle of this to us at our "Christmas Tasting" back in 1988, and every subsequent bottle has been the stuff of legends. I have only drunk the '45 on three or four occasions as the years have rolled by (making our bad cork on the bottle of the '45 this past spring that much more difficult to take, though it was

promptly replaced by the magical 1959 commented on above!), but here is my note from the turn of the century. The 1945 Latour is at the peak of its powers as it closes in on its fifty-fifth birthday, offering up the bottomless depth and great purity that the short crop of '45 gave to the best wines. The bouquet is gorgeous, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, plenty of black truffles, walnuts, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, new leather and a hint of paraffin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly majestic in scope, with a bottomless core, still a bit of chewy backend tannin, excellent focus and grip and a very, very long and superbly complex finish. One of the legendary Latours of the twentieth century! 1999-2050+. **100.**

1929 Château Latour

The 1929 vintage of Château Latour is a brilliant wine, with its still impressively youthful structural chassis a firm testament to the potential longevity of this great wine in this era at the property. 1929 was rightly praised as one of the greatest vintages of its era, with more classic balance than the stern, powerful 1928s that preceded it, but many of the very best wines from this year have come and gone over the course of the last seventy-five years. Not so with this brilliant Latour, which continues to show plenty of the vestiges of youth in its stunning bouquet of cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, gravelly soil tones, walnuts, a hint of mint, summer truffles and still a touch of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is full, pure and beautifully soil-driven, with a fine core, great focus and balance, still a whisper of backend tannin and a very long, complex and utterly poised finish. A brilliant Latour. 2015-2040+. **98.**

1926 Château Latour

I have been fortunate enough to drink the 1926 Latour on three or four occasions in the last half dozen years and I continue to be amazed at just how vibrant this wine remains at now more than ninety years of age. I did have a fake bottle of this wine quite recently, so keep this in mind that the 1926 was not overlooked by folks like Hardy Rodenstock and other fraudsters specializing in claret, but with only one fake bottle out of five examples, my batting average has been pretty good for this great wine! One of the best bottles of the '26 I have had was shared with Max Marinucci at a tasting at his shop, the Wine Connection, back in 2009, but all of the real bottles I have had of the 1926 Latour have been the stuff of legend. The most recent bottle was excellent (and which hailed from my friend Victor Lederer's cellar), offering up a deep, classic nose of black cherries, dark berries, tobacco ash, a touch of petroleum jelly, gravelly soil tones, Cuban cigar wrapper and that classic, mature Latour topnote of walnuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and amazingly vibrant for its age, with a rock solid core, still a touch of backend tannin and simply brilliant length and grip on the perfectly balanced and seamless finish. Just a great vintage of Latour. 2016-2050+. **97.**

1896 Château Latour

This is the oldest vintage of Château Latour that I have ever been privileged to drink, and the wine remains absolutely brilliant and far from the end of the road, despite it having been fully one hundred and twenty-one years of age when I drank this in February of this year! The beautiful nose is now all red fruit tones and tertiary elements, delivering a fabulous constellation of cherries, menthol, a touch of eucalyptus, a potpourri of spice elements, summer truffles and a very complex base of gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still plenty vigorous, with a nice core, great focus and grip, stunning complexity and a very, very long and utterly suave finish. The tannins have all now faded away, but this wine has such excellent balance that I have every expectation that it will continue to absolutely delight the senses for at least another quarter century! This is the magic of old Latour! 2017-2040. **97.**

**FIRST LOOK AT THE 2016 BEAUJOLAIS VINTAGE,
WITH PLENTY OF LATE-RELEASED 2015s AND OLDER BOTTLES**



The first grapes forming in the vines of Beaujolais in 2016.

The 2015 Beaujolais vintage is now pretty widely available in the marketplace, with most of the cuvées that *vignerons* decided to give a bit of extended *elevage* prior to release having now found their way into the pipeline. As readers will recall from Issue 65, it is a big, ripe and sometimes stunning vintage, but as picking dates were critical in this very torrid growing season, the wines can range very widely in style and not all are equally successful. The best are deep, ripe and beautifully structured and will age for a very long time (these are the wines *vignerons* say recall the legendary 1947s), but those that have not quite found the sweet spot of the vintage have ended up a bit heady and show distinct signs of *sur maturité* on both the nose and palate and are likely to be best if drunk in the first decade or so after the vintage. As I have tasted more and more from the 2015 vintage, I have gained even greater respect for the *vignerons* who managed to get everything just right in this very hot summer and who have produced wines of impressive depth, muscle and balance, with the attendant higher octane levels of this torrid vintage nicely managed. As I wrote back in Issues 65, the vintage has produced plenty of wines

with more stuffing than is typical in this lovely region, but also some of the most tannic Cru Beaujolais bottlings since the brilliant 2011s.

So despite the 2015 vintage's general reputation for plushness and generosity of fruit, there are plenty of wines with a series chassis of tannin and relatively long-term aging is probably going to be required for many of the top Cru bottlings in general, and certainly from traditionally structured communes such as Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent. In terms of recent structured vintages, I certainly rank the very pure and soil-driven 2011s a significant step above the more roasted and powerful 2015s, but there are plenty of wines from this latter vintage that are going to prove to be very long-lived and outstanding when they are truly ready to drink. Comparisons to 1947 in style and potential longevity do not seem far-fetched in the least for the very best 2015s, at least based on the handful of old Beaujolais bottlings from this vintage that I have been fortunate enough to taste down through the years. But, I do not think that the 1947 comparison is applicable for the majority of the 2015s, which are more likely to want drinking up on the earlier side of the ledger, due to the rather atypically high octane levels that many of the wines of the vintage share. I have also had some quite low in alcohol examples of the 2015 vintage, which seem to be reflective of periods of blocked maturation along the way in the rippling heat of the summer, so it is a plenty heterogeneous vintage and there is not really any general style to be found in the 2015s. I still like the best example of the vintage very much indeed, but stylistically, amongst the more recent structured vintages, I still gravitate towards the outstandingly pure 2011s for extended cellaring.

One thing I should mention about the 2015 vintage that really has jumped out to me over the course of these last six months of tasting of the vintage, is that the riper and more powerful aspect has often been best harnessed by those *vignerons* who are often grouped in the “natural wine” category, and who have in the past often deferred on the side of modest caution against overt ripeness and occasionally made rather lean wines. This predisposition seems to have been really rewarded in the torrid summer of 2015, as a couple of these producers who I feel fall in this camp, such as the very talented Julie Balagny and Damien Coquelet, have really made some stunning 2015s which will probably be ranked amongst the vintage's greatest successes as time goes by. Their wines in this vintage have a really lovely inner tension that is not always easy to find from other top producers, and when this structural energy is tied to the ripe fruit of the vintage, the results can be absolutely stellar.

The first of the 2016s are also starting to appear at this time and I have included plenty of notes from this far more classically-inclined vintage in this report as well. The more I taste wines from 2016, the more I am convinced that this is an absolutely exceptional vintage in the region, and I am starting to wonder if the best of this vintage will eventually eclipse the riper, but less classically styled wines of 2015. In fact, at this point, 2016 at its best may well be my favorite Beaujolais vintage since the brilliant 2011s. But, this is another heterogeneous year for Beaujolais, as severe hail damage was epic in certain communes and in some *climats*, the crop was all but wiped out completely. The spring of 2016 was early out of the blocks, but cool and damp weather came soon on the heels of the early warmth, putting the growing season a bit behind schedule by the start of May. The first depredation of the vintage arrived soon thereafter, as significant frost damage at the outset of May was extensive in some vineyards, causing serious worries for the potential size of the crop in the affected vineyards. The frost damage was only the

first concern for *vignerons* hit by the frost, as soon thereafter severe hail cut a swathe through the northern end of Beaujolais at the tail-end of May, with Chiroubles in particular hammered by this first, brutal round of hail. Sadly, this would not be the last hail storm, for on the evening of Friday, June 24th, yet another bruising round of hail swept through this same northern section of Beaujolais, with Fleurie the epicenter of the second hailstorm (reported crop losses were over seventy percent in this Cru), with Moulin-à-Vent and northern parts of Morgon also receiving quite a bit of damage from round two and Chiroubles again hit (as if vineyards here had not received enough damage the first time around). The second storm also was accompanied by whipping winds and sheets of heavy rain, with the following weeks' weather warm, rainy and humid, which sparked outbreaks of powdery mildew that further threatened bunches still remaining on the vines. Almost as quick as *vignerons* could get out in the muddy vineyards and apply treatments against the mildew, rains would wash these away and make necessary yet another trip out into the vines. For those affected, the last weeks of June were a trip through Dante's Inferno.

Happily, Mother Nature relented a bit after the mid-summer weather battles of 2016 and August and September in particular were glorious for the remaining bunches, so that a later than normal harvest was brought in under absolutely ideal conditions. Where the crop was abundant (in Crus further south, Brouilly and Côte de Brouilly had been spared from the hail, and to the north, St. Amour and Juliéna were also outside the path of the two hailstorms and had been spared as well), the grapes came in looking very good indeed. In the southern half of the region, where there are no Crus, but plenty of fine vineyards for producing Beaujolais-Villages, there was no hail in May or June and the crop load was quite correct and of excellent quality. During the good *fin de saison* weather, skies were sunny, temperatures warm, but not too hot, and evenings stayed cool, allowing acids to remain at good levels and the resulting wines have a very appealing, crunchy freshness to them from the combination of excellent sugar levels and beautifully-retained acids. So, the biggest problem with the 2016 vintage in Beaujolais is going to be yields in the Cru villages that were pummeled by the hail in May and June, which caused some *vignerons* in these communes to go out and get *négociant* licenses for the first time and buy grapes, so that they could produce a reasonable amount of wine in 2016. For example, the Dutraive family who owns Domaine de la Grand Cour in Fleurie lost more than ninety percent of their production in that commune, but were able to purchase grapes from a friend in Chénas and have made a couple of superb bottlings from that commune to give them some wine to sell in 2016.

However, beyond the very catastrophic impact on yields for those in the path of the two hailstorms, the producers lucky enough to be spared from the storms produced very good, "correct" yields, and this will allow productions levels for the Beaujolais in general to be at least reasonable in 2016. And where there were bunches to pick in 2016, it was very, very high quality fruit and the resulting wines have an energy, sappiness and bounce to them that is really exciting. These are not the larger than life styles of Beaujolais found in many portfolios in 2015, but quite classic and zesty wines, cut somewhat along the lines of the very traditional 2014s, but with more depth, more sheen, superior sappiness at the core and greater generosity and length on the backend of the palate. The best 2016s that I have tasted so far are really, really good! Within the happier news of high quality wines in 2016 in Beaujolais, which somewhat offsets the severe crop shortage in the villages affected by the hail in May and June, is the cautionary fact that hail

has once again decimated the crop in the same band of Cru villages in 2017 and it is still too early to tell if some of these vines (many of which are quite old), pummeled now two years in a row by severe hail, will be able to survive on into 2018, or will they have to be replanted? For fans of Beaujolais, it will make sense to buy more wines for the cellar now than what you might typically go through in a year, as one may not have the same wide array of tasty options on the market a year down the road as we have today, for besides the best of the later-released 2015s and the newly-arriving 2016s, there remain some excellent wines still in the market from 2014 and even the ripely tannic and exceptional 2011 vintage can still be found on some shelves. So, stock up while you can, as next year the Beaujolais market may seem a lot leaner than it does at the present time! So, there is an awful lot of very ageworthy Beaujolais on the market (the best 2016s are going to be very long-lived wines and may well compete with the top 2015s for longevity!) and this is a very, very good time for stocking the Beaujolais corner of the cellar.

Many of the beautiful pictures taken in the vineyards in the region and featured here are courtesy of Carrie Marchal, who lived here for several years and has just returned with her family from Morgon-Villié to New York. She kindly allowed me to use the photos in this and in previous Beaujolais articles and I thank her warmly for her generosity in sharing these lovely photographs of the region, some of which really capture the devastation caused by the hail of 2016.



Hail damage: looking from Fleurie to Chiroubles (the brown hill in mid-ground), May 30th, right after the first hail.

Beaujolais Blanc

2016 Beaujolais-Villages Blanc “Terres Blanches”- Robert Perroud

This is a very classic and tasty example of its genre, offering up a lovely nose of lime, crab apple, chalky soil tones and a touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and bouncy, with a good core, fine focus and balance and very good length and grip on the zesty finish. This is not the most complex wine, but it hits all the right notes and is a good value. 2017-2025. **87.**

2016 Beaujolais Blanc- Domaine Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2016 Beaujolais Blanc from Jean-Paul Brun is really terrific, with the precision and undertow of *terroir* that one expects routinely from Monsieur Brun, but seldom from Beaujolais Blanc. The bouquet is deep, pure and classy, offering up scents of pear, apple, limestone soil, a touch of almond, beeswax and a nice topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and still fairly tightly-knit, with a fine core, brisk acids and excellent length and grip on the vibrant finish. 2017-227. **90.**

Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages

2016 Wild Soul Vin de France- Julien Sunier

There is no vintage date anywhere on the front or back labels here, but this is all fruit from the 2016 vintage. Due to crop losses, Julien Sunier bought a *négociant* license and produced this bottling, from a mix of Beaujolais-Villages and Régnié fruit. The wine was raised in three thousand liter cement eggs and comes in at twelve percent octane. The bouquet offers up a fine nose of black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, fresh thyme and a touch of bitter chocolate in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright and nicely sappy at the core, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a long, bouncy finish. Good juice. 2017-2024. **89.**

2016 Beaujolais “Griottes”- Pierre-Marie Chermette

The 2016 Beaujolais “Griottes” from Pierre-Marie Chermette is a bright and utterly classic example of its appellation, wafting from the glass in a refined aromatic constellation of cherries, sweet cranberries, fresh thyme, superb soil tones and a topnote of gentle smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full and crunchy, with fine soil signature, a lovely core of red fruit, modest tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This is delicious to drink right now and will also age very nicely over the next ten to fifteen years. High class Beaujolais! 2017-2030+. **91+.**

2016 Beaujolais “Origine” Vieilles Vignes- Pierre-Marie Chermette

The 2016 Beaujolais “Origine” Vieilles Vignes from Pierre-Marie Chermette (which is the new name for the Cuvée Traditionelle) is outstanding, offering up great purity and depth on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is characteristically primary today, offering up superb possibilities in its mix of red and black cherries, cranberries, nutskin, gamebird, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a youthful touch of pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a rock solid core, excellent soil signature, outstanding focus and balance and a very long, modestly tannic and still quite primary finish. Great juice that is certainly approachable today, I would opt to tuck away Monsieur Chermette’s 2016 Origine bottling for three or four years and really let it blossom properly with a bit of bottle age! 2020-2040. **93.**

2016 Beaujolais-Villages- Damien Coquelet

The 2016 Beaujolais-Villages from Damien Coquelet is light and feisty in personality, coming in at a cool 11.5 percent octane, but still offering good intensity of flavor. The bouquet

offers up a fine blend of cranberry, fresh herbs, pepper, a nice dollop of soil and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied and a touch lean in style, with moderate depth, tangy acids and very impressive length and grip on the slightly herbal finish. This is a low alcohol bottling for the natural wine crowd, who are going to absolutely love it, as it is really nicely balanced in its style, but those a bit less adventurous may find it a touch lean and green for primetime drinking. I like it pretty well, but it could have had my undivided attention if it had crossed the twelve percent threshold! 2017-2025. **87.**

2016 Beaujolais- Paul Durdilly et Fils

The 2016 Beaujolais from Paul Durdilly et Fils is a beautifully fragrant and expressive wine. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, loads of violets, a fine base of soil, a touch of fresh thyme and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and crunchy, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. There is just a touch of backend tannin here that should carry the wine very nicely in the cellar for a decade or more. This is just a classic example of fine Beaujolais. 2017-2027+. **90.**

2016 Beaujolais “Cuvée Kéké”- Kevin Descombes

The 2016 Cuvée Kéké from Kevin Descombes is a beautiful and very classic example of Beaujolais, offering up a bright and sappy nose of cherries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, soil and a nice touch of floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and juicy at the core, with just a whisper of ripe tannin, good acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is really a lovely drink already, but has the stuffing and balance to also age quite nicely over the medium-term. 2017-2027. **89+.**

2016 Beaujolais-Villages “les Tours”- Justin Dutraive

Justin Dutraive is the son of Jean-Michel Dutraive and works both at the family Domaine de la Grand Cour in Fleurie, as well as making a couple of his own wines on the side. His Beaujolais-Villages “les Tours” hails from a village just outside of Brouilly. The wine is aged in older Burgundy casks and is about as serious an example of Beaujolais-Villages as one is likely to come across. The 2016 vintage is the debut for this bottling from Justin and it is excellent, delivering a fine and deep aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, beautiful soil tones, a touch of chicory, a whisper of cedar and a pungent topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full and surprisingly structured for Beaujolais-Villages, with a sappy core, superb soil signature, moderate, ripe tannins and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. It really deserves to be aged like a Cru. This is terrific Beaujolais-Villages! 2018-2030+. **92.**

2016 Beaujolais- Michel Guignier

The 2016 Beaujolais from Michel Guignier is a beautifully vibrant and classic example of its appellation, jumping from the glass in a superb blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, fresh herb tones, a fine base of soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, crunchy and fullish, with a good core, lovely transparency, tangy acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is lovely juice that will be even better with a year or two in the cellar. 2017-2027. **90+.**

2016 Beaujolais “le Perreon”- Domaine de la Madone

The 2016 Beaujolais “le Perreon” from the Bererd family’s Domaine de la Madone is flat out gorgeous on both the nose and palate and is clearly of Cru Beaujolais quality! The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of sappy black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, woodsmoke, a touch of gamebird and a topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and sappy at the core, with fine focus and grip, impressive nascent complexity and lovely backend mineral drive on the suave, modestly tannic and tangy finish. This has the *gravitas* of a top Cru and is a stellar bargain! 2017-2030+. **92.**

2016 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine des Marrans

Domaine des Marrans is based in Fleurie and farms twenty hectares of vines in six different appellations. Their Beaujolais-Villages bottling hails from a one hectare parcel of forty-five year-old vines just outside of Juliéna in the northern half of the region. The wine offers up a fine and quite classic nose of cherries, sweet cranberries, vinesmoke, a hint of pepper, a good base of soil and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and focused, with a good core, a bit of backend tannin and fine length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is good juice that will be even better with a bit of bottle age. 2017-2025. **88.**

2016 Beaujolais-Villages “la Sambinerie”- Domaine Richard Rottiers

The 2016 Beaujolais-Villages “la Sambinerie” from Richard Rottiers is a classic example, offering up a bright and juicy nose of cherries, cranberries, woodsmoke, a nice base of soil and a touch of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and nicely balanced, with good intensity of flavor, fine focus and balance and a long, tangy and very gently tannic finish. Good juice. 2017-2027. **89.**

2016 Beaujolais “Cuvée l’Ancien” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Terres Dorées

The 2016 Cuvée l’Ancien from Jean-Paul Brun is absolutely classic in profile on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a mix of cranberries, cherries, vinesmoke, lovely soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, vibrant and focused, with a good core, superb transparency, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthful and tangy finish. This is still a very young wine and I would give it a year or two in the bottle to allow the wine to start to blossom from behind this beautiful girdle of acidity. 2018-2035. **91+.**

2016 Beaujolais-Villages “la Roche”- Domaine du Clos du Fief (Michel et Sylvain Tête)

The 2016 Beaujolais-Villages “la Roche” from the Tête family is a superb example of its appellation, with the depth and nicely integrated structure of a Cru. The bouquet is youthfully complex, offering up scents of cherries, cranberries, fresh thyme, lovely minerality, a touch of orange peel and a topnote of vinesmoke. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and still a bit marked by its youthful stems, but deep, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy and very promising finish. This is quite tasty already, but will be even better with a couple years’ worth of bottle age. A most impressive Beaujolais-Villages. 2017-2030. **91.**

2015 Beaujolais-Villages- Domaine des Marrans

The 2015 Beaujolais-Villages from Domaine des Marrans is quite a bit riper than the 2016 version and is quite a typical example of the torrid summer of 2015. The deep and borderline overripe nose offers up scents of black cherries, figs, cigar ash and chocolate. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and a bit chewy on the backend, with a plush core of fruit and good length and grip on the slightly heavy finish. Not bad for a 2015, but I love the vivacity of the more classically-bent 2016 version. 2017-2025. **86.**

2015 Beaujolais “Cuvée l’Ancien” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Terres Dorées

The 2015 Cuvée l’Ancien from Domaine Terres Dorées is a riper and bolder wine than the classically-inclined 2016 version, but very pure and very precise at the same time, as one would expect from Monsieur Brun! The complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a suave blend

of black cherries, red plums, raw cocoa, lovely soil tones, a touch of sweet nuttiness and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very tangy for a 2015, with a good core, very impressive transparency, a touch of backend tannin and a long, vibrant and complex finish. 2017-2030+. **91.**



Good work if you can get it...

2014 Beaujolais-Villages- Maison Joseph Drouhin

It has been almost two years since I last tasted the 2014 Beaujolais-Villages from Joseph Drouhin and the wine has blossomed beautifully over this time. The bouquet is bright, pure and gently sappy, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet cranberries, lovely soil tones, violets, a dollop of fresh thyme and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, medium-full and tangy, with a good core, impressive soil signature, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, crunchy and quite classic finish. A fine, fine example. I do hope Maison Drouhin does not discontinue its *négociant* line of Beaujolais bottlings, now that they have the Hospices de Bellevue vineyards to work with, as these have been exemplary bottlings and great values for decades! 2017-2025+. **89.**

Saint-Amour

2016 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

The 2016 from Domaine des Billards is a stunning young wine and this is going to be another classic, long distance runner vintage from this icon in Saint-Amour. The bouquet of the

2016 is very pure and very precise, offering up a youthful blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, gamebird, dark soil tones, a touch of espresso, fresh thyme, woodsmoke and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a primary profile, lovely depth at the core, fine backend soil signature, a touch of tannin and a long, vibrant and still quite tightly-knit finish. This is certainly approachable today, but there is so much here waiting to be unleashed when the acids relax a bit and the tannins soften that I would not touch a bottle for another year or two, as it will age beautifully and is going to be a great wine a decade or more down the road. 2019-2040+. **93+**.

2016 Saint-Amour “les Capitans”- Domaine du Clos du Fief (Michel et Sylvain Tête)

The Saint-Amour from Domaine du Clos du Fief hails from thirty-five to forty year-old vines in the *lieu à dit* of les Capitans. The 2016 version is nicely structured out of the blocks and will be a long-distance runner, but it needs a bit of bottle age to properly blossom. The youthful nose offers up lovely depth in its nascently complex blend of black cherries, a bit of sweet dark berry, bonfire, a touch of fresh herbs, dark soil tones, gamebird and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit marked by its youthful stemminess, with a lovely core, fine soil signature, gentle tannins and a long, primary and vibrant finish. All this lovely example of St. Amour needs is some bottle age. 2020-2040. **91+**.

2015 Saint-Amour- Domaine de Fa (Maxime et Antoine Graillet)

The 2015 Saint-Amour from Domaine de Fa is plenty ripe, coming in at fourteen percent octane, but it shows lovely freshness in its bouquet of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, roasted *pigeon*, a very nice touch of *garrigue* and just a bit of oak influence from its *foudres*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a good core, a bit of backend tannin and a very long, complex finish that closes with just a touch of *sur maturité*. I like the nose here a bit better than the palate, but that is the nature of the 2015 vintage and this is a good solid effort from that torrid summer. Despite the tannin here, I would be inclined to drink this on the early side, as the acids are pretty low and I imagine it will get a bit heavier-handed down the road. 2017-2027. **89**.

2015 Saint-Amour- Domaine des Billards (Héritiers Loron)

The 2015 Domaine des Billards is settling in nicely after a few months in bottle and is showing even better than it did the last time I tasted it. This is still a plenty ripe example of this beautiful bottling, lifting a hefty 14.5 percent alcohol, but the wine is really quite nicely balanced for this level of octane. The bouquet offers up a ripe and classy blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a bit of roasted *pigeon*, dark chocolate, and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a rock solid core,, ripe, suave tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, still fairly primary finish. This could be really interesting with some extended bottle age. 2017-2040. **90**.

Juliénas

2015 Juliénas “Probus”- Pascal Aufranc

The 2015 Juliénas “Probus” from Pascal Aufranc is a ripe and broad-shouldered example of the vintage, delivering a sappy bouquet of black cherries, balsamic overtones, dark soil, woodsmoke and a hint of thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chewy on the backend, with a rock solid core, pretty good soil signature and a long, well-balanced and moderately tannic finish. This is plenty ripe, but nicely cool in the mouth and should age very nicely. 2017-2035. **89**.

2015 Juliéna “Tradition”- Domaine du Clos du Fief (Michel et Sylvain Tête)

The 2015 Juliéna “Tradition” from Michel et Sylvain Tête is a ripe and well-balanced example of this torrid summer. The bouquet is plush and black fruity in profile, offering up scents of blackberries, black cherries, roasted gamebird, chocolate, just a dollop of dark soil tones, gentle herb tones and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine focus and grip, a bit of ripe backend tannin and a long, complex and quite powerful finish for Juliéna. The alcohol level here is listed at thirteen percent and this seems quite close, and consequently, the wine is quite structured out of the blocks and really will demand a bit of time in the cellar to truly blossom. It should prove to be a very long-lived example of Juliéna. 2019-2040. **91.**

2015 Juliéna “Cuvée Tradition”- Château de Juliéna

This is the first wine I have tasted from the Château de Juliéna, which is one of the largest vineyard owners in the appellation. The wine is aged in traditional large, old *foudres* prior to bottling. The 2015 Cuvée Tradition is a typically ripe example of the vintage, offering up a deep and sappy nose of black cherries, a touch of chocolate, woodsmoke, a nice dollop of soil and a bit of upper register spiciness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and generous, with a fine core, moderate tannins and a long, velvety and gently heady finish. This is listed at thirteen percent octane on the label, but I have to think this is really closer to fourteen percent. In any case, it is nicely balanced and will drink well for at least the next five to seven years and maybe longer. 2017-2024+. **88.**

Chéna**2016 Chéna “Vignes de 1939 en Rémont”- Pascal Aufranc**

I have seem to have listed the 2014 and 2015 vintages of Monsieur Aufranc’s old vine Chéna bottling differently in the last few reports, so I am combining the two names on the label, so that readers can understand (better than I did!) that these are the same cuvées. The 2016 version of these very old vines is lovely, offering up a young and classic nose of cherries, cranberries, vinesmoke, a touch of nutskin, dark soil tones, a bit of espresso and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely tangy, with a fine core of old vine fruit, excellent soil signature, modest tannins and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is really, really good Chéna in the making, but it should be given the courtesy of a couple of years in the cellar for the tannins to fully fall away. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2035. **91.**

2016 Chéna “Lieu Dit les Perelles”- Famille Dutraive

With the Dutraive family’s home base of Fleurie battered by both frost damage and extensive battering by the hail of 2016, fully ninety percent of their production in their own vineyards was lost to the twin terrors of this year, forcing them to buy a *négociant* license and search for some fruit to purchase so that they could make a bit of wine in 2016. These two bottlings of Chéna are both produced from purchased fruit, with the les Perelles delivering a truly beautiful and quite sappy bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, incipient gamebird, a dollop of cranberry, bonfire, soil and a hint of fresh bay in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, fullish and beautifully balanced, with a good core, excellent transparency, tangy acids and impressive length and grip on the bouncy and complex finish. Just lovely Chéna! 2017-2030. **92.**

2016 Chénas “Lieu Dit en Papolet”- Famille Dutraive

The Dutraive family’s 2016 Chénas “Lieu Dit en Papolet” is a beautiful wine from this often overlooked Cru. The bouquet is pure, complex and vibrant, offering up scents of Bing cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, a touch of cinnamon, lovely soil tones and a bit of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and transparent, with bright acids, fine focus and grip, a juicy core and a very long, zesty and complex finish. There is just a touch of backend tannin here that augurs extremely well for this wine down the road, but it is hardly an impediment to immediate enjoyment. Fine, fine juice! 2017-2030+. **92+**.



Threatening clouds hovering over Moulin-à-Vent- sadly a scene witnessed many times in late May and June of 2016.

Moulin-à-Vent

2016 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches”- Pierre-Marie Chermette

The 2016 Moulin-à-Vent “les Trois Roches” from Pierre-Marie Chermette is flat out stunning! This is a young and very, very promising example of Moulin-à-Vent, offering up a superb aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, a touch of sweet dark berry, complex dark, granitic soil tones, a touch of chicory, beautiful spice tones and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and beautifully transparent, with flawless balance, great depth at the core, laser-like focus and stunning backend energy and mineral drive on the very, very long, moderately tannic and tangy finish. This is not a blockbuster, but it is unquestionably

the single finest example of Moulin-à-Vent that I have tasted from Monsieur Chermette, and I have been drinking his wines for a very, very long time! 2021-2065. **95.**

2015 Moulin-à-Vent “Vieilles Vignes”- Louis Boillot

In the spring of 2016, Louis Boillot purchased a parcel in Fleurie, but it was wiped out by hail in the vintage and it will not be until 2017 that we see the first bottling from this new plot of vines. In 2015, Monsieur Boillot picked his Moulin-à-Vent parcels on August 26th and 27th, with the “Vieilles Vignes” bottling offering up a deep and very refined bouquet of cassis, black cherries, gamebird, granite and a topnote of currant leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and very suave on the attack, with a fine core, ripe, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced and nascently complex finish. This will be excellent, but will want a few years’ worth of bottle age. 2019-2050. **92+.**

2015 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Rouchaux”- Louis Boillot

All of the 2015s from Louis Boillot are in the 13.5 to 13.6 percent range in this ripe vintage, which is pretty low by the standards of the summer. The les Rouchaux is excellent, delivering a deep and very sappy nose of red and black cherries, a hint of sweet cranberry, woodsmoke, *pigeon*, dark soil tones, espresso and a nice touch of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused finish. All this impressive wine needs is a bit of patience! 2021-2060. **94.**

2015 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Brussellions”- Louis Boillot

The 2015 Les Brussellions from the Boillot family is simply superb, offering up a pure and very classic bouquet of black cherries, cassis, espresso, spit-roasted gamebird, woodsmoke, fine soil tones and again, a nice topnote of chicory. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with outstanding mid-palate depth, fine-grained tannins and excellent grip and focus on the very long and youthful finish. This will be a very elegant expression of Moulin-à-Vent once it has blossomed. 2022-2060. **94+.**

2015 Moulin-à-Vent- Château des Jacques

The 2015 Moulin-à-Vent from Château des Jacques is a bit lower in octane than many 2015s, coming in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and offering up a sappy and quite compelling bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, chocolate, a bit of bonfire and hung game. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe, with a rock solid core, firm, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and balance and a long, chewy and primary finish. There is just a whisper of *sur maturité* in evidence on both the nose and palate here, but it is not dominant and it will be interesting to see if it becomes more prominent with extended cellaring. In any event, the wine needs a few years in the cellar to start to soften up and blossom before we will be able to tell. If these notes of *sur maturité* fade into the background, the wine will deserve the score at the top of the scale, but if they become more pronounced, the lower number will probably be more accurate. 2020-2050. **88-91+?**

2015 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Michelons”- Yohan Lardy

The 2015 Moulin-à-Vent “Les Michelons” from Yohan Lardy is not overly ripe, like some 2015s, but it has a bit of a weedy streak through the mid-palate right now that indicates that perhaps the vines shut down for a bit in the heat of 2015. The bouquet is nicely complex, offering up scents of dark berries, dark soil tones, a touch of chicory, gentle herb tones and topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, young and focused, with good depth at the core, moderate tannins and a long, youthful and slightly weedy finish. This needs a

few years to blossom and could turn out very nicely if the herb tones here morph into something more savory with bottle age. The range of score indicates where the wine may land, depending on how the gentle weediness changes with cellaring. 2020-2045. **87-90.**

2015 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine Terres d'Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun's 2015 Moulin-à-Vent is a beautifully pure and promising example of the vintage, with the inherent structural chassis one would expect from both the appellation and the vintage, coupled with really lovely, ripe, but far from overripe fruit. The outstanding bouquet delivers a youthful constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, chicory, a touch of graphite, dark soil tones, fresh thyme, incipient *pigeon* and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is very pure, soil-driven and nicely full-bodied, with ripe, seamless tannins, excellent depth at the core, bright, ripe acids and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This has marvelous inner-mouth tension for a 2015 and is a great wine in the making. 2022-2060+. **94.**

2014 Moulin-à-Vent "Vieilles Vignes"- Domaine Grand Moulin (Xavier et Nicolas Barbet)

The 2014 Moulin-à-Vent "Vieilles Vignes" from the Barbet brothers is excellent, albeit a bit reductive when first opened, and needs a bit of prodding in decanter to get it to blossom properly at this early stage in its evolution. Eventually, the wine stirs nicely and offers up a pure and classic bouquet of cassis, black cherries, a complex base of dark soil tones, a bit of roasted meat, chicory, woodsmoke, a hint of cedar and a nice touch of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied and well-knit, with a good core, fine soil signature, ripe, moderate tannins, tangy acids and impressive length and grip on the still primary finish. This is early days for this high quality example of Moulin-à-Vent and I would give this wine at least three or four years' worth of bottle age before starting to pull corks in earnest. It will age very, very well and it is hard not to imagine this really drinking with distinction at age fifteen or twenty! 2020-2050. **92+.**

2014 Moulin-à-Vent "Roche Grès"- Patrick Tranchand

The 2014 Moulin-à-Vent "Roche Grès" from Patrick Tranchand is a very nice example of the vintage and this excellent vineyard. The nose wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of cassis, black cherries, fresh herb tones, dark soil tones, a bit of coffee bean and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full and quite suave on the attack, with a solid core, fine soil signature and good length and grip on the modestly tannic and slightly weedy finish. This is a good, solid example of Moulin-à-Vent that could do with a few years in the cellar to blossom. 2020-2040. **89.**

2013 Moulin-à-Vent- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2013 Moulin-à-Vent from Maison Joseph Drouhin is still a young wine and showing a bit of youthful greenness on both the nose and palate. This has seemingly closed down since I last tasted it two years ago, as the bouquet is quite reticent and nowhere near as pure today as was evident at that time. With some coaxing, the bouquet stirs a bit, delivering scents of cassis, chicory, dark soil tones, gamebird, white pepper and bonfire. On the palate the wine is fullish, tight and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, reserved and slightly weedy finish. I never expected this wine to show this austere side of its personality, as it was certainly not evident when the wine was young, but it remains quite long on the backend and very nicely balanced, so perhaps this is just a dumb stage that the wine is going through. With extended aeration, this wine got better and better, as the black fruit came up and the herb tones

receded markedly, but it is still plenty closed down and several years away from primetime drinking. My initial score back in 2015 now seems a bit optimistic, but there is complexity and balance here and perhaps this will get back to its previous level of potential with further bottle age. 2020-2045+. **88-91+?**

2007 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Moriers

The 2007 Moulin-à-Vent from François de Nicolay's Domaine des Moriers is a very pretty example of this lighter vintage in Beaujolais. The bouquet is quite red fruity and complex today, offering up scents of cherries, cranberries, fresh thyme, stony minerality, vinesmoke and just a touch of espresso in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with respectable depth at the core, fine focus and grip and a long, intensely flavored and zesty finish. This is only moderately ripe in profile and there is a streak of fresh herb tones that runs along with the fruit, but it is complex and very enjoyable at the table in its more understated vintage style. 2017-2030. **89.**

2003 Moulin-à-Vent- Château des Jacques (Louis Jadot)

The 2003 Moulin-à-Vent from Château des Jacques is shockingly fine for a 2003, with breed, purity and complexity that I never imagined possible for this vintage. The wine is not necessarily classic on either the nose, but it is really refined, wafting from the glass in a vibrant and an impressively complex blend of blackberries, violets, a touch of licorice, dark soil tones, cigar ash, a touch of meatiness and just a whisper of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and surprisingly transparent in profile, with plenty of mid-palate depth, good acids, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, focused and very nicely balanced finish. It is only on the tail-end of this wine that one realizes that there is a bit of fig-like elements from the heat of this torrid summer, but overall, this is a simply brilliant example of the 2003 vintage. 2017-2040. **92.**

2002 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos des Rochegrès”- Château des Jacques (Louis Jadot)

The 2002 Clos des Rochegrès from Château des Jacques must have been pretty structured in its youth, for at age fifteen, it still has a bit of backend tannin waiting to resolve, but the wine is evolving beautifully in bottle and is really a pretty stunning example of Moulin-à-Vent. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex and maturing blend of cassis, black cherries. Dark soil tones, woodsmoke, an exotic touch of fresh peppermint and a nice framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, fading, but not yet fully resolved tannins, bright acids and lovely soil signature on the long, well-balanced and classy finish. This is an excellent wine that is approachable today, but still needs at least two or three more years in the cellar for the tannins to fully fall away. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2050. **93+.**

1999 Moulin-à-Vent- Château des Jacques (Louis Jadot)

The 1999 Moulin-à-Vent from Château des Jacques has now reached its plateau of maturity, but it still has a very good structural chassis for further aging. The bouquet delivers a fine, nicely understated bouquet of cassis, black cherries, gamebird, dark soil tones, chicory, wild bay and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, suave on the attack and nicely solid at the core, with fine soil signature, still a bit of backend tannin, bright acids, impeccable balance and excellent focus and grip on the complex and nicely resolved finish. This wine has decades of life still ahead of it, but it is drinking very, very well right now. 2017-2040. **92.**

1997 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos des Thorins”- Château des Jacques (Louis Jadot)

The 1997 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos des Thorins” from Château des Jacques, from the first vintage after Louis Jadot bought the property in 1996, is excellent. Clos des Thorins is an old vine cuvée that I do not taste with regularity from the estate, but they made this wine as recently as 2009, so this remains a bottling that they continue to produce. The 1997 was an auspicious start, as the wine at age twenty is now into its plateau of prime drinkability and offers up a deep and beautifully complex nose of black cherries, cassis, granitic soil tones, gamebirds, a touch of red curry, incipient autumnal notes, just a whisper of dried eucalyptus and violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and perfectly resolved, with fine mid-palate depth, melted tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and absolutely *à point* finish. Gorgeous juice! 2017-2040. **94.**

Fleurie

2016 Fleurie “Poncié”- Pierre-Marie Chermette

The Poncié bottling from Pierre-Marie Chermette hails from thirty-five year-old vines in this *lieu à dit* that is planted up in the steepest section of Fleurie. The 2016 Poncié is outstanding, offering up scents of red and black cherries, gamebird, a hint of violet, superb soil tones, fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly classic in profile, with a sappy core, great transparency, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and still quite youthful finish. This can easily be drunk today, but it is a puppy and really should be allowed to mature at least a couple of years before having at it in earnest! 2019-2035+. **93.**

2016 Fleurie “les Garants”- Pierre-Marie Chermette

In contrast to the Poncié bottling, the les Garants *lieu à dit* is located down in the section of Fleurie that borders on Moulin-à-Vent, and like the Coudert’s Clos de la Roilette, was actually once part of Moulin-à-Vent, rather than Fleurie. Monsieur Chermette gives this wine a bit of new oak, which works beautifully with the more structured personality of this cru, as it offers up a fine nose of black cherries, pomegranate, dark soil tones, gamebird, espresso and a touch of oak spice. On the palate the wine is deep, pure, full and potentially sappy at the core, with fine-grained tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, poised and nascently complex finish. 2020-2050. **94.**

2016 Fleurie- Jean-Louis Dutraive

The 2016 Fleurie from Jean-Louis Dutraive is beautifully light in color and tips the scales at a cool 12.5 percent octane. The bouquet is bright and red fruity, offering up a fine constellation of strawberries, cherries, a complex base of soil tones, a bit of gamebird, roses and just a bit of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is tangy, medium-bodied and intensely flavored, with lovely focus and grip, very good nascent complexity and a long, gently tannic and very nicely balanced finish. This has the raciness of a very natural wine, but also a good core of red fruit and the stable structure to age. A most impressive middleweight. 2017-2030+. **92.**

2016 Fleurie- Julien Sunier

Julien Sunier’s Fleurie is raised in a combination of seventy percent used Burgundy barrels and thirty percent in tank, after fermentation with indigenous yeasts. The wine hails from the two *lieux à dits* of la Tonne and Charbonnières. The 2016 version is outstanding, offering up a bright, red fruity nose of cherries, blood orange, lovely soil tones, fresh thyme, a touch of gamebird and a lovely mix of herbs and spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine

is medium-full, vibrant and tangy, with fine transparency, just a bit of backend tannin and a long, nascently complex and low fat finish. Fine juice that will unwind nicely with a bit of bottle age, but is eminently drinkable right out of the blocks. 2017-2030. **91+**.



2015 Fleurie “Sex Appeal”- Julie Balagny

The 2015 Fleurie from Julie Balagny is pretty ripe by her standards, coming in at a full 13.5 percent alcohol, though, in the context of the vintage, this is still fairly low octane juice! The wine offers up a fine aromatic constellation of black cherries, blueberries, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, a bit of *pigeon*, coffee grounds and just a whisper of volatile acidity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and beautifully soil-driven for a 2015 Fleurie, with just a hint of natural wine “wildness”, but also plenty of complexity and breed. The finish is long, tangy and loaded with personality. Take a walk on the wild side... 2017-2025+. **92.**

2015 Fleurie “Roche Guillon”- Domaine de Fa (Antoine et Maxime Graillet)

The 2015 Fleurie “Roche Guillon” from the Graillet brothers comes in listed at thirteen percent octane on the label, but tastes riper than this to my palate. The bouquet shows a bit of *sur maturité* in its mélange of baked red and black cherries, grilled meats, bonfire, lovely spice tones, incipient notes of *sous bois* and a topnote of sandalwood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly tannic, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and chewy finish. This needs some cellaring to blossom, but will be quite tasty at its peak. 2020-2040. **91.**

2015 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The 2015 Château de Fleurie is a ripe example of this bottling, coming in at 13.5 percent octane, but the wine is nicely balanced and likely to be quite long-lived for Fleurie. The bouquet offers up a sappy blend of black cherries, blueberries, violets, dark soil tones, chocolate and a nice touch of roasted meats. On the palate the wine is deep, full and quite broad-shouldered for Fleurie, with a rock solid core, firm, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is a Fleurie that is structured like a young Morgon and really deserves a bit of bottle age to allow the wine to soften up. A classic and quite successful 2015. 2020-2040+. **90+.**

2015 Fleurie “Bel Air”- Domaine Lafarge-Vial

All of the Lafarge family’s Beaujolais bottlings were raised for fourteen months in eight to ten year-old Burgundy casks in the 2015 vintage, prior to bottling. The 2015 Bel Air is nicely built for the long haul, offering up a deep, black fruity and still quite primary bouquet of black cherries, black plums, granite, gamebird, woodsmoke and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with tangy acids, fine focus and grip and a bit of chewy, well-integrated tannins perking up the finish and auguring very well for a long, fruitful life in bottle. I would give this at least a year or two in the cellar to allow it to come out a bit more from behind its chassis of tannin. Fine juice in the making. 2018-2040. **93+.**

2015 Fleurie “Clos Vernay”- Domaine Lafarge-Vial

The 2015 Clos Vernay from Chantal and Frédéric Lafarge is quite a bit more red fruity in personality than the Bel Air, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of cherries, raspberries, *pigeon*, stony soil tones, a nice dollop of spices and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very much defined at the present time by its granitic soil tones, with ripe, chewy tannins and a long, vibrant finish. The Lafarges used fifteen percent whole clusters for the Clos Vernay this year and raised the wine entirely in older *demi-muids* that they bought from Aubert de Villaine. Lovely juice in the making, but this will need some time to blossom. 2020-2040+. **94.**

2015 Fleurie “Joie du Palais” - Domaine Lafarge-Vial

This is the first Lafarge vintage of Joie du Palais, which is a *lieu à dit* near La Madone in the upper elevations of Fleurie. It is planted to sixty year-old vines and the debut vintage included twenty-five percent whole clusters. The bouquet offers up plenty of black fruit and soil signature in its constellation of black cherries, currant, chocolate, woodsmoke and a complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very sappy at the core, with fine transparency, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and vibrant finish. A lovely bottle in the making. 2019-2040+. **94.**

2015 Fleurie “les Chênes”- Lucien Lardy

Lucien Lardy’s seventy-plus year-old vines in les Chênes have done very well in the torrid summer of 2015, and couples with Monsieur Lardy’s practice of fermentation with indigenous yeasts and *elevage* in older barrels, the wine has turned out very well indeed. The bouquet is deep and pure, offering up scents of black cherries, gamebird, fresh herbs, a touch of youthful stemminess, a fine base of soil and an exotic touch of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full, complex and already velvety on the attack, with a rock solid core, some backend tannin and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This has the deeper-pitched profile of the vintage, which pokes out a bit on the backend, but it remains fairly light on its feet and is really a successful example of the vintage. 2017-2030. **90.**

2015 Fleurie- Domaine des Marrans

The 2015 Fleurie from Domaine des Marrans is produced from forty-five year-old vines and has turned out beautifully in this vintage. The bouquet offers up a pure and sappy nose of red and black cherries, a touch of chocolate, violets, hints of thyme, dark soil tones and a touch of incipient gamebird in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and a bit deeper-pitched than the nose suggests, with a rock solid core, a fair bit of 2015's ripe tannins on the backend and a long, primary and very nicely-balanced finish. This is still a young bottle of Fleurie and could do with some time in the cellar to blossom. It will be very good once it has truly blossomed. 2019-2035. **90+**.

2015 Fleurie- Domaine Terres d'Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2015 Fleurie from Domaine Terres d'Orées is another very pure and nicely sappy example of the vintage from Monsieur Brun. The deep and still quite primary bouquet delivers a lovely blend of red and black cherries, chocolate, dark soil tones, hints of the gamebird to come and a nice touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite structured for a young Fleurie, with a sappy core, lovely soil signature, firm, ripe tannins and a long, nascently complex and promising finish. This is one of those very high quality 2015s that is going to demand some bottle age to properly blossom. 2020-2040+. **92**.

2015 Fleurie "Grillé Midi"- Domaine Terres d'Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2015 Fleurie "Grillé Midi" from Jean-Paul Brun is quite black fruity on the nose and nicely roasted in profile, but also precise, sappy and vibrant in its aromatic profile, as it offers up scents of black cherries, a bit of smoked meats, dark chocolate, fresh thyme, lovely soil tones, violets and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit tannic, with a superb core, fine focus and grip, good balance and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is listed at 12.5 percent octane and I would not be surprised if this is fairly close, as this does not seem like a particularly ripe and muscle-bound 2015, but rather a very nicely structured wine for the long haul. Fine juice. 2019-2030+. **91+**.

2011 Fleurie "la Madone"- Domaine de Prion

The 2011 Fleurie "la Madone" from Domaine de Prion has blossomed beautifully at age five is now really coming into its sweet spot of its evolution in bottle. The bouquet is deep, bright and nicely meaty in personality, offering up scents of black cherries, bonfire, roasted *pigeon*, chocolate, dark soil tones and a lovely topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, still a touch of 2011's tannins perking up on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. Really good juice. 2017-2025. **92**.

2010 Fleurie- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 2010 Fleurie from Joseph Drouhin continues to get better and better each time I revisit it, and I cannot believe that the wine is still available in the market here in New York more than five years after I first tasted it! Like all of the Drouhin Cru Beaujolais bottlings, the Fleurie is made for the long haul and is now into its peak of drinkability, offering up a superbly complex bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, a touch of chicory, violets, gamebird, beautiful spice tones, woodsmoke and a touch of bitter chocolate. On the palate the wine is pure, full and *à point*, with a lovely core, superb soil signature, melted tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This has been a lovely wine since its release and it continues to cruise along with style and vigor. 2017-2025. **91**.

Chiroubles

2016 Chiroubles “Chatenay”- Daniel Bouland

The 2016 Chiroubles from Daniel Bouland is an excellent example of this top notch vintage, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of black cherries, roasted squab (with which it might pair very nicely indeed!), a fine base of soil, bonfires, dark berries, fresh thyme and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is bright, full and bouncy, with a rock solid core, impressive complexity, excellent soil inflection, a surprising bit of backend tannin and a long, focused and tangy finish. There is still a touch of youthful, backend pepperiness here that will dissipate as the wine blossoms, but it is already quite tasty and very easy to drink. It is very nicely structured for Chiroubles and should age seamlessly for at least another dozen years. 2017-2030+. **91+**.

2015 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes”- Damien Coquelet

The 2015 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes” bottling from Damien Coquelet celebrated their ninety-second birthday in 2015, making this truly an old vine cuvée! This is a beautifully low octane version of this warm vintage, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up vivacious purity is its constellation of cherries, blood orange, spiced meats, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of cloves. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and very transparent in personality, with fine intensity of flavor, superb balance and a long, complex and very elegant finish. This is extraordinarily pure, soil-driven and light on its feet for a 2015! 2017-2030. **92**.

2015 Chiroubles “les Gatilles”- Château de Javernand

The 2015 Chiroubles “les Gatilles” from Château de Javernand is a very good example of this buxom vintage, with plenty of black fruit, good soil signature and a broad-shouldered structural chassis that should carry it well into the future. The excellent bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and plenty of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite sappy at the core, with ripe, fairly firm tannins (particularly for Chiroubles!), fine focus and grip and a very long, well-balanced and cool finish. There is no signs of *sur maturité* here, but the wine is quite structured for young Chiroubles and could do with a few years in the cellar to blossom. This is a fine bottle of Chiroubles in the making, which, in structural terms, really wants to be a Morgon! 2020-2040. **91**.

2015 Chiroubles- Domaine Lafarge-Vial

The Lafarge family began harvesting in Beaujolais on August 27th and brought in wines with quite low octane for the vintage, with their Chiroubles tipping the scales at 13.2 percent. Frédéric Lafarge commented that they sought to be extremely gentle with the fermentations in 2015 to retain elegance in the wines. Their 2015 Chiroubles is lovely, offering up a bright and quite black fruity bouquet of black cherries, a touch of cassis, gamebird, dark soil tones and a note of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, round and vibrant, with a lovely sappiness in the mid-palate, bright acids and fine length and grip on the gently tannic finish. Lovely juice. 2017-2035. **92+**.

2015 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine des Marrans

The 2015 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine des Marrans is produced from fifty year-old vines. The wine offers up a deep and classy nose of red and black cherries, roasted gamebird, fine soil tones, exotic touches of turmeric and chervil and dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a good signature of soil, ripe, chewy tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. This is a tad low in acid, as is

typical with many 2015s, but it is pure, complex and quite impressively balanced. 2017-2035+. **92.**

2014 Chiroubles- Georges Descombes

Georges Descombes' 2014 Chiroubles is simply outstanding on the nose, jumping from the glass in a deep and sappy blend of red and black cherries, roasted *pigeon*, dark soil tones, lovely spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature, just a wisp of backend tannin and a long, complex and focused finish. Like his Régnié, there is a bit of volatile acidity in evidence on the backend and a bit of time in decanter benefits the wine decidedly. 2017-2025. **91.**

Régnié

2016 Régnié “Vieilles Vignes” Haut Ronze- Jean-Michel Dupré

The 2016 Régnié “Vieilles Vignes” from Jean-Michel Dupré is an excellent wine, showing off all the sappiness of the vintage and a great base of soil. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex mélange of black cherries, pomegranate, espresso, incipient gamebird and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full and very pure on the attack, with a superb core of fruit, tangy acids, excellent focus and grip, impressive transparency and a long, suavely tannic, vibrant and beautifully-balanced finish. This is really an excellent bottle of young Régnié! 2017-2035+. **92.**

2016 Régnié- Antoine Sunier

The 2016 Régnié from Antoine Sunier is a refined and classic example of the vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a crunchy blend of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a bit of spice and a gentle base of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a fine core, very good soil signature, modest tannins and a long, tangy finish. This has just beautiful balance and will be a stylish middleweight for the next dozen years! 2017-2030. **90.**

2016 Régnié- Julien Sunier

The 2016 Régnié from Julien Sunier (Antoine's older brother) is also an excellent bottle, with a bit more sappiness than Antoine's version, but with the same impeccable balance and classic soil signature. The nose is complex and very expressive, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet cranberries, fresh thyme, a touch of lavender, dark soil tones and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full, complex and succulent at the core, with excellent transparency, a touch of backend tannin, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and complex finish. 2017-2030+. **92.**

2015 Régnié- Georges Descombes

The 2015 Régnié from Georges Descombes is a much bigger and riper version than his lovely and classically-styled 2014, with plenty of Morgon-like personality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a sappy nose of black cherries, a touch of plum, hung game, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh thyme, bonfire and a bit of dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied (particularly for Régnié) and well-balanced, with a bit of backend tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and very tasty finish. This is by no means an over the top 2015 Beaujolais and the wine has the depth and stuffing to age very nicely, while still be quite tasty right now. A very impressive 2015 Régnié. 2017-2035+. **91.**

2014 Régnié- Georges Descombes

The 2014 Régnié from Georges Descombes is a bright and vibrant example, with just a touch of volatile acidity lifting up the aromatics nicely in the bouquet of black cherries, gamebird, fine soil tones, balsam bough and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and focused, with a good core, fine soil signature, modest tannins and a touch of VA on the long backend than the shows on the nose. Decant this wine, as the VA moderates briskly and the wine really opens up and starts to drink nicely. 2017-2025. **90.**

2013 Régnié “Sans Soufre Ajouté”- Château de la Pierre

The 2013 Régnié “Sans Soufre Ajouté” from Château de la Pierre is a bit more forward in style than one might expect if the wine had been raised with a customary level of SO₂, but it is drinking very nicely today and will be a tasty bottle for at least another few years, but it seems pretty clear that this wine’s potential longevity is shorter from its lower sulfur level. The bouquet is mature and sappy, offering up scents of black cherries, a touch of balsam bough, dark soil tones, bonfire and a touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a good core, fairly moderate acidity, just a bit of chewy tannin on the backend and good length and grip on the complex finish. There is plenty of stuffing here, with Régnié’s proximity to Morgon evident stylistically, but it seems likely to only have a couple of years more of life before oxidation starts to play a role here. 2017-2019. **89.**



Morgon

2016 Morgon “Bellevue” Schiste- Daniel Bouland

The 2016 bottling of Morgon from the Bellevue vineyard is another outstanding wine from Monsieur Bouland. Bellevue shares a very similar soil base with the Côte du Py, which gives the wine a sense of refined minerality on both the nose and palate. The bouquet of the 2016 is excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, pomegranate, lovely minerality, bitter chocolate, incipient notes of *pigeon*, lovely spice tones, thyme, nutskin and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a superb core, fine mineral drive, more structural reserve than the expressive nose suggests and outstanding length and grip on the tangy finish. Fine juice. 2018-2045+. **92+**.

2016 Morgon “Corcelette” Vieilles Vignes- Daniel Bouland

The 2016 Corcelette “Vieilles Vignes” from Daniel Bouland is a beautiful young wine, but it does not have quite the same sappy exuberance found in the Delys bottling this year, so I am guessing that there was a bit of hail damage in Corcelette at some point in the growing season. The bouquet is a bit more reserved than the Delys, but offers up impressive complexity in its mix of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a bit of gamebird, fresh thyme and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and very pure on the attack, with a good core, a fair bit of chewy tannin, bright acids and very good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This will be an excellent wine with some cellaring, but it needs to unwind a bit structurally before it will be ready for primetime drinking. 2019-2045+. **92**.

2016 Morgon “Delys”- Daniel Bouland

The 2016 Delys from Daniel Bouland is a simply stunning young bottle of Morgon, with the purity and depth of a truly great wine. The superb nose soars from the glass in a vibrant constellation of cherries, sweet cranberries, stony soil tones, a nice touch of meatiness, woodsmoke, gentle notes of cedar and a potpourri of exotic spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and tangy, with great sappiness in the mid-palate, excellent focus and grip and impressive backend mineral drive on the long, moderately tannic and vibrant finish. This is great, great young Morgon! 2020-2060. **95**.

2016 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Damien Coquelet

The 2016 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Damien Coquelet is another low octane example of the vintage, coming in at a slightly anorexic 11.5 percent alcohol. The complex nose here is riper than in his 2016 Beaujolais-Villages, offering up scents of cherries, quince, bitter chocolate, gamebird, a good base of soil, fresh thyme and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nicely balanced, with a moderate core, equally moderate tannins and pretty good length and grip on the focused and bouncy finish. I like this wine well enough, but I get the feeling that the technique is trumping the *terroir* a bit here, as this is, after all, Côte du Py in a superb vintage, and the wine is a touch malnourished and does not really have the depth or dimension one hopes for from top producers with vines in this vineyard. How about we meet in the stylistic middle and drink some truly great wine together in the future? 2017-2030. **89**.

2016 Morgon “la Roche Pilée”- Michel Guignier

The *lieu à dit* of “la Roche Pilée” lies just below the Côte du Py on the hill, with the bottling from Michel Guignier hailing from sixty-plus year-old vines, which are farmed organically. Monsieur Guignier barrel-ferments and ages this wine in old casks. The 2016 is the first labeled as hailing from la Roche Pilée, as Monsieur Guignier used to sell this bottling under the “Bio-Vitis” label in the past, though it was always from this single vineyard. The 2016 is a lovely wine, as most of the hail in Morgon missed this hillside in the village, offering up a deep

and still quite youthful bouquet of black cherries, cassis, dark soil tones, gentle smokiness, espresso and gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, moderate, ripe tannins, fine focus and grip and a very long, still quite primary finish. This will be both sappy and soil-driven once it has blossomed, but it is a bit buttoned up behind its structure today and deserves a bit of time in the cellar. 2020-2045. **92.**

2016 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Michel Guignier

Michel Guignier’s old vine bottling of Morgon is gorgeous in 2016. This is a blend of parcels in three prime vineyards in Morgon, including Côte du Py, la Roche Pilée and les Grands Cras (on the Brouilly border in the southern end of the commune), all of which were spared the hail damage that affected vineyards in the northern half of Morgon in the summer of 2016. The wine offers up a sappy and very vibrant nose of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, a nice touch of raw cocoa, gentle smokiness, hints of thyme and incipient notes of roasted *pigeon*. On the palate the wine is pure, full and classically proportioned, with an excellent core of fruit, superb transparency, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and youthful finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to really blossom, but it is so nicely balanced out of the blocks that it is already quite easy to drink. 2019-2045. **93.**

2016 Morgon- Antoine Sunier

Antoine Sunier’s Morgon is produced from a parcel of sixty year-old vines in the *lieu à dit* of Croix de Chèvre, with the wine fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in eighty percent old Burgundy casks. The 2016 version is a beautiful and utterly classic young bottle of Morgon, offering up a deep and pure bouquet of black cherries, lovely, granitic soil, woodsmoke, gamebird, fresh thyme and a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and focused, with a lovely core, excellent transparency, fine-grained tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. This is really a very elegant and soil-driven iteration of Morgon. 2017-2040. **92+.**

2016 Morgon- Julien Sunier

The Morgon from Julien Sunier hails from two different parcels, both of which are fifty-plus years of age. Like all of his wines, the Morgon is fermented in cement and raised in older Burgundy casks that Julien buys from his old mentor, Christophe Roumier in Chambolle. The 2016 Morgon is beautifully expressive already on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a fine blend of cranberries, red plums, lovely soil tones, violets, bonfires and a touch of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and still young, with fine intensity of flavor, moderate tannins, good acids and a long, tangy and youthful finish. This is a touch leaner in 2016 than in past vintages, which I assume is a reflection of some hail impact in one or both of the parcels (one of these lies on the Morgon-Régnié border and most certainly was hit), but the wine is quite clean and just a touch less plush at the core than is customary. Give it a couple of years to blossom. 2019-2040. **91.**

2016 Morgon- Domaine Terres d'Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun has made an absolutely beautiful and very transparent Morgon in the 2016 vintage. The nose jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, fresh thyme, lovely granitic minerality, vinesmoke and incipient notes of gamebird. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tangy and very long, with excellent focus and grip, moderate, ripe tannins and lovely balance on the very long, nascently complex finish. This is approachable out of the blocks, but this is a proper Morgon and is really built for some cellaring, so I would try to keep my hands off of it for the next five years and really let it start to build layers of complexity

and open up a bit more on the palate. It will be very long-lived and probably superior to the 2015 over the long haul. 2022-2060. **93+**.

2015 Morgon “Côte du Py” Vieilles Vignes- Damien Coquelet

Damien Coquelet's 2015 Côte du Py Vieilles Vignes is a beautiful example of the year, with the inner structural tension of all of Monsieur Coquelet's wines in this vintage. The bouquet shows a touch of volatile acidity when first poured, but with a bit of air, this blows off and the wine offers up a vibrant constellation of cherries, blood orange, spiced meats, a fine base of soil tones, bonfire and a nice dollop of Asian spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent in personality, with a fine core, ripe, firm tannins, really good acids for the vintage and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is only 12.5 percent alcohol, which is almost unheard of in the 2015 vintage, and the wine delivers great intensity of flavor and minerality as a result. Approachable now, this wine will be even better with a few years of bottle age to allow the tannins to soften up a bit more and the secondary layers of complexity to emerge. 2019-2040. **92+**.

2015 Morgon- Georges Descombes

Georges Descombes 2015 Morgon is an outstanding example of the vintage, with all of the bottomless and sappy fruit one could ask for, but also with good soil signature and a lovely sense of overall balance. The bouquet is flashy and pure, offering up scents of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, gamebird, espresso, a bit of balsam bough and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full and sappy at the core, with truly exceptional backend mineral drive (particularly for 2015!), with ripe, seamless tannins, tangy acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long and nascently complex finish. This is simply stellar! 2017-2040+. **93+**.

2015 Morgon- Kevin Descombes

Kevin Descombes' 2015 Morgon is another surprisingly low octane example of the vintage, tipping the scales at a very civilized 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up very good complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, gamebird, dark soil tones, a bit of chicory, woodsmoke, cloves and a gently balsamic topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and tangy, with a fair bit of tannin, good focus and grip, nascent complexity and a long, youthful and gently volatile finish. I really like this wine, which is nicely lean and transparent for a 2015 Morgon, and it should age very nicely over the medium to long haul, but it is certainly not a classic rendition of Morgon from the hot summer of 2015. 2018-2035+. **92**.

2015 Morgon “la Voûte Saint-Vincent”- Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2015 Morgon “la Voûte Saint-Vincent” from Louis-Claude Desvignes is a ripe and very nicely sappy example of the vintage, wafting from the glass in a very deep blend of black cherries, black plums, dark chocolate, gentle balsamic tones, dark soil tones and a meaty topnote. On the palate the wine is broad-shouldered, powerful and probably quite a bit higher in octane than its stated 13.5 percent, with plenty of depth at the core, firm, chewy tannins and a long, youthful finish that closes with a note of coffee grounds. This is borderline overripe to my palate, and lacks a bit of freshness and punch as a result, but it is deep, sappy and very long on the finish, so it may come around down the road. 2020-2040+. **87-89+?**

2015 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2015 Côte du Py from Louis-Claude Desvignes is plenty ripe, in the style of the vintage, but has excellent structure and seems destined for a long and graceful life in the bottle. The bouquet shows a bit of overripeness in its complex mélange of sappy black cherries, plums,

chocolate, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke and a nice balsamic touch in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, really good balance for the vintage and a long, ripely tannic and focused finish. This seems likely to hold off the hint of *sur maturité* that shows on the nose at its present level, which augurs very nicely for its long-term development. It is still a ripe 2015, but it also stands out for its beautiful balance and management of the summer's heat. 2020-2050. **91+**.

2015 Morgon “les Javernières”- Louis-Claude Desvignes

The Desvignes family's 2015 Javernières is listed at the same octane (fourteen percent) as the Côte du Py, but seems just a touch riper to my palate. The bouquet is sappy and shows a fair bit of *sur maturité* in its aromatic mélange of black cherries, prunes, coffee grounds, hung game and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows a nice spine of granitic minerality that is not evident on the nose, with a rock solid core, chewy tannins and quite a bit of overt overripeness on the long and complex finish. The ripeness here makes the wine a bit heavy-handed on the backend and I have some doubts that this characteristic will mitigate with the passage of time. 2020-2040+. **86-88+?**

2015 Morgon “la Griottier”- Domaine Dupré

The 2015 Morgon “la Griottier” from Jean-Michel Dupré is a nicely transparent example of the vintage, with plenty of fruit, but a mineral drive that is quite rare in this ripe year. The bouquet offers up a sappy and impressively precise blend of red and black cherries, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, a bit of *pigeon* and a topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is pure, full and soil-driven in personality, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, gently chewy tannins and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to blossom, but it is a very strong 2015 Morgon, as it is quite classically balanced and should age long and gracefully. 2020-2050. **92.**

2015 Morgon “Côte du Py” Vieilles Vignes- Laurent Gauthier

The 2015 old vine bottling of Morgon “Côte du Py” from Laurent Gauthier is an excellent example of the vintage, with the ripeness of this year quite nicely managed and the wine offering excellent potential for the long haul. The very pure and sappy bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, woodsmoke, chicory, dark soil tones, a bit of *pigeon* and a lovely topnote of thyme. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripely tannic, with a sappy core, excellent soil signature, fine focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex finish. This is excellent and delivers all of the potential of the 2015 vintage, without any of its pitfalls! 2020-2060. **93.**

2015 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2015 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Château Grange Cochard is a ripe example of the vintage, coming in listed at fourteen percent octane, but probably slightly exceeding this level. The nose is deep, sappy and exuberant, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of balsam bough, chocolate, a touch of mustard seed, lovely soil tones and a bit of apricot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe, firm tannins, good focus and grip and a very long, primary and cool finish. Like many of the top 2015s, this is structured and will need some time in the cellar to come around, but it manages its ripeness beautifully and will be an excellent wine when it is ready to drink. 2021-2045. **91+**.

2015 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2015 Côte du Py from Château Grange Cochard is also a big, bold and ripe example of the vintage, offering up a sappy bouquet of black cherries, chocolate, cassis, dark soil tones, a

touch of squab and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a very fine structural chassis, moderate tannins, fine focus and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. There is more backend soil signature here than in the Vieilles Vignes and this should make fine old bones. A very impressive 2015! 2017-2050. **93.**

2015 Morgon- Hospices de Belleville (Maison Joseph Drouhin)

I tasted all three 2015 Hospices de Belleville bottlings from Maison Drouhin while I was visiting in Beaune in November of 2016, but the Morgon was the only one that was really ready for tasting and I did not take notes on the other two wines in their relatively unfinished states. The 2015 Morgon is excellent and offers up a deep and stylish bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, lovely nuttiness, gamebird and a fine base of granitic soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and quite suave on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, vibrant and very suave finish. This is refreshingly classical in profile (rather than some of the more buxom and higher octane examples of Morgon that can be found in the 2015 vintage) and will age very well indeed. Fine juice. 2017-2040. **92.**

2015 Morgon- Château des Jacques

According to the back label, the 2015 Morgon from Château des Jacques is even a touch riper than the Moulin-à-Vent, as this is listed at 14.5 percent octane. This wine too shows a distinct note of *sur maturité* in the nascently complex nose of black cherries, a touch of fig, woodsmoke, gamebird, dark soil tones and a bit of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, broad-shouldered and chewy, with a good core, firm, well-integrated tannins and a bit of coffee grounds flavors poking out on the long finish from a touch of overripeness. This needs time to blossom, but probably will always stay a bit overripe in profile to rank up there with the top vintages of this bottling from Château des Jacques. 2021-2045. **87+?**

2015 Morgon “Corcelette”- Domaine des Marrans

The 2015 Morgon “Corcelette” from Domaine des Marrans is a typically ripe and powerful wine from this vintage, with fairly high octane and plenty of muscle and depth. The bouquet shows a bit of *sur maturité* in its blend of backed black cherries, a bit of fig, coffee grounds, bonfire, roasted venison and a bit of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full, dense and chewy, with a rock solid core, plenty of tannin and just a whisper of heat poking out on the long backend. This is nicely managed for its octane, which is listed at fourteen percent, but is probably a tad higher, and should blossom nicely with a few years in the cellar. However, at this level of ripeness, it will probably not be a particularly long-lived example of Morgon. 2020-2030+? **88.**

2015 Morgon- Domaine Terres d'Orées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Monsieur Brun’s 2015 Morgon is a very interesting example of the vintage, as the label lists this wine at 12.5 percent octane, and on the palate, this seems quite accurate! I would guess there was a period where the vines shut down here due to hydric stress, which kept the alcohol level down, but the wine still shows lovely ripe fruit on the nose. The bouquet is a fine mix of sappy red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of mocha, gamebird, vinesmoke and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and moderately tannic, with tangy acids, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. I suspect this is going to age very well, as it is balanced to precision on the palate, but the “solar signature” of the vintage is evident in certain aspects of the nose, so it is going to be very interesting to see in what direction the wine evolves over the long haul. I, for one, would be happy to bet on this wine turning out to be excellent with extended bottle age, but this is never going to be a paradigm of the vintage. 2020-2045. **92+.**

2014 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château Grange Cochard

The 2014 Côte du Py bottling from Château Grange Cochard is utterly classical in profile, delivering a fine, but youthful nose of black cherries, cranberries, woodsmoke, a good base of dark soil, fresh herb tones, a touch of cedar and incipient notes of gamebird. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and refined, with lovely transparency, good intensity of flavor, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the young, tightly-knit and promising finish. This is every bit as youthful and serious as the more powerful 2015, but it is cut from a far different cloth stylistically. 2019-2050. **92.**

2014 Morgon “les Charmes”- Château Grange Cochard

The les Charmes bottling of Morgon from Château Grange Cochard hails from the Wilding family’s oldest vines, which are one hundred years of age. This wine is raised in Burgundy casks, rather than *foudres* and the 2014 version is excellent, offering up a very pure and vibrant bouquet of pomegranate, black cherries, complex granitic minerality, violets and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely reserved in personality, with a sappy core of old vine fruit, superb transparency, fine-grained tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. This is utterly classic in profile and exceptional in quality. 2020-2065. **94+.**

2014 Morgon- Georges Descombes

Georges Descombes’ 2014 Morgon is a classic and very promising bottle in the making. The bouquet is pure, nascently complex and lovely, delivering a fine mix of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh thyme, granitic minerality, a hint of cedar and a nice peak at the gamebird to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full and beautifully transparent, with ripe, fairly firm tannins, bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and utterly suave finish. This is going to be a terrific bottle of Morgon down the road, and though it is very easy to drink today, it would make sense to tuck it away in a corner of the cellar for at least a couple of years and let the wine fully blossom. High class juice. 2020-2045+. **93.**

2014 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes”- Kevin Descombes

The 2014 Morgon “Vieilles Vignes” from Kevin Descombes is a beautiful young wine, with a great sense of sappiness on both the nose and palate, tied to serious granitic undertow. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gamebird, lovely soil signature, bonfire, espresso and balsam bough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a good core, fine-grained tannins and impressive mineral drive on the long, nascently complex and still fairly primary finish. This is very well balanced and easy to drink today, but it is still a puppy and one is only getting an understated glimpse of its inherent complexity when drinking it now. I would tuck it away for at least a few years and really let the fireworks unfold! 2019-2045+. **92+.**

2013 Morgon- Château des Jacques

The 2013 Morgon from Château des Jacques is starting to really drink beautifully (though it will be even better down the road), offering up excellent depth in the complex nose of sweet dark berries, black cherries, roasted *pigeon*, dark chocolate, superb soil tones, a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and still a tad youthful structurally, with a rock solid core, excellent transparency down to its stony soil, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and nascently complex finish. There is still a touch of youthful stemminess showing

through the mid-palate here, but the wine is blossoming very nicely and is only a year or two away from primetime drinking. 2018-2040. **92+**.

2011 Morgon- Maison Joseph Drouhin

It has been more than two years since I last tasted this outstanding young Morgon from Maison Drouhin, and the intervening time has allowed the wine to start to blossom nicely and fulfill its early promise. Today, the wine offers up lovely aromatic complexity in its vibrant mélange of black cherries, cassis, dark soil tones, espresso, a bit of fresh thyme and an exotic topnote of sarsaparilla. On the palate the wine is pure, full and sappy at the core, with ripe, moderate tannins, fine focus and grip, excellent complexity and a very long, still blossoming and perfectly balanced finish. This is just starting to drink well and will last for several decades! Great juice. 2017-2050. **94**.

2006 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château des Jacques

The 2006 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Château des Jacques is evolving beautifully and at age eleven, it is nicely in its apogee of peak drinkability. The black fruity nose is deep and complex, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, balsam bough, dark soil tones, hung game, a touch of dried eucalyptus and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and showing a bit of dark chocolate, with a good core, an overt sense of smokiness, fine soil signature, melted tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish that still closes with excellent grip. Good juice. 2017-2030+. **91**.

2005 Morgon “les Javernières” Vieilles Vignes- Louis-Claude Desvignes

I still have a few bottles of this wine in my small cellar in France and had a chance to open a bottle during my trip in October. This is the bottling from the older section of the vineyard, though it is not labeled as Vieilles Vignes. I last drank a bottle of this two years ago and it was surprisingly shut down and still quite tannic (at age ten, no less, just in case anyone doubted the potential for Morgon to age long-term in a powerful vintage like 2005!), but a few more years in the bottle has allowed the wine to start to blossom beautifully. The exuberant fruit of youth has now evolved into a more mellowed, refined expression, but there is a ton of complexity here once the wine has had some time in decanter and it is really quite superb. Once wide open, the bouquet delivers a complex blend of baked red and black cherries, a touch of orange zest, dark soil tones, beautiful spice elements (including notes of curry and cardamom), bonfires, roasted gamebird and the first vestiges of forest floor. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully soil-driven, with fine focus and grip, a rock solid core, melting tannins and lovely length on the very well-balanced finish. This was a bit inexpressive when first opened, but after thirty minutes of extended aeration, it started to really sing! 2017-2040. **94**.



Harvest time in the non-hailed on section of Morgon, autumn of 2016.

Brouilly

2016 Brouilly “Pierreux”- Pierre-Marie Chermette

The 2016 Brouilly “Pierreux” from Pierre-Marie Chermette is absolutely classic in profile and outstanding in quality. The very pure and very classy nose jumps from the glass in a blend of sappy cherries, sweet cranberries, gamebird, soil tones, vinesmoke, a touch of peonies and a discreet mix of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite young, with a fine core, a nice sense of backend reserve, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the tangy finish. There is a sense of sappiness buried here at the core, but the wine is so nicely structured that it is only going to come to the fore with a bit of cellaring. This is good now, but will be great with a few years of bottle age, so exercise a bit of patience! 2019-2040+. **93+**.

2016 Brouilly “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine de la Grand Cour (Jean-Louis Dutraive)

The 2016 Brouilly “Cuvée Vieilles Vignes” from Jean-Louis Dutraive is produced from an old vineyard with the minimum age of the vines fifty years of age, with a great many vines over one hundred years old! The 2016 version is excellent, wafting from the glass in a red fruity and quite complex blend of cherries, a touch of blood orange, cranberries, vinesmoke, gamebird, incipient hints of nuttiness and a nice base of soil that will go autumnal in profile fairly quickly. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and quite transparent, with a good solid core, tangy acids, just a touch of backend tannin and fine balance on the long and complex finish. This is bouncy and fairly tightly-wound today, with fine intensity of flavor and quite a long finish. It will get more generous in the mid-palate as the structure has a chance to relax a bit with further bottle age. A lovely middleweight. 2017-2030. **91+**.

2015 Brouilly- Georges Descombes

The 2015 Brouilly from Georges Descombes is a very nicely red fruity example of the vintage, offering up the depth and muscle of this warm growing season, but also plenty of vibrant red fruit tones on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a vibrant and gently wild mélange of red and black cherries, lovely spice tones, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a nice touch of spit-roasted gamebird in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and tangy, with a superb core, a fair bit of backend tannin (particularly for Brouilly) and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is already very easy to drink, but it is structured like a young Morgon and deserves a bit of time in the cellar to allow its tannins to soften up a bit more. A superb result! 2018-2035. **92+**.

2015 Brouilly “Combiaty” Vieilles Vignes- Laurent Martray

The 2015 version of Monsieur Martray’s old vine bottling of Brouilly is a ripe and quite black fruity example of the vintage (particularly for Brouilly). The nose is a deep-pitched blend of plums, black cherries, chocolate, a nice touch of fresh thyme, damp soil and a bit of roasted venison. On the palate the wine is full, plush on the attack and rock solid at the core, with a bit of firm backend tannin, good focus and balance and a long, broad-shouldered finish. A good 2015, but this may be a bit heavy-handed stylistically for some fanciers of Brouilly. 2017-2030. **88**.

2015 Brouilly “Pollen”- Robert Perroud

This bottling of Brouilly from Robert Perroud is made from seventy-six year old-vines and fermented in cement tanks and raised in used Burgundy barrels. The 2015 version is pretty ripe, coming in at 13.5 percent, but offers up lovely purity in the bouquet of sappy black cherries, blueberries, dark soil tones, a bit of chocolate and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is precise, full-bodied and plenty ripe, with pretty good soil signature for the vintage, modest acids, just a touch of backend tannin and a long, gently warm finish. This is very much 2015 in personality, but steers clear of any roasted tones and is really quite a good drink for the near-term. It certainly has broader shoulders and more stuffing than is customary with Brouilly! 2017-2025. **89**.

2014 Brouilly “Cuvée Romain”- Robert Perroud

The Cuvée Romain bottling of Brouilly from Monsieur Perroud hails from organically-farmed vines in the *lieu à dit* of En Saburin. The wine is aged in used Burgundy barrels and the 2014 version is excellent, offering up a fine bouquet of cherries, sweet cranberries, a fine base of soil, woodsmoke and a deft touch of oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, young and tangy, with a good core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and still a bit of youthful greenness on the backend. The finish is long and nascently complex and this is going to be delightful with a year or two’s worth of bottle age, but it has not yet completely absorbed its oak on the backend and could do with a bit more cellaring. This is quite ambitiously-styled for Brouilly and I really like the size and shape of the 2014- all that is needed is a bit of patience. 2018-2030+. **90**.

2011 Brouilly- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Amazingly, this beautiful bottle of Brouilly is still in the market in New York and I implore subscribers that live here to search this wine out, as it is drinking beautifully and has the structure to continue to age gracefully for at least another fifteen years! The deep and pure bouquet wafts from the glass in a still very vibrant constellation of cherries, plums, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of toffee (from the six years of bottle age) and a classy base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely structured (particularly for the normally

easy-going appellation of Brouilly!), with a rock solid core, modest tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. The backend energy here is almost unheard of for Brouilly! Great juice. 2017-2030. 92+.



Côte de Brouilly

2016 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie”- Daniel Bouland

The 2016 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Mélanie” is yet another absolutely stunning 2016 from Monsieur Bouland. The bouquet is deep and bright, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, plums, lovely minerality, woodsmoke, gamebird and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full and complex, with great depth in the mid-palate, moderate tannins, superb backend mineral drive and a very long, tangy and laser-like focus. Brilliant Côte de Brouilly! 2017-2040. 93+.

2016 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée des Ambassades”- Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes

The 2016 Cuvée des Ambassades from Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes arrived here in New York just as I was putting the finishing touches on this feature, so I was very happy to include it in this article. The wine is beautifully vibrant on the nose, which jumps from the glass in a red fruity blaze of cherries, cranberries, stony minerality, a touch of orange peel, violets, fresh thyme and lovely spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and very transparent, with excellent intensity of flavor, a good chassis of modest tannin, excellent focus and grip and a very long, nascently complex finish. This is very classic in profile,

in contrast to the riper and more muscular 2015 version, and it should age long and gracefully. 2017-2040. **92+**.

2015 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun's 2015 Côte de Brouilly is aromatically ripe, roasted and quite black fruity for this bottling, but still nicely cool in the mouth and I would bet it will age very nicely over at least the medium-term. The bouquet offers up scents of roasted black cherries, balsamic overtones, a bit of hung game, dark soil tones and upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately chewy, with a plush core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and nascently complex finish. This is approachable today, but like many of the superior 2015 Beaujolais Crus, it really could do with a bit of time in the cellar to allow a bit of tannin to soften on the backend. 2019-2040. **90**.

2015 Côte de Brouilly "les Cailloux"- Emmanuel Fellot

The 2015 Côte de Brouilly "les Cailloux" from Emmanuel Fellot is a good, solid example of the vintage, steering clear of overtly overripe aromatics and flavors and offering pretty good balance on the properly structured palate. The bouquet is a youthful and sappy blend of black cherries, espresso, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh thyme and a good base of volcanic soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good focus and grip, a fair bit of firm, ripe tannins on the backend and just a hint of heat on the long and nascently complex finish. This needs some time in the cellar to blossom, but should turn out quite well once it opens up. It is a good 2015, but I am really looking forward to see what Monsieur Fellot can do in the far more classic vintage of 2016! 2019-2030. **88**.

2015 Côte de Brouilly "Cuvée des Ambassades"- Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes

I last tasted the 2015 Cuvée des Ambassades from Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes almost a year ago, and the wine has settled in quite a bit from its early exuberance. This is still a broad-shouldered and sappy vintage for this fine bottling, but the wine retains very good freshness to go with its riper and plusher style. The bouquet is quite ripe, but not showing is roasted personality today in its mix of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebird, dark chocolate, a touch of nuttiness and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit heady for this bottling, with a good core, a fair bit of ripe tannin and very good length and grip on the primary, but promising finish. Like many of the 2015s, this will be better with a bit of bottle age, to allow some of the tannin her to fall away. It is a very good example of the vintage. 2018-2035. **92**.

**THE ABSOLUTELY SUPERB 1974 VINTAGE
THE RED WINES THAT MADE CALIFORNIA FAMOUS**



The beautiful Martha's Vineyard in Oakville, made famous by the Heitz family and the legendary 1974 bottling.

The 1974 vintage in California can be said to be the year where winemaking in the state really came of age and laid the foundation for the region's world-wide reputation for excellence that continues on to this day. This was an era when the early pioneers of high quality wine in California were still very active, with Joe Heitz at the helm of the family winery in St. Helena, André Tchelistcheff in charge at Beaulieu Vineyards, the long-tenured Paul Draper at the peak of his powers at Ridge Vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains, Bob Travers hitting his stride at Mayacamas Vineyards on Mount Veeder, Ric Forman making some of the greatest wines of his long and illustrious career at Sterling Vineyards and Robert Mondavi having firmly established the reputation for his eponymous winery since the inaugural vintage of 1966. It was a heady time in California wine country, as this was now forty years out from the repeal of Prohibition in 1934 and the wine industry in the state had firmly recovered, with the production of fine wines centered around the Napa Valley and Sonoma County as the mid-1970s arrived, with a few outliers such as Ridge Vineyards, Mount Eden Vineyards and Chalone Vineyards proving that great wines could also be made in the Santa Cruz and Gavilan Mountains south of San Francisco

Bay. It would still be another two years before Steven Spurrier's famous 1976 comparison tasting of French and Californian wines in Paris, the so-called "Judgement of Paris", would complete the journey to worldwide recognition of California as a first class wine-producing region, but these were already heady times for many of California's first fine wine pioneers, and many new wineries were already popping up along Route 29 in Napa Valley and throughout the rolling hillsides of Sonoma County.

The top quality wine regions in the state had been on quite a roll leading into the summer of 1974, as truly great vintages had rolled through the vineyards here in 1968, 1970 and 1973, and very good wines had been made as well in strong years such as 1969 and 1971 as well. Only the difficult 1972 vintage had been less than celebrated. Prices were starting to rise a bit for the top bottlings of cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay, though both were still typically well under ten dollars a bottle for the best producers (with the exception of a very few Reserve wines), but it was becoming clear that being a winemaker in Napa or Sonoma could turn out to be a proper way to make a comfortable living. A decade earlier, this would have been a pipedream for folks like Joe Heitz or Lee Stewart up at Souverain Cellars on Howell Mountain, as they had to scramble to find clients for their excellent wines in the early and mid-1960s. But things were changing for the better for winemakers in Napa, Sonoma and the other top wine regions in California by 1974, as more and more clients were knocking on doors on weekends to taste and buy, East Coast wine merchants were starting to pop up with regularity and place orders and more farmland was being planted over to vineyards. Optimism was in the air. Wineries were starting to earn reputations for being particularly gifted with specific wines- Stony Hill Vineyards and Château Montelena were chardonnay specialists, Heitz, Sterling, Ridge and Mayacamas were home to the best cabernets and Joseph Swan and Ridge Vineyards were home to the finest zinfandels the state had ever seen. It was still the day when most wineries made a bit of everything, and often with far more success across the board than many people realized (try an old bottle of Joe Heitz's non-malo chardonnay, for example, and it is easy to see that Joe had a way with this grape as well), but the trend was already taking root that certain wineries would end up being most renowned for certain varietals.

Into this cultural ferment came the long growing season of 1974, which turned out to be the first vintage to really capture the global wine imagination about the potential and the reality of high quality wines in California. The year did not start out particularly auspiciously, as it was a very cool spring and though the summer was plenty sunny, it was not particularly hot. However, flowering took place under ideal conditions and the bud set was excellent, promising a big and abundant crop. The question would be how the backend of the growing season would unfold and could the weather remain fine and ripen this bountiful crop to an optimal point. As the previous year of 1973 had been exceptional already, with these red wines still aging comfortably in casks and the white wines starting to make the rounds and turn heads, it had to be a pretty stress-free summer for top winemakers in California in 1974. Happily, the last summer months were lovely- not too hot, but always sunny and ripeness kept mounting incrementally and excitement started to build a bit about the potential of this vintage as well. September was glorious and warmer than July and August, as the temperatures mounted from the rather cool previous two months and the sugars started to really move up towards ideal brix levels, while the tannins rounded out and ripened up nicely in the red grapes. Most folks started picking in mid-to-

late September and cabernet was still being brought in well into October in 1974, with the grapes in absolutely beautiful condition and plenty of bunches in the hoppers.

The wine world was expanding exponentially at this time in California, with a spate of new vineyards going in and new wineries opening in the early to mid-1970s truly remarkable. John Tilson, writing about the 1974 vintage in The Underground Wine Letter all the way back in 1980, demonstrates how quickly things were blossoming in the California wine world at this time. Writing about the '74 cabernets, John notes that acreage planted to this grape variety in 1968 in Napa and Sonoma was only 1771 acres in the two regions; by 1970 this had already more than doubled to 3616 acres, and by 1974, this total for cabernet sauvignon vines in the two regions was up to 10,298 acres dedicated to just this grape, so one can see that there was a veritable explosion of growth in the fine wine industry in California at this time. Numbers for other major grape varieties would have matched this same growth pattern. One of the things to keep in mind when one speaks of the greatness of the 1974 cabernets in particular, is that many of the new plantings that went into the ground at the start of the decade would have been on their "third leaf" in the summer of 1974 and being used for the first time by winemakers in the region. As I have mentioned in the past, the fruit from young vines in their "third leaf" is often the finest fruit the vineyards will produce for the next decade or more, as the vines have still not really settled in completely to their environment and do not produce the very high yields typical of young vines until the coming years, so that often "third leaf" fruit is of extraordinary quality for younger vines. For example, the legendary 1985 Côte-Rôtie "la Turque" from Marcel Guigal was produced exclusively from "third leaf" fruit. So, some of these newly-planted vineyards would have been able to produce exceptional quality grapes in the most favored growing season of 1974.

With all the new vineyard expansion in California wine country, it necessarily followed that many new wineries were opening their doors around this time as well. Old guard producers like Beaulieu Vineyards, Inglenook and Charles Krug had been around since before Prohibition, and very early pioneers such as Stony Hill, Souverain Cellars, Mayacamas, Schramsberg and Hans Kornell all opened their doors in the 1950s. Joe and Alice Heitz had returned to Napa Valley in 1961 to start their own winery (Joe had worked at BV with André Tchelistcheff in the 1950s, before moving back down south to head the Oenology Department at Fresno State University from 1958 to 1961), and Mount Eden, Ridge and Chalone were already starting to do great things at this time further south. But, it was still a relatively small community of wineries devoted to high quality wines in this era, and the numbers grew fairly slowly in the mid to late '60s, with Robert Mondavi opening his doors in 1966, Joseph Swan making his first zinfandel in 1968 (he would not pursue winemaking full-time until 1974) and Sterling Vineyards producing their first vintage in 1969. The farmland that would become Warren Winiarski's Stag's Leap Wine Cellars was first purchased by Warren in 1970, while Caymus Vineyards and Al Brounstein at Diamond Creek made their first wines in 1972. In this same vintage, Château Montelena (under the direction of Jim Barrett), Clos du Val and Silver Oak also all released their first wines on a small scale and Joseph Phelps Vineyards produced their inaugural wines from the year of 1973. So a lot of the wineries that would one day become institutions in California wine were only just getting rolling at this time and the superb vintage of 1974 could not have been better timed.

By the summer of 1974, cabernet sauvignon was the king grape in the world of California fine wine, as chardonnay was yet to realize its immense popularity, merlot was still considered primarily a blending grape to make cabernet a bit more Bordeaux-like, and zinfandel, despite the outstanding success of the varietal at Ridge and Joseph Swan in particular, was still not treated with the same reverence as cabernet. Pinot Noir was yet to really find its place in the firmament of California wine at this time, as often the pinot vineyards were planted in the wrong places, where it was just too hot for the grape to really perform optimally, with the exception at this time of vineyards up in the Santa Cruz Mountains and Gavilan Mountains, where Mount Eden, Calera and Chalone were already doing very good things with this varietal. There were some pinot noir vineyards planted in the cooler zones in Sonoma County at this time, but they were only really getting a foothold and it would be another decade before people really started to realize that the cooler pockets of Sonoma were where this grape was going to really excel. There was a bit of syrah in the ground (Joseph Phelps had bottled the first pure varietal expression of syrah in 1974), but Petit Sirah was far more important than its proper cousin in this era and there were actually a few really fine examples of Petit Sirah being made at this time, including those from Ridge and Stag's Leap Winery. But, cabernet sauvignon was seen as the leading grape with the most potential for world class wines at this time, which would make the results of the Paris tasting in 1976 all the more surprising, when the 1973 Château Montelena Chardonnay made by Mike Grgich would take the top prize for white wines ahead of elite white Burgundy bottlings.

So it is not all that surprising that the two most expensive wines released from the 1974 vintage were both cabernet sauvignons: the Robert Mondavi Reserve bottling came out in September of 1979 at the then unheard of sum of \$30 per bottle and the Heitz Wine Cellars "Martha's Vineyard" bottling released at \$25 per bottle in February of that same year. These prices were considered very controversial when the wines hit the market, particularly when one considers the prices which some of the other legendary wines from this vintage were released at around the same time. These included the Ridge "Monte Bello" at \$10, all of the Diamond Creek single vineyard cabernets at \$7.50 per bottle, Mayacamas cabernet at \$9.50, Caymus '74 cabernet at \$7, Chappellet at \$8 and the Sterling "Reserve" cabernet and the Joseph Phelps "Insignia" both at \$12 per bottle. As far as consumers were concerned, those were indeed good days for loading up the cellar, but these prices probably represented one of the first vintages where winery owners were starting to make a bit of money from their endeavors and the prices seemed pretty good to them as well back in 1977 or 1978. How the world of California wine has changed since those days! Another dramatic difference from the market today is that many wineries were still selling their 1974s out the cellar door in 1980, when John Tilson was preparing his report on the 1974 cabernets for his newsletter at the time, as where he listed these opening prices for future historians to take note, he noted that many of these superb wines remained available in the market in 1980- either at the winery or still readily available at retail.

So, where are the wines today at age forty-three? While the vintage's reputation is built soundly on the foundation of the excellence of the cabernet sauvignon in this year, 1974 was a superb year for all varietals and I have had some absolutely beautiful '74s from other grapes in recent years. For example, I have had the 1974 Stony Hill Chardonnay, which was winemaker Mike Chelini's very first vintage at the helm here, on two occasions in the last few years and the wine is absolutely stellar- fresh, vibrant, complex and still at its peak of maturity, with years of life still ahead of it. As the section on 1974 Zinfandel below will show, it is a bit more of a

mixed bag for this varietal at the present time, but more so for the simple reason that many of these wines were made for near-term consumption back in 1974 and many wineries would never imagine that people would have saved bottles of their zinfandels for this long! But, the long distance runners with this grape variety, led by the trailblazing bottlings from Ridge Vineyards, are still drinking splendidly well and still have many miles to go before they sleep. I have not had many 1974 Pinot Noir bottlings over the years, but as I am just starting a project on older American pinot bottlings for a future issue, I may be better placed to speak about this varietal's success in this lovely vintage a few months down the road. However, this article focuses primarily on the cabernet sauvignon (with a subsection on zinfandel), as cabernet is what made this vintage famous from the outset and these wines continue to absolutely dazzle at age forty-three.



With the big 1974 tasting that I attended, which forms the basis of this article, I was one of the few folks at the table that was not at all surprised with the relative youth of many of the cabernets in our lineup. The tasting was organized by the peripatetic, New York-based collector, Omar Khan, who is the organizational glue behind a great many of the epic tastings that take place in New York (and other sundry fields) these days, and true to his nature, it was a beautiful dinner and absolutely loaded with wines to provide a wide window into the state of the 1974 vintage today. I had helped organize a dinner of the 1978 California cabernets last year, along with Omar and my friend Mark Golodetz (who also supplied several of the 1974s in our tasting), and at the '78 dinner Omar had opined that we really needed to do the 1974s sooner, rather than later, so that we could get a good sense of where the two vintages stood in comparison to each

other. True to Omar's nature, a handful of months later, we were sitting next to each other at a superb 1974 themed dinner. I would divide the 1974 cabernets today generally into two camps, the first being wines that were inexpensive in the day (say, \$5 per bottle and under) and never intended by their winemakers to be wines for the long haul, but which are still cruising along admirably in many cases; and secondly, the world class wines of the era that were indeed built to age long and gracefully along the lines of the classical Bordeaux model of this time period, which started out life deep, full of pure fruit and properly structured, with plenty of ripe tannin and personalities that often precluded really drinking them until they were fifteen or twenty years of age. A great many of these wines, which are certainly the *crème de la crème* of the vintage, still retain a fair bit of melting tannin and have decades and decades of life still ahead of them.

So where do they stand in comparison to the 1978 cabernets I reported on a few issues back in the newsletter? In general terms, and here we are talking of the very top bottlings, such as those from Sterling, Chappellet, Ridge, Heitz, Mayacamas, Mondavi, Joseph Phelps and the like, the 1974s are probably not quite as elegant in profile as the 1978s, but offset this by offering even a bit more power and dimension and absolutely stunning depth of fruit. For the most part, the very top bottlings of cabernet sauvignon from 1974 are just now reaching their apogees of peak maturity, often with a bit of remaining tannin to continue to carry them forward, but with wide open, pure, complex and really impressive aromatic and flavor profiles. They are every bit as good as the very high reputation of the vintage would suggest, and they remain wines that will drink and deliver immense pleasure for another twenty, thirty or forty more years down the road. A few wineries, that were still fledgling operations in 1974, such as Clos de Val, had not yet realized the success that they would by the time the 1978 vintage rolled around, but in general, one can say that most successful wineries in these two vintages have produced legendary and standard-defining efforts in both years. A preference for one vintage over the other really depends on one's stylistic preference, with those that prize a touch more elegance likely to be drawn to the 1978s and those that prefer a bit more bountiful fruit tones more fond of the equally impressive 1974s.

One thing to keep in mind about this era in California wine, and for cabernet sauvignon in particular, is that 1974 was simply one of a string of excellent vintages at this time in the various regions of the state where fine winemaking excelled. California has probably never seen a decade as generously endowed with Mother Nature's munificence than the 1970s, as the 1970 vintage was every bit as exceptional in quality as either 1974 or 1978, 1971 was very good, 1973 even better than 1971 (albeit, not quite as long-lived as some of the other top years in this decade, so the wines are a bit more along their evolutionary arcs today and do not still offer the same long-term potential found in '74 or '78), 1975 was a big, powerful and structured vintage that is still not quite ready to drink and may, in the end prove to be the very greatest vintage of this extraordinary decade, and the two drought years of 1976 and 1977 have also produced a bevy of excellent wines that are presently drinking with very impressive distinction and show no signs of slowing down anytime soon. So, this was a magical decade in the world of California wine and there are literally hundreds of bottles from the 1970s that merit continued attention from shoppers looking for mature wines, as the vast majority of the top wines from any of these vintages remain in their plateaus of peak maturity and offer decades of further life in bottle. The 1974 vintage may be "first among equals" in the minds of most wine lovers familiar with this marvelous decade in California, with a very high reputation that remains richly deserved, but one

should not overlook the top wines from these other surrounding vintages in a quest to solely drink the 1974s, as the distance between the best of '74 and the best of '73, '75, '76, '77 and '78 is not all that dramatic and less than what the current reputation of the 1974s in the popular imagination might suggest.

The following notes on the 1974s are divided first into sections on Zinfandel and then Cabernet Sauvignon (with a couple of other varietals listed at the start), and within each subsection, the wines are listed alphabetically by producer. As I had tasted in the last few years (primarily as part of research on historical features on some of my favorite California producers) other 1974s that were not in our recent tasting, I have included those notes here, so that subscribers looking specifically for information on this vintage can find all of the notes to date included in this one article. The older notes are easily spotted by the earlier date of the projected window of drinkability for each wine, with many of these older notes dating back to a fine tasting I attended in southern California back in 2009. I should take a moment to mention that the slightly higher reputation that the 1974 vintage enjoys *vis à vis* the other top vintages of the 1970s, often means that the most famous cabernets from '74 have been popular auction items already for several decades, and the odds of encountering a very well-travelled bottle of 1974 cabernet are exponentially higher than is the case with equally famous wines from some of these other vintages, and we did hit a few wines that were not in pristine condition due to their heavily-stamped passports. Wine is a less satisfactory commodity than barrels of oil, rubber, diamonds, manganese, wheat or corn, as it needs to be taken care of like the perishable food that it is, and often those who are drawn to wine primarily as an investment do not really care a whole lot about the taking care of the wine during its time that it is in their hands or in transit to and from their trading partners. For many in this genre of collectors, it is simply a line on a spreadsheet and best if never opened, so that the inconvenient truth that it has not been handled properly somewhere along the way remains a well-kept secret.

In this regard, the 1974s are a bit more fraught with potential peril than some of the other top vintages of the 1970s in California, and in addition to some of the most famous wines having been auction darlings for decades and moving around quite a bit, one has to assume that the stars of the 1974 vintage have not been ignored entirely by fraud artists as well. For these reasons, I tend to focus a bit more on some of the other great vintages of the 1970s when I am buying California wines at auction for my own cellar (I own a fair bit of both the 1973 and 1975 vintages for this reason), as the risk of encountering a less than pristine bottle is quite a bit lower with these vintages. But, that said, pristine examples of the top 1974s remain amongst the greatest wines ever produced to date in the history of fine wine production in California and are absolute treasures when one finds a perfectly-stored bottle. This is a distinction that they will continue to proudly carry for many decades to come, as cabernets like Heitz Martha's Vineyard, Ridge Monte Bello, Mayacamas, Sterling Reserve and Chappellet are still relatively young wines and will still be drinking spectacularly well twenty-five or thirty more years down the road! And, as I hope the notes above will attest, the 1974 vintage was equally strong across several other varietals, and though these wines remain less readily available these days (given that most were drunk up decades ago, when the top 1974 cabernets were still too tannic for primetime drinking), when one comes across a bottle at auction or from a mature wine specialist, they can be equally inspiring. And, as I hope becomes more apparent as one wades through the tasting notes that follow, it is not necessary to only focus on the most famous and expensive cabernet bottlings

from 1974 to experience the magic of this vintage, as there are plenty of excellent wines to be found amongst the less well-known producers in this historically momentous vintage.

Chardonnay

1974 Stony Hill Vineyards “Napa Valley” Chardonnay

It is kind of hard to believe how often I have drunk the 1974 Stony Hill chardonnay in the last few years, as this is a very rare bottle and I have been fortunate enough to be served it four or five times over this time frame. The wine continues to dazzle me with its quality at age forty-three, offering up a beautifully pure, resolved and complex nose of apple, orange peel, toasted almond, salty soil tones, browned butter, just a hint of honey, a bit of lavender and a lovely, zesty topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still vibrant, with a lovely core and soil signature, bright framing acids and impeccable balance on the long, complex and focused finish. This is simply one of the greatest examples of chardonnay I have ever tasted from California. 2017-2030+. 96.



Zinfandel

Few folks might expect zinfandel to last forty-three years in bottle, but the wine was generally made quite differently back in the 1970s and it is not a rare occurrence to find wines made predominantly from zinfandel that have aged very nicely indeed from this era. As this is a grape variety that ripens unevenly and has a lot of natural acidity to it, the 1974s that I tasted for

this article were a bit all over the place stylistically, with some quite low in alcohol (the Robert Mondavi version was only twelve percent alcohol) and others well over fourteen percent, but the relative octane of these 1974 zins did not seem to be directly related to their ability to age over the long haul. Witness the 14.5 percent 1974 Fiddletown Ranch Zinfandel, made by Paul Draper at Ridge Vineyards, which was one of the most beautiful wines I tasted from this varietal as I was working on the research for this feature. Not all of the wines were singing of course, as forty-three years remains a fairly long time for even the best examples of zinfandel from 1974 to have held up, but several were really, really good and certainly demonstrated that this grape, if vinified for structure and balance, certainly has the ability to age fifty years or more in the hands of a talented winemaker.

Back in 1974, zinfandel had a very strong reputation amongst California wine lovers, due primarily to the pioneering efforts of David Bennion and Paul Draper at Ridge Vineyards and Joseph Swan at his eponymous winery over in the Russian River Valley. Ridge had led the way with zinfandel back in the 1964 vintage, when they were the first winery to release a “serious” example of the varietal, and its success with wine drinkers led more wineries to follow the lead of David Bennion and the rest of the team at Ridge. Joseph Swan made his first commercial wine from the zinfandel grape in the 1968 vintage, which immediately garnered him a reputation as a specialist with this grape variety and California wine lovers made a point of searching out his small lots of zinfandel that he produced on a part-time basis in these earliest years. Joe Swan would not retire from his “day job” as a commercial pilot and become a full-time vintner until the 1974 vintage, but his reputation for the excellence of his zinfandels in the early ‘70s was sufficiently high for other winery principals to take note and start to produce their own bottlings of zinfandel in this era. Consequently, the notes below include a fair number of famous wineries that were producing zinfandel back in the 1970s, almost always from purchased grapes (as there was still a lot of old vine zinfandel planted around by grape growers who had originally put it in the ground as a blending grape for jug wines), but who no longer make the varietal. While our results were variable, there were some truly excellent and still quite vibrant 1974 zinfandels in our tastings, proving that well-made and well-balanced zinfandel can certainly stand the test of time and continue to deliver great pleasure fully forty-three years down the line. I have included below notes on a few 1974s from the article I wrote last year on old school zinfandel, as bottles of these wines are hard to come by and it makes sense to have the notes all in one place for folks referencing this article.

1974 Burgess Cellars Zinfandel (Napa and Sonoma Counties)

Tom Burgess retired from piloting and started his life as a Napa Valley vintner in time for the 1972 vintage, having purchased Lee Stewart’s Soverain Cellars and vineyards up on Howell Mountain early in that year. Zinfandel, made from purchased grapes, was always one of the staples in the first decade of the winery, and a re-release of their superb 1978 Zinfandel was actually the first wine that I ever purchased in my very early days that crossed the ten dollars per bottle threshold. The 1974 Burgess Zinfandel is still excellent and at the peak of its powers, offering up a classic bouquet of raspberries, fruitcake, other brambly fruit tones, coffee, autumnal soil elements and plenty of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a fine core, excellent focus and grip, tangy acids and impressive length and balance on the complex finish. Fine juice with years of life ahead of it! 13.2 percent octane. 2017-2030+. **92.**

1974 Conn Creek Vineyards Zinfandel (Napa Valley)

It was the legendary 1974 cabernet sauvignon made from grapes purchased from the Eisele Vineyard that really put this winery on the map, but Bill and Cathy Collins' foundation for Conn Creek Vineyards was actually the fifty-four acre zinfandel vineyard, located in northern Napa Valley, that they purchased in 1968. The 1974 zinfandel from Conn Creek Vineyards was the first I had ever had a chance to taste from the Collins family, and the wine has aged quite nicely and continues to drink very well indeed. The quite complex bouquet offers up a stylish blend of black raspberries, menthol, chocolate, cigar smoke, dried spices, a nice touch of soil and a peppery topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and still very nicely balanced, with a good core, nice spice tones and a long, mature finish that closes with a note of coffee. This wine has probably been fully mature for at least twenty years, but shows no signs of slowing down in the immediate future and is quite a tasty old bottle of zinfandel. 2015-2030. **89.**

1974 Gemello Winery "Amador County" Zinfandel

The Gemello Winery was founded by John Gemello in the Santa Cruz Mountain region at the end of 1933, right after the repeal of prohibition. He had arrived in the region from Piemonte in 1913 and had started his California wine career working for Paul Masson. He was able to save enough to buy the property he would eventually build his winery on in 1925. His son Mario took over as head of the family winery in 1944 and made wine here until his last vintage of 1978. The Gemello family mostly purchased grapes in Santa Cruz for their wines, but starting in 1970, they began to produce zinfandel from grapes in Amador County, after Bob Trinchero of Sutter Home introduced them to the region. Their 1974 Amador County zinfandel is still alive and kicking, with plenty of depth and muscle, as this was the style that they were looking for back in this era, "a good heavy zinfandel" as Mario Gemello liked to recall. The wine offers up a deep and brambly nose of dark berries, zinfandel spice tones, a fair bit of tariness, woodsmoke and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly four-square in personality, but with impressive depth at the core and still a bit of chewy tannin perking up the vigorous finish. This is a sturdy bottle that still has plenty of life ahead of it, but is not particularly complex or refined. Not bad. 2015-2035. **86.**

1974 Robert Mondavi Zinfandel

This was the first bottle of Mondavi zinfandel I had ever tried and it was not too bad. Clearly it had been crafted to be an easy quaffer early on in its career and no one at the winery would have imagined it forty-three years down the road, but it was hanging on pretty well and was quite tasty. The nose is quite tertiary now, offering up scents of dried berries, figs, toffee and wood ash. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and still quite tangy, with melted tannins, autumnal flavors and modest length and grip on the nicely balanced finish. This is gently in decline, but still quite drinkable. 2017-2025. **86.**

1974 Ridge "Fiddletown" Zinfandel (Amador County)

Unlike some of the other zinfandel bottlings from Ridge in this era, the Fiddletown bottling was produced from one hundred percent of this varietal. This is pretty ripe for the era, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol, but the wine has aged beautifully and is drinking with complexity and polish at age forty-three. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of raspberries, currants, lovely spice tones, cloves, a fine base of soil and a nice touch of dill in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and seamless, with a fine core, melted tannins, sound acids and impressive length and grip on the superbly balanced finish. Fine, fine zin. 2017-2030+. **92.**

1974 Ridge Vineyards “Lytton Springs” Zinfandel (Dry Creek Valley)

The 1974 Lytton Springs zinfandel from Ridge is one of the greatest bottles of zinfandel I have ever had the pleasure to taste. The wine has aged brilliantly and is drinking still at its absolute peak, soaring from the glass in a complex and captivating nose of black raspberries, cherries, pipe tobacco, delicate spice tones, a dollop of meatiness, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of aged leather. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and seamless, with excellent complexity, a fine core, outstanding focus and balance and a very long, meltingly tannic and utterly sophisticated finish. For those keeping score at home, the alcohol on this gem in the ripe vintage of 1974 was 13.3 percent. An utterly brilliant zin with decades of life still ahead of it! 2012-2035+. **94.**



Merlot

This most recent bottle of the 1974 Merlot from Ric Forman at Sterling Vineyards remains the only example of this varietal that I have tasted from the vintage. The grape was not anywhere near as widely-planted back in this era as it is today, and as I alluded to above, much of what was harvested back in the mid-1970s was used primarily for blending into cabernet sauvignon bottlings. However, as the 1974 Sterling should show, the varietal had the potential for longevity back in this era and other 1974s should probably merit attention, if made by top flight producers.

1974 Sterling Vineyards Merlot

Ric Forman made a really lovely and long distance runner merlot in 1974, with some of the same depth and structural integrity of his two superb cabernet sauvignon bottlings in this vintage. The '74 Merlot remains vibrant and at its peak, offering up scents of backed plums, saddle leather, cigar wrapper, a touch of petroleum jelly and a gentle tariness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and impressive length on the very well-balanced finish. This does not quite match the cabernets in terms of complexity, but there is life and personality here! 2017-2030+. **89.**

Cabernet Sauvignon

1974 Burgess Cellars “Vintage Selection” Cabernet Sauvignon

I had high expectations for this wine, but two bottles were both slightly “off” in the tastings that formed the basis of this report, so I live in hope of crossing paths with a pristine bottle sometime in the future. The first bottle was slightly oxidized and this second one seemed to have seen a bit of heat along the way and could not quite shake its “cooked” aspect, despite blossoming a bit in the glass. Given how well the 1974 zinfandel from Tom Burgess continues to drink (please see above), I am sure that there are excellent bottles of the 1974 cabernet out there as well, but the two bottles that I tasted this autumn were not on form.

1974 Chappellet Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon

The 1974 Chappellet cabernet included ten percent merlot in the blend, which was rather a new approach at this point in time in Napa Valley. The wine was released in August of 1977 for \$8.00 a bottle! This most recent bottle was one of the finest of our two tastings of the 1974s, with depth, breed and complexity to burn. The nose offers up a superb blend of cassis, dark berries, sale leather, cigar ash, dark soil tones a nice touch of meatiness and beautiful spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and beautifully-balanced, with a rock solid core., superb length and grip and still a bit of tannin on the very long, complex and vibrant finish. This outclassed wines such as Diamond Creek Red Rock Terrace and Volcanic Hill in the flight it was positioned in and really is one of the absolute superstars of the 1974 vintage. 2017-2040+. **95.**

1974 Clos du Bois “Proprietor's Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon (Dry Creek Valley)

Readers may recall from my recent article on the 1978 vintage, how pleasant a surprise the Clos du Bois “Proprietor's Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon bottling was in that vintage, but the 1974 is not quite in the same quality league. To be fair, 1974 was Frank Woods’ first vintage at Clos du Bois, so one has to be a bit understanding if the wine is not up to the quality level of subsequent vintages. The bouquet is good, but not great, offering up scents of cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones and a bit of chipotle pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is still full-bodied and tangy, with a bit more complexity in the mouth than the rather straightforward nose suggests, with melted tannins, tangy acids and a long, nicely focused finish. One of my chief complaints with this wine is that the tartaric acids are not that well blended into the wine and are now sticking out just a bit on the backend. It is certainly quite potable and has plenty of life ahead of it, but despite it offering up good, solid quality, it is not exciting. The winery had clearly moved up a notch in precision and complexity by the time the next great vintage rolled around in 1978. 2017-2030+. **87.**

1974 Clos du Val “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

The fruit for this bottling came from vineyards in the Stag’s Leap district and was first released by the winery in October of 1976 for \$7.50 per bottle. This was only the third vintage for Bernard Portet at Clos du Val, as the inaugural vintage here was the 1972, so this was still very early days in the history of this estate. At our tasting, the 1974 Clos du Val was not as suave and refined in profile as the superb 1978 bottlings I wrote about a few months back, with a slight coarseness to the tannins on the backend that have reportedly been part of the profile of this wine since it was released, and which remain to this day. The winemaking is just not as fine-tuned here in ’74 as would be the case a few years later, and one has to assume Monsieur Portet was still feeling his way with fruit from the Stag’s Leap district, after having been born and raised in Bordeaux. That said, this is still a pretty good wine with decades of life ahead of it. The bouquet of the 1974 Clos du Val is still quite fine, offering up scents of cassis, cigar ash, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf, hints of chipotles and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and nicely suave on the attack, with a good core and complexity, but the aforementioned grittiness of the tannin on the backend detracting a bit from what is a pretty tasty wine. This is good in a slightly rustic style, but it is pretty clear that Clos du Val was still a work in progress in 1974. 2017-2040. **90.**

1974 Conn Creek “Eisele Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 1974 Conn Creek cabernet was made entirely from fruit from the Eisele vineyard, and it is clearly one of the finest wines in this vintage. I had tasted one less than pristine bottle of this wine previously, and was very happy to cross paths with a perfect bottle at our Laguna Niguel tasting. The bouquet is deep, complex and a classic expression of the Eisele vineyard, as it offers up a superb mélange of sweet cassis, black cherries, mint, violets, chocolate, tobacco, lovely soil tones and a touch of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and very suave, with lovely complexity, excellent mid-palate depth, melting tannins, superb balance and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully delineated finish. An American classic. 2009-2025. **95.**

1974 Diamond Creek Vineyards “Red Rock Terrace” Cabernet Sauvignon

Release prices for the 1974 cabernets from Diamond Creek were all of \$7.50 per bottle back in the fall of 1976. However, there were only one hundred and fifty-seven cases made of the Red Rock Terrace cuvée in the ’74 vintage, so this was one of the hardest wines to find in this year. I had not tasted the 1974 Red Rock Terrace in a decade and time has not seemed to really pass for this wine during that time, as it remained quite similar in development to where it was back in late 2006. This was the least highly regarded of the three single vineyard wines here upon release, but it has aged quite well and is now starting to drink with complexity. As I noted ten years back, and still find true today, this is better on the nose than the palate, as the bouquet offers up a complex blend of cassis, currant leaf, stony soil tones, a touch of black raspberry, cigar smoke, saddle leather and gentle medicinal tones. On the palate, even at forty-three years of age, the wine remains a bit four-square and not as good as the nose promises, with its full-bodied format nicely soil-driven and still quite chewy. There is good depth at the core, the tannins are nicely integrated into the body of the wine and the finish is long, but overall, this remains a touch sinewy on the palate and not quite as good as later vintages in this decade would prove to be from the Red Rock Terrace. 2017-2050. **91.**

1974 Diamond Creek Vineyards “Volcanic Hill” Cabernet Sauvignon

There were four hundred and eighty-five cases produced of the 1974 Volcanic Hill bottling from Diamond Creek, so there was a bit more of this to go around upon release than the Red Rock Terrace cuvée. I like this a bit better on the palate than the above, but it too is better on the nose than in the mouth at the present time and seems likely to always be so as the years unfold. The bouquet is really quite superb, delivering a fine constellation of cassis, saddle leather, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a touch of resolved bell pepper and a distinct note of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and has a bit more solidity at the core than the RRT, with firm, chewy tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. The tannins again are a bit less refined than what might be termed ideal, but this is a very good example of the vintage that will age for decades to come. 2017-2050. **92+**.

1974 Fetzer Vineyards “Estate Bottled” Cabernet Sauvignon (Mendocino)

I continue to be amazed by the beauty and elegance of the 1974 Fetzer cabernet sauvignon, not to mention its longevity, as it had been a dozen years since I last drank a bottle and time has seemed to not touch this wine in the interim. This is a fairly low octane example of this ripe vintage, coming in at twelve percent, but the wine still has depth, complexity and intensity of flavor that is most impressive at age forty-three. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, tobacco leaf, a nice base of gravelly soil, cigar ash, gentle chipotles and a touch of herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with lovely detail and balance, melted tannins, bright acids and impeccable balance on the long and refined finish. Really lovely juice- kudos to the Fetzer family for making such high class wine at such a great price back in the day! 2017-2035. **90**.

1974 Gemello Winery “Carmel Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 1974 Gemello “Carmel Valley” bottling of cabernet is holding on pretty well and remains a solid, drinkable wine. This was never meant for serious aging and was really more of a small step up from a jug wine when it was released, so one has to give it a bit of understanding today. The wine is chunky and a bit inky on both the nose and palate, but still has good remaining fruit and offers up scents of black cherries, a touch of spiced meats, brambly overtones, gentle tariness and a bit of Redwood spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, four-square and simple, but also solid at the core, with respectable length and grip on the meltingly tannic finish. Not bad for what it was. 2017-2027. **86**.

1974 Geyser Peak Cabernet Sauvignon (North Coast)

This was an inexpensive wine on release, coming out at \$5 per bottle back in 1976, and to see it still drinking well more than forty years down the road is pretty remarkable! This remains a good solid drink with at least another decade’s worth of life in it, as it offers up a bright nose of black cherries, dill (from American oak casks), cigar ash and a nice touch of chipotle peppers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still quite broad-shouldered, with a good core, melted tannins and surprising length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not overly complex, but it is quite tasty and cruising along nicely. 2017-2027+. **88**.

1974 Heitz Wine Cellar “Martha’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1974 Heitz “Martha’s Vineyard” is rightfully one of the most famous wines ever produced in the history of California, and the wine continues to cruise along beautifully at age forty-three. The bouquet is very deep and impressively complex, soaring from the glass in a blaze of cherries, blood orange, plenty of eucalyptus, spice elements, grilled venison, lovely soil tones, cigar wrapper and hints of petroleum jelly in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with great focus and grip, ripe, melting tannins, tangy

acids and outstanding balance on the very long and complex finish. This was the first vintage that David Heitz made the wine, as his father Joe was in the hospital with a bad back injury during the harvest (David actually would make daily trips to the hospital with various samples so that Joe could taste how things were progressing in the cellars in '74), and he certainly hit the ground running! A legendary wine. 2017-2040. **97.**

1974 Inglenook Vineyards “Cask A-16” Cabernet Sauvignon

By 1974, Inglenook's golden age was already a bit in the rearview mirror, but they still made a nice range of good cabernet bottlings in this vintage. The Cask A-16 was one of their reserve wines, which included a small percentage of merlot in the blend. The wine came in listed at twelve percent alcohol in '74, and was drinking quite nicely, though with the first vestiges of maderization hovering on both the nose and palate and suggesting drinking up in the very near-term is warranted. The bouquet remains quite complex, offering up tertiary scents of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash, gentle chipotles and a very nice base of Rutherford Bench soil tones. On the palate the wine is full, suave and gently cuspy, with a good core, sound acids, melted tannins and still quite nice length on the complex finish. If this did not have that touch of oxidation starting to show on both the nose and palate, it would be quite a fine drink, and there may well still be better bottles out there than the one we had at our tasting. 2017-2025+? **88+?**

1974 Kenwood Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (California)

There is no detail on the label of the 1974 Kenwood cabernet to indicate where the grapes for this wine may have come from, but it was showing very nicely at our tasting and was one of the real pleasant surprised in our lineup. The wine came in at 12.8 percent octane in this vintage and still offers up a lovely, complex and classy bouquet of cherries, dill, gentle savory notes, a touch of *gibier*, fine soil tones and a bit of chipotle in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a good core, melted tannins, very elegant balance and a long, focused and velvety finish. The bit of savory aromatics here suggest that this wine was probably a bit weedy out of the blocks, but forty-three years' worth of bottle age has allowed these elements to evolve in a beautiful direction and this wine is really drinking well today. Not bad at all for a wine that was released at \$5 per bottle! 2017-2035. **90.**

1974 Charles Krug “Vintage Select” Lot F-1

After the bitter falling out of the Mondavi brothers in the mid-1960s, where Robert and Peter actually came to blows in the winery, Peter Mondavi was eventually forced to make financial arrangements to allow his older brother, Robert to receive his share of the family legacy. The history of the family's acrimonious parting and eventual law suit is chronicled in James Conaway's book, Napa, and also notes the falling out between Peter Mondavi and a number of the winery's former suppliers of grapes, which included Nathan Fay. The Lot F-1 “Vintage Select” is the last Krug wine made from Fay Vineyard fruit by the winery, and may well be the last of the great Charles Krug cabernet sauvignons that had ranked right up at the very pinnacle of California cabernet during the decades of the 1940s and 1950s. The 1974 Lot F-1 has been fully mature for many years but remains in full bloom on both the nose and palate, as it offers up a superb bouquet of dark berries, chipotle peppers, woodsmoke, herb tones, lovely soil nuances, tobacco, a touch of nutskin and a fantastic spice box of Indian spices in the upper register that just become more and more complex and vibrant with extended aeration. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and velvety, with very little remaining tannins, but such fine balance that it will have no difficulty continuing to drink at a very high level for at least another decade or more. The wine shows lovely focus and fine mid-palate depth, and is very long, elegant and complex on the finish. A delightful bottle. 2009-2020+. **92.**

1974 Mayacamas Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Mount Veeder)

The 1974 vintage of Mayacamas cabernet included eight percent merlot in the blend and was released originally in October of 1978 for \$9.50 per bottle. This was reported by John Tilson back in 1980 to be a massively powerful and tannic example of the vintage in need of decades of bottle age to soften up and become approachable. At the time, he thought the wine was excellent in potential, but not likely to match the brilliant 1970 vintage here. Along with the Heitz Martha's Vineyard, this remains my favorite wine of the vintage, and the wine was stunning at our tasting this past September. The bouquet is deep, pure and riveting, delivering a fine constellation of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, gorgeously complex soil tones, black truffles, cigar smoke and a nice touch of chipotles in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and almost sappy at the core, with great focus and grip, fine-grained, now modest tannins and stunning grip and mineral drive on the very, very long, impeccably balanced and magical finish. Bob Travers made some absolutely monumental cabernets during his long trusteeship at Mayacamas, and the 1974 is one of his greatest accomplishments. 2017-2050+. **98.**

1974 Robert Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The regular bottling of 1974 cabernet sauvignon from Robert Mondavi included four percent cabernet franc and two percent merlot in the blend and was produced in prodigious quantity, with fully fifty thousand cases made. It was first released from the winery in February of 1977 for \$8 per bottle. Given that this was really a mass market wine in comparison to many others in this tasting, it is remarkable how beautifully the wine was made at the outset and how brilliantly it has aged. The bouquet today is deep, complex and very classy, offering up scents of cassis, a touch of dried eucalyptus, Cuban cigars, a fine base of soil, gentle herb tones and incipient notes of chipotle pepper. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, still a touch of backend tannin and impressive length and grip on the focused finish. This has continued to get better and better over the last fifteen years that I have been drinking it and probably is just now entering its peak of maturity at age forty-three. It is not far off the quality of the 1974 Reserve bottling, which is one of Mondavi's most famous wines. Not too bad for \$8 per bottle back in the day! 2017-2035+. **92.**

1974 Mount Eden Vineyards "Estate" Cabernet Sauvignon (magnum)

The 1974 cabernet from Merry Edwards' first vintage at the helm at Mount Eden is drinking beautifully out of magnum today, and though it is a bit more powerful in personality than the 1973, it is still a superb example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and now wide open, offering up scents of cassis, pomegranate, a touch of mint, cigar ash, chipotle peppers, dark soil tones, a touch of spice (vaguely reminiscent of nutmeg) and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine focus and grip, tangy acids and a long, complex, still gently tannic finish. This is a beautiful wine with decades and decades of life still ahead of it (particularly in magnum). 2016-2050+. **94.**

1974 Mount Veeder Winery Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa County)

The fruit for the 1974 Mount Veeder cabernet sauvignon came from the Bernstein Vineyard on Mayacamas Mountain. The vintage produced six hundred and forty-four cases and the wine was released in March of 1977 for the price of \$8 per bottle, which was pretty ambitious for those days, particularly when one considers that the Diamond Creek wines were only \$7.50 per bottle. I do not have a lot of experience with Mount Veeder's old wines, but this 1974 cabernet had aged very well indeed and was drinking with plenty of personality at our tasting. The bouquet is deep, vibrant and complex, offering up scents of cassis, dark soil tones, currant leaf, a touch of road tar and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep,

full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core, still a bit of tannin on the backend and a long, complex and focused finish. There is just a whisper of medicinal tones on the backend here, which recalls a bit some of the Ridge cabernets from this era, but it is only a whisper and hardly a detraction. Good juice with plenty of life still ahead of it. Thirteen percent alcohol. 2017-2035+. 90.



1974 Joseph Phelps Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

If recent auction prices are a reflection of a trend, it seems that folks who fancy great old school California cabernets are waking up to the fact that there was not really all that much difference between “regular bottlings” and “single vineyard bottlings” back in the day, as the prices for the “regular bottlings” have been rising steeply in the last year. Of course, the auction prices for the great old single vineyard bottlings from Joseph Phelps have been pretty stiff for years, accurately reflecting just how brilliant the wines were here up through the big stylistic change that commenced at the estate with the 1991 vintage. This most recent bottle of the '74 Napa cabernet from Joseph Phelps was excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of cassis, black raspberries, eucalyptus, a touch of chipotle pepper, cigar ash, a lovely dollop of spice tones and a bit of petroleum jelly in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and velvety on the attack, with a good core of fruit, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. This particular bottle had a slightly loose cork, so there is a possibility that there are even better examples out there. 2014-2025. 90.

1974 Joseph Phelps Vineyards Insignia (Napa)

The 1974 Joseph Phelps Insignia bottling is one of the greatest California wines I have had the pleasure to taste, and at age thirty-eight, it is still a wonder to behold. This was the very first vintage that the winery produced an Insignia bottling, as the work on the winery was finally completed (the first vintage for any wines from Joseph Phelps was 1973), which in this first few vintages was primarily cabernet sauvignon sourced from the Stelzner Vineyard, blended with six percent merlot. The glorious nose on the 1974 soars from the glass in a blaze of mulberries, chocolate, small berries, a touch of toffee, a beautiful base of soil tones, crushed violets, smoke and a deft touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and extremely elegant, with a lovely core of ripe, pure fruit, seamless structure, melting tannins and great focus and balance on the very long, velvety and complex finish. It is so sad that Joseph Phelps Vineyards got tired of making First Growth quality wines and decided to make vinous cartoon characters instead, as the 1974 Insignia clearly shows that at one point in time these folks really knew how to make magical wines in California. The '74 Insignia is fully mature, but still has decades and decades of life ahead of it. This was originally released in March of 1978 from the winery at \$12 per bottle! 2012-2050+. **97.**

1974 Raymond Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1974 Raymond Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon is a pretty ripe example of the vintage, coming in at 13.7 percent octane, but the wine has aged quite well and is a perfectly balanced and nicely resolving example of this outstanding year in California. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, cassis, a hint of petroleum jelly, menthol, dark soil tones, hints of past bell pepper tones and a nice touch of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch tarry in personality, with a fine core of fruit, still a bit of backend tannins, lovely focus and grip and a long, velvety and complex finish. The nose is a touch more refined than the palate, but this is a good, solid and nicely mature example of a top flight cabernet vintage. 2017-2035+. **89.**

1974 Ridge Vineyards "York Creek" Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

The 1974 York Creek cabernet from Ridge is a lovely wine that has certainly been mature for many years already, but shows absolutely no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The deep, pure and complex nose wafts from the glass in a mix of black cherries, plums, tobacco ash, menthol, coffee, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, suave and classy, with fine, mature complexity, still solid stuffing, melted tannins and nice brightness and grip on the long and fully resolved finish. The balance here is lovely and this wine will continue to drink well for years to come, despite its tannins having fully fallen away. Four hundred cases produced, the winery originally released this wine for \$7 per bottle. 2012-2025. **91.**

1974 Ridge Vineyards "Montebello" Cabernet Sauvignon (Santa Cruz Mountains)

It had been fully fifteen years since I last drank a bottle of the 1974 Monte Bello, and I was delighted that Omar and Mark had conspired to include it in our tasting lineup. This is a great vintage for Monte Bello and the wine is just now hitting its true apogee of peak drinkability and the wine will vie with Mayacamas for the longest-lived wine from the 1974 vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a superb blend of cassis, black raspberries, a touch of medicinal tones, gorgeous soil nuances, a bit of saddle leather, incipient notes of black truffles and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with a nice touch of sappiness at the core, excellent soil signature, still some backend

tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the very, very long, complex and classic finish. This wine will continue to improve over the coming decade or two! 2017-2055+. **95+**.

1974 Simi Cabernet Sauvignon “Vintage Reserve”

The 1974 Simi “Vintage Reserve” cabernet is a very classy bottle of wine that is just beginning to get a little long in the tooth, but it so clearly tried to rise above its incipient maderization that it retained a fair bit of interest despite it now having started down the far side of the plateau into decline. The fruit for this bottling came from Alexander Valley, and the winery aged it three additional years in bottle after its extended elevage in oak cooperage to allow it to more fully blossom prior to release. While the nose is now beginning to show slight signs of maderization, there is also a lovely sweetness of fruit and impressive aromatic complexity still to be had from the mix of red and black cherries, dusty soil tones, cloves, cinnamon, delicate chocolate, smoke and a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and now a touch soft, with the oxidative notes translating into a bit of cigarette ash in the mouth, but with a plush core, soft tannins and pretty good length still for a wine that is now in decline. Every few minutes the wine tried to completely freshen and became brighter and more vivid, and then like a bed-ridden invalid without the strength to rise up, the wine again slumped back into the glass exhausted. But it is quite clear that this was a dynamite bottle of wine in its heyday, and it should prove to be still a great wine in magnum, if any were made back in the day. Drink up in regular-sized formats. **84.**

1974 Souverain Cellars “Vintage Selection” Cabernet Sauvignon (Sonoma County)

Our bottle of this was a bit maderized at our recent tasting, but there is a good wine underneath, and I am sure that sound bottles will still be quite enjoyable. This was made by the veteran winemaker, Lee Stewart from purchased grapes, as he had already sold his original winery and vineyards to Tom Burgess in early 1972, and his wines from 1970 forwards were not quite as potentially long-lived or profound as those he had made from his estate vineyards back in the 1950s and 1960s. Lee made two different bottlings of 1974 cabernet, this one labeled as Vintage Selection and another made from fruit from Alexander Valley in Sonoma and labeled as such. I last had the 1974 Alexander Valley bottling back in 2009 (and include the note below, as the wine should still be drinking well today), but this was the first time I had tasted the Vintage Selection cuvée and was disappointed it was not in sound enough condition so that I could take a note. If historical accounts are correct, Lee Stewart was an old, curmudgeonly transplanted Scotsman who worked his assistants tirelessly, but was also one of the best early winemakers in the history of Napa Valley and folks like Warren Winiarski and Mike Grgich cut their teeth working for Lee Stewart back in the day, so his memory should be kept alive for the important early work he did blazing the trail for high quality wines in Napa Valley.

1974 Souverain Cabernet Sauvignon “Alexander Valley”

The 1974 Alexander Valley cabernet from Souverain was made from purchased fruit after Lee Stewart had sold off his prime vineyard site to Tom Burgess. The wine is, not surprisingly, completely different in aromatic and flavor profile from the classic Napa-based Souverains of the 1960s, but is an equally well-made and compelling wine. The bouquet is deep and complex, as it offers up a fine mix of cherries, a touch of menthol, cigar box, gentle notes of walnuts, coffee and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. The nose seems to indicate that a bit of merlot was used in the blend in this wine. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and suave, with virtually no remaining tannin, but lovely focus and balance that will keep it drinking well for at least another decade. The finish is long and shows lovely complexity and grip. A charmer. 2009-2020. **90.**

1974 Sterling Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa)

While the 1974 Sterling Reserve cabernet sauvignon is rightly recognized as one of the greatest wines of this decade in California, the regular bottling from Sterling in this vintage is often overlooked. This is unfortunate, as the quality between the two wines is not particularly large and this most recent bottle of the 1974 “regular” cabernet was absolutely brilliant! The nose soars from the glass in a youthful and vibrant blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, menthol, a great base of soil tones, hints of petroleum jelly and a bit of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, with a pure and sappy mid-palate, outstanding focus and balance, still a bit of remaining tannin perking up the finish and magical complexity on the very, very long and classy finish. I have loved this wine for decades (the first time I ever tasted it was in the late-1980s, when it was already approachable and quite delicious), and it seems to get better with every passing year- which is, after all, what cabernet-based wines are supposed to do in the first place! Great juice and an absolute classic. 2017-2045. **94.**

1974 Sterling Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon “Reserve” (Napa)

The 1974 Reserve bottling of cabernet is the most famous wine Ric Forman ever produced during his tenure at Sterling Vineyards and the wine is every bit as good as its stellar reputation. At age forty-three, the wine is still deep and youthful in profile, offering up a beautiful bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a touch of mint, incipient notes of chipotle peppers, cigar smoke, dark soil tones and a touch of tariness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite powerfully built, with a plush core of fruit, lovely complexity, melting tannins and superb length and grip on the focused and perfectly balanced finish. I first crossed paths with the ’74 Sterling Reserve more than twenty-five years ago, and the wine was great then, and it has not lost a bit of bounce or purity over the ensuing quarter century. One of Napa’s legendary bottles of cabernet sauvignon, this magnificent wine should continue to drink well for at least another thirty years and maybe longer. That said, the regular Sterling bottling from 1974 can still give it a run for its money! 2017-2055. **97.**

DOMAINE FERRET'S 2015 POUILLY-FUISSÉ



Domaine J. A. Ferret, founded in 1840, is one of the most historically important estates in all of the Mâconnais, as they were the first producer to move from selling all their production in bulk to starting to domaine bottle and selling their wines in bottle. The Ferret family began this immediately after World War II. Today, the estate farms eighteen hectares of vines, with about three-quarters of these located near the village of Fuissé in the heart of the appellation and the other quarter surrounding the Roche de Vergisson in the northern sector. One of the most interesting aspects of the history of Domaine Ferret is that it has had its wines made by women dating all the way back to 1840, and during my early days in the wine trade in the 1980s, the wines were routinely known as “Madame Ferret’s”. Madame Jeanne Ferret was the proprietor of the estate when they first began estate-bottling their wines in the early 1940s, and she ran the property with great style for more than half a century and was still making the wine well into her eighties. Jeanne Ferret would pass away in 1993. The first vintage that she estate bottled was in 1942, when her daughter, Colette Ferret, was born, though she kept these wines solely for family consumption. The first commercial vintage release of estate bottled wines at Domaine Ferret was to follow in 1945, when some private clients in France were sold the wines, and in 1947, Madame Ferret found her first customers from outside of France, with orders placed on a small scale in this vintage from Belgium, Germany and even French Indochina. Collette Ferry would

join her mother in running Domaine Ferret in 1992 and continued on the family legacy of vinous excellence here until her own passing in December of 2007, leaving no heirs of her own to continue the family estate. Consequently, in 2008, Maison Louis Jadot purchased Domaine Ferret. Since that time, the female leadership tradition at the estate has been continued under the ownership of Maison Jadot, as Madame Audrey Braccini has been the director of the domaine and its winemaker since its change of hands. Audrey Braccini hails originally from the Touraine in the Loire Valley, studied oenology at Montpellier University and started her winemaking career in nearby Beaujolais, prior to taking on the direction of Domaine Ferret in 2008. It was a big challenge, as the reputation for Madame Jeanne Ferret and her domaine's wines has always been one of the highest in the entire appellation and it is a great credit to Madame Braccini that she has been able to continue on this tradition of excellence since her very first vintage here in 2008 and the wines today remain every bit as fine as they were when Madame Ferret was crafting the wines.

In addition to being the very first producer in Pouilly-Fuissé to start to estate-bottle their wines in the mid-1940s, rather than selling everything off in bulk to the *négociants*, Domaine Ferret was also one of the very first producers in the region to begin to bottle single vineyard cuvées from some of their prime parcels of vines. The very first bottlings here to be made from single vineyards were their Le Clos and Les Perrières cuvées, which are two of the best-situated of the top crus in the vineyards lying within and to the west of the town of Fuissé. These single vineyard wines were labeled on their own for the first time in 1983. Le Clos is a small monopole of Domaine Ferret, comprising only seventy *ares* and found lying between the winery and the communal church within the village limits of Fuissé. Le Clos has an easterly exposition and the vines here range from twenty to fifty years of age. Up above the village, on the slope is the vineyard of Les Perrières, which is not a monopole of Domaine Ferret, but where they have a one hectare parcel of vines. Interestingly, Les Perrières is the only vineyard on this hillside that has a southerly exposition, as almost all the other vineyards here face back east towards the village center. The domaine's hectare of vines in Les Perrières are thirty-five years of age. For many decades, Domaine Ferret has labeled these two wines as *Tête de Cru*, which is one of their two designations for their top, single vineyard wines. A third single vineyard wine was added to the lineup in more recent times and also designated as *Tête de Cru*, the Clos des Prouges, which was first produced on its own in the 2011 vintage. The domaine has two hectares of vines in the Clos des Prouges, which also lies close to the village of Fuissé in the center of the appellation, with an easterly exposition and a gentle slope. Domaine Ferret's vines in Clos des Prouges are of three different ages, as one-third are young vines only planted in 2006, with one-third having been planted in 1986 and the final third dating back to 1956. The youngest vines here do not go into the single vineyard bottling.

The other top designation for single vineyard bottlings at Domaine Ferret is *Cuvée Hors Classé*, which is now used for the single vineyard bottlings here from *lieux à dits* such as Les Ménétrières and Tournant de Pouilly. Back in Madame Jeanne Ferret's time, she considered her *Tête de Cru* bottlings to be her premier crus, and those that she designated as *Cuvée Hors Classé* as her grand cru bottlings. This is still considered the pecking order up to the present time at Domaine Ferret, though I have to confess that in my experience, I have a hard time ranking one classification here as higher than the other, as in many past vintages, *Tête de Cru* bottlings such as Perrières or le Clos from the domaine have been amongst the very finest Pouilly-Fuissé

bottlings that I have tasted from a given vintage, and I have never been able to notice a step up in quality with bottlings labeled as *Cuvée Hors Classé*. However, maybe as my experience continues to grow with the wines from Domaine Ferret, I may start to see the difference between the two levels here. The vineyard of Les Ménétrières lies due north of the village center of Fuissé, with a southerly exposition and a fairly rich topsoil of clay and alluvial deposits, over a subsoil of limestone marl. Some of the domaine's vines here are only ten years of age, with the balance ranging from twenty to forty years old. They have less than one hectare in Les Ménétrières. This is another of the older single vineyard cuvées from the domaine, as Madame Colette Ferret was producing a bottling from this vineyard as far back as the early 1990s. A more recent addition to the *Cuvée Hors Classé* level at Domaine Ferret is their Tournant de Pouilly bottling, which was only started a few years prior to Maison Jadot purchasing the estate. This vineyard lies northeast of Les Ménétrières and is closer to the tiny hamlet of Pouilly than it is to the town of Fuissé (as the name implies), with an easterly exposition and some of the oldest vines that Domaine Ferret farms, as the average age of vines here is fully fifty years of age and many are quite a bit older than this. The estate owns one hectare in Tournant de Pouilly.

I should mention that Madame Jeanne Ferret started bottling cuvées labeled as either *Cuvée Hors Classé* or *Tête de Cru* in advance of the labeling of her first single vineyard bottlings in the early 1980s. She used these designations going back as far as the early 1970s, but without the name of the vineyard appearing on the label over the first dozen years or so that she used the two designations. During the decade of the 1970s, Madame Ferret was already beginning to bottle some of her single vineyards on their own, though this information would not appear on the label for another ten years or more. In these earliest days of the two quality designations, the criteria for whether or not Le Clos, Tournant de Pouilly, Les Ménétrières or Les Perrières would be bottled as either *Cuvée Hors Classé* or *Tête de Cru* in a given vintage depended on how well that particular parcel of vines had fared in a given year, so that in some years, the *Cuvée Hors Classé* bottling might be based on the wine from Le Clos or Les Ménétrières, and in another vintage, the wine from that particular vineyard might be bottled with a *Tête de Cru* neck label instead and perhaps the Les Perrières might merit a designation as *Cuvée Hors Classé*. And in lesser years, there were no wines designated with the *Cuvée Hors Classé* or *Tête de Cru* labels and everything would be released simply as Domaine Ferret Pouilly-Fuissé.

In addition to the five single vineyard bottlings produced today at Domaine Ferret, the winery also now crafts a straight, blended bottling simply labeled as Pouilly-Fuissé, and three other wines that are more specific geographical cuvées that focus in on more precise sub-sectors of the appellation. These three are the "Autour de Fuissé", "Autour de la Roche" and "Sous Vergisson" cuvées. These three cuvées are made a bit differently than the single vineyard bottlings, which tend to be entirely barrel-fermented, as here a significant percentage of each bottling is fermented in either cement or enamel tanks and the balance in cask, with none of these wines ever seeing any new oak. For example, the Autour de Fuissé and the Autour de la Roche bottlings are done in fifty percent fermented in enamel-lined concrete tanks and fifty percent in older barrels; the Sous Vergisson is fermented in seventy-five percent enamel tanks and twenty-five percent previously-used casks. All three of these bottlings tend to be made either from the younger vines in the vineyards where the domaine produces a single vineyard bottling from older vines, or from small, well-situated parcels in the same sub-regions, where there is not enough production to make a single vineyard wine. Consequently, vine age for these wines can range

from ten years up to forty years of age. The entry level bottling of Pouilly-Fuissé here is from vineyards across the entire appellation and is again, a fifty-fifty blend of enamel-lined tanks and barrel-fermented juice, with the wine raised in two to five wine casks.



The beautiful Roche de Solutré, one of the two peaks that dominate the landscape in the north of Pouilly-Fuissé.

While the emphasis has been on continuity at Domaine Ferret since its purchase by Maison Jadot in 2008, building upon the substantial legacy of Mesdames Jeanne and Colette Ferret, there have been a few changes at the estate since the transition to Jadot ownership. The first was Audrey Braccini deciding to utilize only indigenous yeasts for the fermentation of the wines, as Mesdames Ferret had previously used commercial yeasts for their ferments. The other major change was the construction, completed in time for the 2012 harvest, of a modern winemaking facility for Domaine Ferret, which allowed Madame Braccini the room necessary to ferment more parcels on their own and to be able to move all of the wines by gravity, rather than having to pump the wines to move them about in the cellar. Domaine Ferret owns fully forty-five separate parcels of vines amongst its eighteen hectares in the appellation, and since the construction of the new *cuvée* and *chais*, each parcel has been vinified separately, so that blending decisions can be fine-tuned for certain cuvées and the single vineyard wines can be treated as optimally as possible, with the size of fermenters fitted to each vineyards' production levels.

For the 2015 vintage, Domaine Ferret began picking on August 28th, with ripeness being pushed briskly across the finish line by the arrival of southerly winds out of Africa, which arrived around the 25th of the month and kept temperatures high and sent sugars climbing briskly at the end of the growing cycle in the Mâconnais. To try and offset this to some degree, Audrey Braccini and her team at Domaine Ferret decided to only pick grapes in the morning, so as to guard the acidity in the grapes as well as possible and kept the berries chilled until they had arrived at the cellars to be pressed. They are a very strong set of wines from a very ripe year, but

they are not necessarily classical expressions of their respective *terroirs*, which are far more representative in the 2014s that I have tasted from the domaine. Happily, the American importer, Kobrand, still had a couple of the fine 2014s from the domaine in house, which they kindly sent along to go with the newly released 2015s, so I was able to append notes on the 2014 Ménétrières and Perrières to the notes on the 2015s, just to give a better sense of the more classic expressions of each vineyard bottling in a more typical vintage.

2015 Pouilly-Fuissé- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The “straight” Pouilly-Fuissé from Domaine Ferret is a lovely bottle in 2015, with the ripeness of the vintage nicely managed and the wine comes in listed at 13.5 percent octane. This is made from the younger vines (ten to thirty-five years of age) in some of the domaine’s top holdings. The bouquet is fresh and bright, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, a touch of tangerine, iodine, pretty soil tones, hints of the nuttiness to come with bottle age and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with a fine core, the broad shoulders of the vintage and a long, focused and gently warm finish. I would guess that this is a bit higher in octane than the stated level, but it is still very tasty for early drinking. 2017-2020. **88.**

2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Autour de la Roche”- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2015 Autour de la Roche bottling from Domaine Ferret is also listed at 13.5 percent, but again, it is probably a bit higher in alcohol in this vintage. This wine hails from the vineyards near the Roche de Vergisson, where the schist soils were a bit affected by hydric stress during the torrid growing season. The nose here is lovely, delivering a mix of pear, fresh almond, a touch of pastry cream, a nice touch of soil, spring flowers and just a hint of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, good acids and a long, ripe and succulent finish. This too shows just a whisper of backend heat, but it is drinking with plenty of personality already. 2017-2022. **89.**

2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Tournant de Pouilly” Cuvée Hors Classé- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2015 Tournant de Pouilly bottling from Domaine Ferret is one of their riper wines in this vintage, being listed at a full fourteen percent alcohol. This vineyard has an easterly exposition, but is located in the warmer microclimate north of the village of Fuissé and planted with vines that are fifty years of age. The 2015 Tournant de Pouilly was barrel-fermented and raised in twenty percent new wood in this vintage. The wine delivers lovely purity on the nose, with scents of pear, white peach, almond, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and crisp, with a fine core, good soil signature and a long, focused and juicy finish. Though this is listed as a bit higher in octane than the two wines above, it seems to handle its alcohol better and I do not get the same sense of heat on the finish here. Good juice, but again, for the relative near-term. 2017-2023. **90.**

2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Les Ménétrières” Cuvée Hors Classé - Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2015 Les Ménétrières from Domaine Ferret is another pretty ripe wine, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol, as is the case with so many examples of Pouilly-Fuissé in the hot summer of 2015. The wine has retained very lovely freshness on the nose for its level, offering up a bright and complex blend of apple, white peach, acacia blossoms, chalky soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely precise for its octane, with a generous core of fruit, bright acids, lovely early complexity and a long, gently warm finish. I would opt for drinking this wine on the younger side, as it is hard to envision it

maintaining its lovely current balance a decade down the road, given its ripeness level. But, it will be a tasty drink for the next half dozen years or so. 2017-2023. **91.**

2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Clos des Prouges” Tête de Cru- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2015 Clos des Prouges Tête de Cru from Domaine Ferret is riper than customary for this bottling, coming in listed at 14.5 percent octane. The wine is raised in one-third new oak, with the balance one and two wine casks. The 2015 version is deeply-pitched on the nose, offering up scents of peach, pastry cream, pear, a touch of nutskin and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and pretty well-balanced for its octane, with plenty of mid-palate richness, good acids and a long, nascently complex and focused finish. Again, though this is listed at 14.5 percent octane, I do not get much impression of backend heat, which is quite impressive. This is still nicely primary in terms of flavor development and has pretty good acids, but I do not really have much experience with how white wines at 14.5 percent will age over the long haul, so I would still be inclined to drink this on the younger side. 2017-2025+? **90.**



The les Perrières vineyard, looking back down at the village of Fuissé.

2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Les Perrières” Tête de Cru- Domaine J. A. Ferret

As mentioned above, the vineyard of Les Perrières is a bit unique in its band of *lieux à dits* on the hillsides above the village of Fuissé, as it has a due south exposition, unlike most of its neighbors that face east. This has given the 2015 Perrières from Domaine Ferret a tad higher alcohol than the Le Clos for example, as this bottling reached a robust 14.5 percent octane. However, it is impeccably balanced at this alcohol level and seems likely to age longer and with more grace than the other single vineyard bottlings that came in at 14.5 percent in this vintage. The bouquet is really beautiful, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, hints of pastry cream, almond, a complex base of soil, orange blossoms and just a whisper of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile for a ripe wine, with a

lovely core, excellent backend mineral drive, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is terrific wine! 2017-2035+. **93.**

2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Le Clos” Tête de Cru- Domaine J. A. Ferret

The 2015 Pouilly-Fuissé “Le Clos” from Domaine Ferret is a tad lower in alcohol than either the Ménétrières or Tournant de Pouilly bottlings, perhaps owing to its due easterly exposition. This comes in at an even fourteen percent and is quite a bit more primary in profile than the riper crus in the Ferret lineup this year. The bouquet delivers a youthful blend of apple, peach, hazelnuts, superb soil tones, wild flowers and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, broad-shouldered and quite full, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, impressive nascent complexity and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. Madame Braccini feels this will be the real long distance runner amongst her 2015s and I am in full agreement. Fine juice in the making, but this will stay quite primary for the next few years and I would tuck it away in the cellar for a short time. 2020-2040. **93.**

2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “Les Ménétrières” Cuvée Hors Classé - Domaine J. A. Ferret

Domaine Ferret’s 2014 vintage of Les Ménétrières is far more classical in profile, coming in a full degree lower in alcohol than the ripe 2015 version. This is a beautiful wine on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, a touch of orange peel, gentle notes of iodine, beautiful soil tones and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and complex, with excellent depth at the core, fine soil signature, bright, zesty acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This was bottled in a more reductive state than many previous vintages here, which I assume mirrors techniques in the Côte de Beaune these days to hold off premox as long as possible. If you intend to drink the wine sooner, it really blossoms nicely if given a short decant before serving. Lovely juice. 2017-2030. **92+.**

2014 Pouilly-Fuissé “Les Perrières” Tête de Cru- Domaine J. A. Ferret

Audrey Braccini’s 2014 version of les Perrières is a beautiful wine in the making, with superb soil signature in evidence on both the nose and palate. The youthfully complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of white peach, apple, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and still fairly primary, with lovely depth at the core, bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, pure and nascently complex finish that deserves a few years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Just lovely juice in the making. 2019-2035. **93+.**



Alphabetical Listing of Producers and Their Wines Covered in This Feature:

L. Aubry Fils (Jouey-lès-Reims): Premier Cru Brut NV; “Premier Cru” Brut Rosé NV; 2008 “Aubry de Humbert” Brut Millésime;

H. Billiot Fils (Ambonnay): “Brut Réserve” Grand Cru NV; “Brut Rosé” Grand Cru NV;

Le Brun Servenay (Avize): “Mélodie en C” Extra Brut NV; “Odalie” Brut NV; 2006 Blanc de Blancs “Vieilles Vignes” Extra Brut Millésime; 2008 “Exhilerante” Vieilles Vignes Extra Brut Millésime;

Chartogne-Taillet(Merfy): “Chemin de Reims” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; “Heurtebise” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Cuvée Sainte Anne” Extra Brut NV;

Gaston Chiquet (Dizy): “Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ” Grand Cru Brut NV; Brut “Tradition” NV; Premier Cru Brut Rosé NV;

Demièrre-Ansiot (Oger): Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; 2012 “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Vintage Brut; 2010 “Neyrot” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature;

José Dhondt (Oger): Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; Rosé de Saignée Brut NV; 2010 “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;

Dhondt-Grellet (Flavigny): “les Terres Fines” Blc de Blc 1er Cru Extra Brut NV; “Prestige du Moulin” Blc de Blc Grand Cru Brut NV; 2012 “le Bateau” Blc de Blc Gr. Cru Extra Brut NV;

Duval-Leroy (Vertus): Brut NV;

Alexandre Filaine (Damery): “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV Magnum; 2008 “Sensuum Vertigo” Brut Millésime;

Champagne Geoffroy (Aÿ): “Pureté” Brut Nature NV; “Expression” Brut NV; 2009 “Cuvée Empreinte” Brut Millésime;

Pierre Gimonnet et Fils (Cuis): “Cuvée Cuis” 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Rosé de Blancs” Brut NV; 2008 “Cuvée Fleuron” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;

Gosset (Épernay): Grand Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV;

H. Goutorbe (Aÿ): “Cuvée Préstige” Brut NV;

Marc Hébrart (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ): “Brut Sélection” Premier Cru NV; Brut Rosé Premier Cru NV; 2012 “Special Club” Brut Millésime;

Charles Heidsieck (Reims): 1995 “Blanc de Millenaires” Brut Millésime;

Jacquesson Cuvée 736 (Dizy): “Dégorgement Tardif” Extra Brut NV;

Krug (Reims): Grande Cuvée “160th Édition” Brut NV ID# 214031; 2004 Vintage Brut ID# 116006; 1979 Vintage Brut;

Jean Lallement et Fils (Verzenay): Brut NV; “Cuvée Réserve” Brut NV; “Réserve Rosée” Brut NV;

Lallier (Aÿ): 2008 Brut Millésime;

Georges Laval (Cumières): “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (375 ml.); “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (jeroboam); “Cumières” Brut Nature Rosé NV;

Marie-Noëlle Ledru (Ambonnay): Brut NV; 2008 Brut Nature Millésime; 2006 Brut Nature Millésime;

Gérard Lorient (Mesnil le Huttier): “Brut Tradition” NV; “Brut Sélection” NV; Rosé de Saignée Brut NV;

Arnaud Margaine (Villers-Marmery): “le Brut” Premier Cru NV; Brut Rosé NV;

Champagne Minière F & R (Hermonville): “Absolu” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Influence” Brut Rosé NV;

Moët et Chandon (Épernay): 1975 “Grand Vintage” Brut Magnum;

Robert Moncuit (Mesnil-sur-Oger): Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV; 2008 “les Chétillons” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut;

Moussé Fils (Cuisles): “l’Or d’Eugène” Solera Blanc de Noirs Brut NV; l’Or d’Eugène l’Extra” Solera Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV; “Rosé Effusion” Brut NV;

Bruno Paillard (Reims): “Première Cuvée” Extra Brut NV; “Première Cuvée” Rosé Extra Brut NV; 2002 Blanc de Blanc Brut Millésime Magnum; 2002 “Assemblage” Brut Millésime; 2002 “Nec Plus Ultra” Brut Millésime;

Pehu Simonet (Verzenay): “Face Nord” Grand Cru Brut NV; “Face Nord” Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV;

Pierre Péters (Mesnil-sur-Oger): “Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV;

Champagne Salmon (Chaumazy): “Montgolfière” Brut NV; “Meunier” Brut NV; Brut NV; 2012 “Special Club” Brut Zero; 2012 “Rosé de Saignée” Extra Brut Millésime;

Champagne Frédéric Savart (Écueil): “l’Ouverture” 1er Cru Brut NV; “l’Accomplie” Vieilles Vignes 1er Cru Brut NV; “Bulle de Rosé” 1er Cru Brut NV (Disgorged 1/17); “Bulle de Rosé” 1er Cru Brut NV (Disgorged 9/16);

Guillaume Sergent (Vrigny): *“les Prés Dieu” Extra Brut; “le Chemin des Chappes” Extra Brut;*

Varnier-Fannière (Avize): *Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV; “Cuvée St. Denis” Grand Cru Brut NV;*

Vazart-Coquart (Chouilly): *Blanc de Blancs “Réserve” Brut NV; Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV; 2009 “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2008 “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;*

Vilmart et Cie (Rilly-la-Montagne): *2008 “Coeur de Cuvée” Brut Millésime;*

THE BI-ANNUAL CHAMPAGNE REPORT PART TWO- OCTOBER 2017



One of the Marc Chagall stained glass windows in the cathedral in Reims.

This remains an excellent moment to be buying Champagne for the cellar, as the market continues to have lots of examples of non-vintage bottlings based on the superb 2012 vintage still in the pipeline, not to mention some pretty impressive vintage cuvées from previous top years like 2008. Many of the smaller, grower Champagne producers are segueing into wines from the base years of 2013 and 2014 at the present time, but those producers who can afford to age their wines a bit longer *sur latte* prior to release are just getting into their 2012 base year wines, so there are still lots of outstanding wines to choose from at the non-vintage level. I have started to see a few more of the 2012 vintage-dated bottlings appearing in the marketplace, and the next year or two should see a plethora of releases from this vintage and it would make a lot of sense for collectors to pay attention to this vintage, as it is an absolutely complete and compelling year that will rival the best from 2002 and 2008 in the fullness of time. As I mentioned in Part One of the bi-annual coverage on Champagne, the 2013 vintage, which is the base year for a great many non-vintage wines in the market at the present time, is a very good year as well, with plenty of cut and mineral drive and these too are very, very satisfying examples of non-vintage wines. It was a late harvest, as the spring was cool and grumpy and it was not until beautiful weather arrived in September that everything ripened up properly in time

for harvest. I imagine that many houses will not produce a 2013 vintage wine, given how superb is the preceding year's quality, but it is a very good base year for the non-vintage wines and the top estates will have made non-vintage bottlings that age long and gracefully. The biggest caveat with 2013 is that localized hail damage midsummer cut down the size of the crop rather notably in some communes.

We are also starting to see the first of the non-vintage cuvées based on the 2014 vintage arriving in the market, usually from the smaller growers who do not have the financial wherewithal or the bottle stocks in the cellar to age their wines longer on their fine lees prior to disgorgement and selling them to clients. 2014 is another pretty good year, but it was not up to the quality of the previous two growing seasons, with the possible exception of chardonnay, which did particularly well in 2014. It was a warm spring and an early flowering in the Champagne region in 2014 and the vines were a couple of weeks ahead of schedule going into the second half of the summer. However, August turned cool and rainy and the prospects of an early harvest disappeared under the consistently damp and grey weather of the month. As the flowering had been very good, the crop was large and with poor August weather, concerns of ripening the fruit completely started to be quite real, but fortunately, September turned warmer and sunny again and the crop was able to get across the finish line in good shape and at a very respectable, if not outstanding level of ripeness by the time the grapes found their way to the cellars. To underline just how successful chardonnay was in 2014 (the same looks to be true in 2017 as well), there are reports that Taittinger's Comtes de Champagne will be produced in 2014, as well as Krug's Clos du Mesnil, so there will probably be some other 2014 Blanc de Blancs vintage bottlings, but do not expect a whole lot of other 2014 vintage-dated wines that include pinot noir or pinot meunier in their blends, as these two grapes did not succeed to the same degree as chardonnay in this vintage.

This autumn has also seen the release of a couple of major vintage-dated bottlings from the *Grandes Marques*, as Krug has rolled out there 2004 Vintage Brut and Bruno Paillard is releasing the long-awaited 2002 version of their *Tête de Cuvée*, Nec Plus Ultra or N.P.U. The 2004 Krug is absolutely brilliant and the finest example of the vintage (along with Louis Roederer's Cristal) that I have tasted from this vintage. Interestingly, given how racy and minerally many 2004s were upon release, the utterly suave and refined palate impression of the 2004 Krug is quite remarkable. The wine is drinking really beautifully out of the blocks and is far more enjoyable in the glass today than the great 2002 here, which still needs plenty of bottle age to really start to blossom, and I would suggest that drinking the 2004 Krug and letting the 2002 continue to hibernate for the next decade (at least) would be a very good strategy for those cellaring vintage Krug. This great estate has also just re-released the 160th Édition of their Grande Cuvée (which is also based on the 2004 vintage) alongside of the 2004 Vintage Brut, and it too is really drinking splendidly at the present time. Turning to the great year of 2002, Bruno Paillard has finally released his N.P.U. cuvée, and it is without a doubt the finest young vintage I have tasted of this superb *Tête de Cuvée* bottling. The wine was aged fully thirteen years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and then another year or more in the cellars, prior to its release into the market at age fifteen and it is one of the great, superstars of the legendary 2002 vintage!

As I have written about pretty extensively in the past, but have not touched upon in recent iterations of this report, I still believe that Champagne remains one of the very best opportunities

in the present day market for cellaring. Too much of Champagne purchases tend to get drunk up within a few weeks (or hours) of acquisition, and too many bottles still tend to be opened as celebratory wines or *aperitifs* for larger tastings of still wines. It makes me a little crazy to see so many great bottles of Champagne quaffed without even a moment's consideration as small talk is exchanged prior to the start of wine tastings, when many times the bubbly ends up being one of the best wines at the event! Sure, Champagne remains a great wine to simply throw back at the end of a long day or to mark an important celebration, but it is so much more than that and not enough wine collectors treat the wine as other wines in their cellars, making sure that the wines are properly settled in from travel, chilled to the proper temperature and served in the correct glass (not a white wine glass in my book, as I like the *mousse* to still be in the glass when I drink it!) so that the wine can be savored to its utmost level of enjoyment. Champagne remains a painstakingly crafted wine that deserves to be focused on with critical faculties at full attention, and too often it simply slakes the thirst over chit-chat before a tasting or dinner really gets rolling and its magical quality gets partially overlooked. Treat that bubbly with the respect it deserves!

Along these lines, I still want to encourage collectors to start thinking about putting more Champagne into the cellar and aging it in the same fashion as other wines in their collections. This exhortation is not directed exclusively at vintage-dated bottlings, but also the top quality non-vintage bottlings that we see more and more of in the market each and every year. If I may use the Burgundy analogy for a moment, try to think of non-vintage bottlings of Champagne much like the top growers' bottlings of *Villages* level wines, which will blossom beautifully and grow in both breed and complexity with some extended bottle age. It took me a long time of Burgundy collecting to learn that I should be buying *Villages* bottlings from people like Christophe Roumier, the Mugneret sisters, the Lafarge family and Domaine Dujac (to name just a few), and if I had learned this sooner, my cellar would not have been quite so denuded of top premier crus from vintages of the 1980s and early 1990s, all drunk long before their true apogees, as I could have been nipping at my bottles of *Villages* in those earlier days and left the premier crus resting comfortably alongside of the grand crus from each vintage. Non-vintage Champagne fills this same sort of niche in the cellar beautifully, as this level of wine really does improve dramatically with at least a handful of years in the cellar after its release, and it can cruise along superbly for a quarter century from a top producer with no difficulties whatsoever, so why not tuck a few cases away and let time work its magic on these wines? And in my experience, I am yet to see one example of premature oxidation from a bottle of Champagne!

This approach to cellaring Champagne can only be more rewarding in our present era, when a number of the very top Grower Champagne producers are making wines that absolutely need some time in the cellar to blossom and come into their true plateaus of maturity. These smaller producers do not have the luxury of deep stocks of bottles to appease demand of clients while their younger wines evolve with further bottle age at the *maison*, so circumstances will very often demand that these bottles are released several years before they are really ready to drink. Maybe a generation down the road, the most successful small growers will have been able to build up stocks and age their wines longer *sur latte* before disgorging and release to their thirsty clients, but right now, the vast majority still have to send their wines out into the market when they are pretty youthful. So, treat them accordingly and start putting them away for some extended cellaring before starting to drink them up and witness the beauty of blossoming maturity for these wines. And, it is not only the small growers whose wines fall into this

category, as non-vintage bottlings from many of the highest quality *Grandes Marques* are also superb candidates for the cellar and deserve to be given more time in the bottle. For example, the Première Cuvée bottling from Bruno Paillard is one of the best values in the world of Champagne for long-term cellaring amongst the *Grandes Marques*, and a wine like this will repay ten or twenty years in the cellar with tenfold complexity and refinement. I was actually discussing this with Monsieur Paillard on his most recent visit to New York in October, and hope to report on a vertical tasting of Première Cuvée after my next visit to the cellars in Reims next spring.

I should also mention that one of my absolute favorite, small growers has now officially retired. As I have written about in the past, Marie-Noëlle Ledru in Ambonnay had begun to prepare for her eventual retirement a few years ago, as she has no heirs to take the reins of the family domaine in future generations. She had handed back several hectares of family-owned vines to her brothers and sisters back in 2011, as the prospect of retirement started to hover on the edge of the horizon, and has only been farming 1.7 hectares of vines in the village of Ambonnay since that time. I have now heard definitively that the 2016 harvest was her last and there will be no Domaine Ledru wines from 2017 forwards. Of course, given that Champagne has to age for several years in the cellars before it can be released, there will still be a few more bottles coming in the years to come, but the small supply that Madame Ledru has been producing since 2011 is now officially finite and there will be no replenishing of stocks in the cellar after the 2016 vintage here. Madame Ledru is one of the most talented *vignerottes* I have ever had the pleasure to meet in Champagne, as well as one of the nicest and most gracious people, and her legacy will live on long after the last of her bottles have been sold out into the market. But, if you want to have some of her wines in your collection (and they age brilliantly over the long haul), it is now high time to start to search them out, as they will not be around for all that many more years. Madame Ledru has had a brilliant career and I only wish I had the chance to visit her at the domaine many years ago, instead of only getting to know her a bit as she was winding down and preparing for eventual retirement.

The following notes are organized a bit differently than in past iterations of this report, as I have now begun to group Extra Brut bottlings alongside those of Brut cuvées, instead of listing them in the section with Brut Nature and Brut Zero wines. My reasoning for this is that we are seeing lower *dosage* for a great many Brut cuvées in the last several years, and the difference between wines listed as Brut and Extra Brut seems to be smaller than was the case a decade ago. My impression is that many wine lovers are not going to find dramatic differences in levels of sweetness (or austerity) between Brut and Extra Brut these days, whereas the non-*dosé* wines will continue to stand out as targeting a more specific subset of the wine-drinking public that really wants a bone dry bottle of bubbly. As there are, of courses, gradations on the scales of *dosage* for both Brut and Extra Brut, there can still be dramatic differences, but more often than note these days, it is the Brut bottling that has too generous a *dosage* that sticks out more than the Extra Brut bottling that seems too austere and acidic. As we are also starting to see more *vignerons* who bottle at the Extra Brut level extend the amount of time the wine ages *sur latte* prior to release, there are less well-made, but overtly austere Extra Brut bottlings hitting the market each year, so it seems to make more sense to group these wines alongside the Brut bottlings. The other change I have made is to put the date of disgorgement now right before the projected window of drinkability, as this information has not been appearing in the database.



Marie-Noëlle Ledru, a couple of years ago, in her tasting room in her small family domaine in Ambonnay.

For my own palate, I still tend to prefer wines with at least a bit of *dosage* to bottlings that have none, with the exception of a few folks such as Vincent Laval, who has always worked with the very ripe fruit of Cumières and aged his top, non-*dosé* bottlings for a long time in his cellars prior to releasing them. These days, and I am sure this reflects a bit of evolution with my Champagne palate, I tend to not want to go above seven or eight grams per liter for *dosage* (and this for wines that have fairly high acids that need buffering) and generally do not want to go too much below 3.5 grams per liter of residual sugar. I try to be cognizant of what a winemaker is aiming for when tasting Champagne and grade wines based on the perceived intentions of the producer (and how successfully they have realized their vision), particularly with very low *dosage* or non-*dosé* wines, but in terms of my personal Champagne drinking habits, I am far more likely to reach for a bottle with at least a modicum of *dosage* when I am pulling wines out of my cellar for dinner, rather than a bottle that is very low or non-*dosé*. I still note that amongst younger *vignerons* and sommeliers, the trend to make and drink Champagne at very low or no *dosage* levels continues to have quite a bit of momentum, but I am still not sure how much long-term traction these bottlings will have with the broader sections of the Champagne-drinking public. And, I am also not certain of how these very low or non-*dosé* wines will age over the long haul, as the role of *dosage* in the evolution of a bottle of Champagne over thirty or forty years may be quite important, particularly for wines that do not hail from villages such as the “Sun Bowl” of Cumières and the like. So, I hope that we will continue to see *dosage* used judiciously for most cuvées, rather than completely turned away from by talented young producers enamored of the current trend for little or no *dosage*, as I would hate to see the truly

excellent work being done in the vineyards and cellars by so many producers these days lost over the long haul, because a bit of *dosage* turned out to be a key building block to a bottle of Champagne aging harmoniously over thirty years or more.

Non-Vintage Non-Dosé

Champagne Geoffroy “Pureté” Brut Nature NV (Aÿ)

The Champagne Geoffroy “Pureté” Brut Nature is composed of a blend of fifty percent pinot meunier and equal parts of chardonnay and pinot noir and the *vins clairs* do not go through malolactic fermentation. The current release is from the base year of 2010, with reserve wines from 2009, so this wine spent more than five years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is pure and classy, offering up scents of apple, bread dough, lovely minerality, a touch of fresh almond and a hint of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still plenty brisk structurally, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, bone-dry and very nicely balanced finish. This is very well done in its style, with sufficient bottle age buffering the acids pretty well today and allowing the wine to drink with generosity, despite its bone dry personality. Good juice. (*Disgorged June 2016*). 2017-2030+. **91**.

Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (375 ml.)

I cannot recall exactly when Vincent Laval started to age his Cumières bottling for a bit shorter time in the cellar- it used to be four years *sur latte*, but demand for the wine has forced Vincent to shorten up its time in the cellars prior to release- so, I am not sure if this would have been base year 2009 or 2010. In either case, this would have been composed of the traditional *cépages* for this cuvée of fifty percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot meunier. The wine is drinking very nicely out of half bottle, offering up a complex nose of apple, tart orange, plenty of smokiness, a touch of caraway seed and superb base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complexity, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, poised and blossoming finish. Lovely juice. (*Disgorged September 2014*.) 2017-2030+. **92**.

Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (jeroboam)

The Cumières Brut Nature from the base year of 2011 from Vincent Laval has turned out very well indeed for the vintage, but out of such a large bottle, this is still on the young side and needs a bit more bottle age. The bouquet delivers a fine, youthful constellation of apple, tart orange, *patissière*, chalky soil tones and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very primary, with good depth at the core (but not quite up to Monsieur Laval’s very high standards in most vintages, but this is 2011 after all), elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. (*Base Year 2011*.) 2021-2045+. **91**+

Blanc de Blancs Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut

Le Brun Servenay “Mélodie en C” Extra Brut NV (Avize)

The Le Brun Servenay “Mélodie en C” Extra Brut is composed entirely of chardonnay, but it is not listed as a Blanc de Blancs on the label. The wine is from the base year of 2013 and spent three years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement and finishing with a very modest *dosage* of three grams per liter. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, delicious apple, limestone minerality, fresh almond, hints of the pastry cream to come, white flowers and gentle upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied

and rock solid at the core, with a youthful personality, slightly coarse *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. The aromatics here are first class and I would expect the wine to open up nicely on the palate with a bit more bottle age. (*Disgorged January 2017*). 2019-2030+. **90+**.

Chartogne-Taillet “Chemin de Reims” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Merfy)

The Chemin de Reims bottling from Alexandre Chartogne is composed entirely of chardonnay and the new release is from the base year of 2011. The wine spent five years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of 5.5 grams per liter. The wine offers up beautiful complexity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, brioche, spring flowers, complex, chalky soil tones and a bit of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and marvelously balanced, with bright acids, excellent focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is so well-balanced that it is very easy to drink out of the blocks, but it has fine structure and I cannot wait to drink it ten years down the road. For a 2011 wine, it is pretty extraordinary! (*Disgorged March 2017*.) 2017-2040. **92**.

Chartogne-Taillet “Heurtebise” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Merfy)

Like the Chemin de Reims, the new release of Heurtebise from Alexandre Chartogne is from the 2011 vintage. The wine spent five years aging on its fine lees and was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The nose is pure and complex, offering up scents of apple, pear, toasted almond, incipient *crème patissière*, chalky minerality, smoke and just a whisper of vanillin oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and mineral drive, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and a young, complex and impressively long and well-balanced finish. Fine juice in the making, the 2011 Heurtebise is already tasty, but really needs a few more years to fully relax on the palate and drink with distinction. (*Disgorged March 2017*). 2017-2040. **93**.

Gaston Chiquet “Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ” Grand Cru Brut NV (Dizy)

Nicolas Chiquet’s rare Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ is still from the base year of 2012, but this is a more recent disgorgement than the bottle I reported on last summer. As readers may recall, this wine spends three years aging *sur latte* before disgorgement. The bouquet is deep and lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, brioche, a fine, fine base of soil, spring flowers and just a touch of upper register smokiness that should become more pronounced with bottle age. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still quite tightly-knit, with a fine core of fruit, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, youthful and promising finish. While this is certainly quite drinkable today, it really deserves a bit of bottle age to really blossom. (*Disgorged May 2016*.) 2018-2035. **91**.

Demièvre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Oger)

Nicolas Demièvre makes lovely non-vintage Blanc de Blancs and his new release, from the base year of 2013, is a fine follow-up to last year’s fine bottling. Like all of the Demièvre wines, this is a non-malo Champagne. The wine is still quite youthful on the nose, delivering a fine blend of lemon, apple, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a nice topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, and still youthfully snappy, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, promising finish. This cannot quite match the same mid-palate dimension as last year’s version, from the superb 2012 vintage, but this is another very fine bottle of Blanc de Blancs that will age nicely and drink with generosity with another six or seven months’ worth of bottle age. (*Disgorged January 2017*.) 2018-2030+. **90**.

José Dhondt Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Oger)

José Dhondt Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut is always a nicely structured wine out of the blocks and has a very good track record of aging over the medium-term. The new release is from the base year of 2014 and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter, so this is still a young wine and will be even better in the next year or two, once the acids have had a chance to relax a bit. The wine is bright and focused on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, lemon, chalky minerality, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very vibrant in personality, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and balance and a long, zesty and still youthful finish. I would start drinking this wine next year, but plan to hold bottles back until 2019 or 2020 to really get the full expression of the wine. (*Disgorged February 2017.*) 2018-2030. **90.**

Dhondt-Grellet “les Terres Fines” Blc de Blc 1er Cru Extra Brut NV (Flavigny)

The Dhondt-Grellet “les Terres Fines” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is an outstanding wine. All of the grapes for this bottling hail from the village of Cuis, with the current release being from the base year of 2013, with thirty percent reserve wines added from the domaine’s solera, which dates back to 1986. The wine is finished with a *dosage* of 1.2 grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of pear, hazelnut, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality, a touch of oak and a beautifully smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully snappy, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, slightly coarse *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and quite bone-dry finish. I would have liked to have seen this wine with a bit more *dosage*, as the acids are plenty racy here and a bit of buffering *dosage* would have made it less of a specialists’ drink right out of the blocks. That said, the raw materials here are very high class. (*Disgorged June 2016.*) 2019-2030+. **89.**

Dhondt-Grellet “Prestige du Moulin” Blc de Blc Grand Cru Brut NV (Flavigny)

Adrien Dhondt may be only twenty-five years of age, but he is really making high class bubbly since taking over the direction of the estate from his parents in the last few years. Adrien only uses the family’s parcels in the grand cru village of Cramant for this bottling, which hails from the base year of 2013 and again includes thirty percent reserve wines from the solera dating back to 1986. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter. The bouquet here is excellent, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of pear, *crème patissière*, almond, chalky soil tones, a touch of buttery oak, spring flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and loaded with personality, with a fine core, beautiful focus and balance, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. The *dosage* here really plays to the wine’s advantage, as the acids are buffered nicely and make the wine very tasty right out of the blocks. Fine juice. (*Disgorged July 2016.*) 2017-2035. **92.**

Pierre Gimmonnet et Fils “Cuvée Cuis” 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cuis)

The Gimmonnet “Cuvée Cuis” currently in the market is from the base year of 2013, with thirty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines that date back to 2009. The wine delivers fine aromatics in its mix of pear, apple, pastry cream, a touch of almond, limestone minerality and white flowers. On the palate the wine is still young and snappy, with a full-bodied format, good mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is still a puppy and needs some bottle age to allow the wine to relax a bit structurally, but there are good raw materials here and this wine will be very tasty when it has had a chance to settle in. (*Disgorged December 2016.*) 2018-2030. **88+.**

Gosset Grand Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Épernay)

The new release of Gosset Grand Blanc de Blancs is young and very, very promising. The bouquet offers up a reserved, but deep and precise blend of apple, pear, chalky minerality, incipient notes of *crème patissière*, spring flowers and brioche. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nascently complex, with excellent focus and balance, refined, frothy *mousse*, fine grip and a long, poised and very elegant finish. This is approachable today, but like all top Gosset bottlings, this is really made for the cellar and will be even more interesting five years down the road. 2017-2040. **93.**

Champagne Minière F & R “Absolu” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Hermonville)

The *vins clairs* for the Absolu Blanc de Blancs from Champagne Minière are barrel-fermented and do not go through malolactic fermentation. The current release is from the base year of 2010, with eighteen percent of the blend reserve wines from 2009. The wine is aged *sur latte* for five years prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. The bouquet is a bright and very stylish blend of apple, pear, plenty of smokiness, a fine base of soil, fresh almond and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, very good focus and grip and a long, snappy and youthfully complex finish. This is already tasty, but will be even better when the acids have relaxed a bit more with further bottle age. (*Disgorged May 2016.*) 2018-2030+. **91.**



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

The new release of Domaine Robert Moncuit’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut is excellent on both the nose and palate. It is from the base year of 2013, with twenty percent of the blend from the previous year. The *vins clairs* are fermented in both older casks and stainless, but about eighty percent of the cuvée is done in older barrels. The *dosage* is five grams per liter and nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of pear, delicious apple, hazelnut, chalky minerality, brioche, smoke and a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still pretty tightly-knit, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is still young and will be even better once it has had a chance to blossom more fully on the palate. (*Disgorged September 2016.*) 2018-2032+. **92.**

Pierre Péters “Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

As is customary with this bottling from Rodolphe Péters, the wine is a blend of fifty percent of its base year of 2014 and fifty percent from last year’s blend, which had gone into the family solera of reserve wines that dates back to 1988. The *vins clairs* here do not entirely go through malo as fifteen percent are non-malo wines, with the range raised in a variety of vessels, including barrels, stainless steel tanks and cement vats and the wine spend two years aging *sur latte*. The new release is very good indeed, offering up a youthful blend of apple, pear, hazelnut, chalky minerality, incipient pastry cream and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, focused and full-bodied, with a good core, still pretty brisk acidity, frothy *mousse* and very good backend mineral drive on the long and nascently complex finish. This is very good today and will be even better with a couple of years in the cellar. (*Disgorged March 2017.*) 2017-2030+. **91+.**

Varnier-Fannière Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Avize)

The Varnier-Fannière Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut now in the market is now from the base year of 2014, but half of the blend is from the previous year. This is not labeled as Blanc de Blancs on the label, but is all chardonnay, with basically one-third of the blend each from the villages of Cramant, Avize and Oger. The wine is aged in stainless steel and the *vins clairs* go through full malo. Aging *sur latte* is two years prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a really lovely and classic bouquet of pear, apple, almond, *crème patissière*, a touch of nutmeg and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and shows plenty of mid-palate amplitude, with fine focus and grip, frothy *mousse* and just a touch of youthful backend bitterness that needs to be waited out. Given this six months to blossom. If the palate can catch up to the classy bouquet, my score will prove quite conservative. 2018-2030+. **89+.**

Vazart-Coquart Blanc de Blancs “Réserve” Brut NV (Chouilly)

Jean-Pierre Vazart makes lovely wines, with plenty of early personality and the ability to age long and gracefully. His new non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2014 and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter, which nicely buffers the youthful acidity of young Chouilly chardonnay. This is still on the young side and really demands another year in the bottle to blossom, as it offers up a bright bouquet of pear, apple, warm bread, lemon zest, chalky soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still a touch youthfully green on the backend, but with fine focus and grip, a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and quite promising finish. Just give this a bit of time in the cellar to blossom. (*Disgorged April 2017.*) 2018-2030+. **90+.**

Vazart-Coquart Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Chouilly)

Jean-Pierre gives his Extra Brut bottling an additional year in the cellar to allow the acids to integrate nicely in this low *dosage* bottling, which in this version from the base year of 2013,

was finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. The wine is showing very nicely, with lovely balance from its extra year *sur latte*, and offers up a bright and classy nose of delicious apples, almond, brioche, plenty of smokiness and fine base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This is a classy new addition to the Vazart-Coquart lineup. (*Disgorged April 2017.*) 2017-2030. **90+**.

Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut

L. Aubry Fils Premier Cru Brut NV (Jouey-lès-Reims)

The current release of Aubry Brut NV is from the base year of 2014, but with half of the cuvée from the perpetual cuvée of reserve wines that dates back to 1998. The *cépages* is fifty-five percent pinot meunier, twenty-five percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir. My tech sheet also indicates that this bottling includes small amounts of Arbanne, Fromenteau and Petit Meslier, but as the percentages added up to one hundred and five, I will leave it to you to puzzle on which of the other three varietals are a bit less. The wine spent two years *sur latte* and offers up a youthful nose of lemon, green apple, bread dough, a nice base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, young and full-bodied, with good focus and grip, plenty of mid-palate stuffing, but slightly coarse *mousse* on the long and snappy finish. This needs some time in the bottle to settle in, but it will be quite tasty. (*Disgorged March 2017.*) 2018-2030. **89**.

H. Billiot Fils “Brut Réserve” Grand Cru NV (Ambonnay)

The new release of Serge Billiot’s Brut Réserve is its customary *cépages* of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay. As the last disgorgement of this wine was fifty percent base year of 2013 and the balance an equal mix of 2012 and 2011 juice, I assume that new bottling has moved up a year and we have half 2014 base wine and the balance from the previous two years. The wine delivers fine aromatic complexity in its blend of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, bread dough and incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, good focus and grip and a long, bright and classy finish. This seems a bit more forward than the bottle I tasted last year (could this be the same wine with a further year aging *sur latte*?) and is already drinking very nicely. (*Disgorged February 2017.*) 2017-2030+. **91**.

Le Brun Servenay “Odalie” Brut NV (Avize)

Le Brun Servenay’s cuvée “Odalie” non-vintage Brut is composed of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine is from the base year of 2013 and spent three years aging on its fine lees. It was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine is a touch reductive when first opened, with but a touch of air delivers fine, nascent complexity in its bouquet of pear, white peach, plenty of smokiness, a fine base of saline soil tones and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is brisk, full and racy, with a rock solid core, fine mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and a long, primary and promising finish. This has plenty of cut and needs some time in the cellar to unwind, but it should be quite tasty once it has blossomed. (*Disgorged January 2017.*) 2020-2035. **90**.

Chartogne-Taillet “Cuvée Sainte Anne” Extra Brut NV (Merfy)

The new release of Cuvée Sainte Anne from Alexandre Chartogne is composed of sixty percent 2014 wine and forty percent from 2013. The *cépages* is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The bouquet is

pure and refined already, offering up scents of pear, apple, hints of *crème patissière*, nicely dusty soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and very nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and very nice length and grip on the complex finish. I had heard reports from a couple of Champagne professionals that Alex's Cuvée Sainte Anne had dramatically dropped in quality, due to the growing number of single vineyard wines he is now producing (some of which used to be the backbone of this bottling), but it is not self-evident to me tasting this lovely wine. Maybe there is not quite the rock solid core here as a few years back, but this is still a very impressive glass of bubbly. (*Disgorged March 2017*). 2017-2035. **91.**

Gaston Chiquet Brut "Tradition" NV (Dizy)

This bottling of Brut Tradition from Nicolas Chiquet is still from the base year of 2010, as he skipped shipping a 2011 base year bottling to the US and instead extended the previous base year bottling for another year. This cuvée is its customary *cépages* of forty percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot noir. I tasted this same disgorgement a year ago, with the extra twelve months in the bottle allowing the wine to continue to blossom, offering up a superb bouquet of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a complex base of soil, gentle smokiness and a lovely, floral topnote that seems more pronounced than a year ago. On the palate the wine is full, crisp, complex and rock solid at the core, with bright acids and very good length and grip on the balanced finish. As was the case last year, the only slight demerit for this wine is that the *mousse* is slightly coarse, but it is a minor flaw in an otherwise very tasty bottle. (*Disgorged January 2015*.) 2017-2030. **90+.**

Duval-Leroy Brut NV (Vertus)

I drank a glass of this on the road in France, so do not have exact information on *cépages* or date of disgorgement, as Duval-Leroy still does not include this information on their back labels. It is a blend of the three major grapes of Champagne, chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, but I am uncertain of the percentages. In any case, the wine is a good, solid effort, but I tend to like the non-vintage bottling of Blanc de Blancs here just a tad more in most years. The bouquet is a blend of peach, fresh-baked bread, soil, a touch of orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and solid length on the focused finish. This is not overly complex, but well-made and easy to drink. 2017-2027. **88.**

Alexandre Filaine "Cuvée Spéciale" Brut NV (Damery) Magnum

Fabrice Goss's Cuvée Spéciale from the base year of 2010, served from magnum, is really, really superb, but it could still do with a few more years in the cellar to really allow its secondary layers to emerge completely. The bouquet is deep and very refined, offering up a vibrant blend of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, brioche, spring flowers and just a hint of the smokiness to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and loaded with personality, with a superb core, pinpoint bubbles, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. I had no difficulty finishing my first glass and going back for seconds, but a couple more years in the cellar will really benefit this lovely bottle. (*Base Year 2010*.) 2019-2040+. **93.**

Champagne Geoffroy "Expression" Brut NV (Aÿ)

The current release of Champagne Geoffroy's non-vintage Brut is composed of a blend of two-thirds 2013 juice and one-third from 2012. The *cépages* is forty-one percent pinot meunier, thirty-one percent pinot noir and twenty-eight percent chardonnay. The wine spent more than two years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and offers up a lovely bouquet of apple, white peach, bread dough, a good base of soil and a touch of hay in the upper register. On

the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nascently complex, with pinpoint bubbles, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long and youthful finish. According to the back label, this was disgorged fifteen months ago, but it still seems like it is integrating its *dosage* right now, which makes me wonder if the back label is not quite accurate and the wine was disgorged a bit later. In any event, the balance here will be very nice in a few more months, when the *dosage* drops more fully into the body of the wine, and there is good complexity and length on the backend. (*Disgorged July 2016*). 2018-2030+. **90.**

H. Goutorbe “Cuvée Pr  stige” Brut NV (A  )

According to the information I could find on this cuv  e, this is still base year 2008, with twenty-five percent of the blend from the previous year, so this wine now has some lovely age to it. The *c  pages* is seventy percent pinot noir, twenty-five percent chardonnay and five percent pinot meunier. The bouquet is very classy, offering up scents of peach, apple, warm bread, a touch of walnut, complex soil tones and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, long and complex, with slightly coarse *mousse*, but fine focus and grip on the long and still quite snappy finish. Quite tasty, albeit not the most elegant examples of its genre. (*Disgorged June 2016*.) 2017-2025+. **89.**

Marc H  brart “Brut S  lection” Premier Cru NV (Mareuil-sur-A  )

Jean-Paul H  brart’s non-vintage “Brut S  lection” bottling has a slightly different *c  pages* this year than last, as it is seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay. All of the pinot noir is from old vines in the village of Mareuil-sur-A  . The new wine is from the base year of 2011, but this only constitutes fifty-five percent of the blend, with remainder hailing from the previous two years. The *vins clairs* all go through full malo and the wine is aged *sur latte* fully four years prior to disgorgement. The wine is showing beautifully on the nose, offering up a very expressive blend of apple, peach, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a lovely floral topnote that recalls iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and very nicely balanced, with bright acids, pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and grip and a long, youthfully complex finish. This is blossoming very nicely and is already a fine drink, but another six to twelve months in the bottle will allow the secondary layers to fully emerge. As always, good juice. (*Disgorged August 2016*.) 2017-2030+. **90+.**

Jacquesson Cuv  e 736 “D  gorgement Tardif” Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

As readers may recall from the feature on Champagne Jacquesson, the Cuv  e 736 is base year 2008 and was finished with a *dosage* of 1.5 grams per liter. The *c  pages* for this year is fifty-three percent chardonnay, twenty-nine percent pinot noir and eighteen percent pinot meunier, with just over a third of the blend being reserve wines. The Cuv  e 736 “D  gorgement Tardif” has just been released in the market, after an extended period aging in the cellars in Dizy and it is really starting to blossom beautifully. The bouquet is a fine blend of apple, pear, brioche, limestone minerality, plenty of smokiness, orange zest and very pretty, nutmeg-like spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and laser-like in its focus, with excellent mid-palate depth, fine balance and grip, elegant *mousse* and a fine soil signature on the long, youthful and very long finish. While the Cuv  e 736 D.T. is starting to drink nicely, I would still want to keep it tucked away in the cellar for at least another few years and really let it relax structurally and start to hit on all cylinders. Fine, fine juice. (*Disgorged November 2016*). 2020-2040+. **93+.**



Spring in some organically-farmed vineyards of Damery.

Krug Grande Cuvée “160th Édition” Brut NV (Reims) ID# 214031

The Krug Grande Cuvée “160th Édition” is from the base year of 2004 and is being re-released in small quantities to go along with the first release of the superb 2004 Vintage Brut bottling. This particular bottle was disgorged in the Spring of 2014 and is composed of a *cépages* of forty-four percent pinot noir, thirty-three percent chardonnay and twenty-three percent pinot meunier. The blend included thirty-five percent reserve wines, ranging all the way back to the 1990 vintage. Today, the 160th Édition is drinking beautifully, offering up gorgeous nose of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, a hint of the walnut to come, superb minerality, a touch of wild fennel, gentle smokiness and a topnote of buttery floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full and very elegant in profile, with a great core, superb focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a very long, complex and balanced finish that closes with lift and excellent grip. This is blossoming with style and grace. 2017-2050. **94.**

Jean Lallement et Fils Brut NV (Verzenay)

The non-vintage Brut from Jean Lallement et Fils is from the base year of 2013, with twenty percent of the cuvée made up of reserve wines from the previous vintage. This is eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* going through malo and raised in stainless steel. It spent two and a half years *sur latte*. The wine delivers a fine nose of apple, peach, a good base of soil, a touch of brioche and a dollop of fresh nutmeg-like spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and zesty, with solid depth at the core, fine focus and balance, elegant *mousse* and a long, wide open and bouncy

finish. The *dosage* here seems a tad higher than in the Cuvée Réserve, but maybe that is just my palate. It is certainly not as structured as that wine, but it is tasty and ready for business. (*Disgorged September 2016.*) 2017-2027. **89.**

Jean Lallement et Fils “Cuvée Réserve” Brut NV (Verzenay)

The current release of the Cuvée Réserve from Alex Lallement is still primarily base year 2012 (eighty percent), with the balance now made up of 2013 juice. The wine is primarily pinot noir, as is proper for a domaine with four hectares of vines split between Verzenay and Verzy, with twenty percent of the cuvée chardonnay. This is essentially from the same vineyards as the regular Brut NV, but taken from vines that are all in excess of thirty years of age. The wine delivers a superb nose of apple, almond, steely minerality, bread dough and an exotic, gentle topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still pretty youthful in profile, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, good backend soil drive and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This has that cut of good Verzenay and should age very nicely, but it is certainly approachable already today (particularly at the table). Good juice. (*Disgorged July 2016.*) 2017-2030+. **90+.**

Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut NV (Ambonnay)

The 2016 release of non-vintage Brut from Marie-Noëlle Ledru is starting to drink very nicely indeed, despite the fact that it is still a young wine and has a long life ahead of it. The nose jumps from the glass in a fine blend of apple, a touch of orange peel, superb minerality, spring flowers and early signs of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a rock solid core, elegant *mousse* and a very long, perfectly balanced and nascently complex finish. Madame Ledru makes beautiful bubbly. (*Disgorged 2016.*) 2017-2035+. **92.**

Gérard Lorient “Brut Tradition” NV (Mesnil le Huttier)

As I mentioned, last year, Gérard Lorient exploits 7.5 of vines in this small village at the start of the Marne Valley, with the vast majority of his vineyards planted to percent pinot meunier. His “Brut Tradition” is made up entirely of pinot meunier, with the new release from the base year of 2013; it was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. All of the Lorient wines go through full malo. The new release of Brut Tradition is quite floral, offering up a fine bouquet of white peach, tangerine, complex soil tones, a touch of nutskin and a nice touch of musky flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, young and elegant in profile, with vibrant acids, fine focus and grip, a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, classy finish. This is already quite tasty, but is still a little youthfully high strung and will drink even better with another six months of bottle age. (*Disgorged March 2017.*) 2017-2030+. **90+.**

Gérard Lorient “Brut Sélection” NV (Mesnil le Huttier)

The current release of Gérard Lorient “Brut Sélection” is from the base year of 2013 and as readers may recall, this is not entirely meunier, as the *cépages* here is fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot meunier. This is the old vine, non-vintage bottling from the Lorient family, as all of the production earmarked for this cuvée hail from vines that are at least fifty years of age. The *vins clairs* all go through malolactic and the *dosage* of the new release was eight grams per liter. The bouquet here is really stylish, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, tangerine, brioche, spring flowers and a lovely signature of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full, elegant and zesty, with a fine core, refined *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and just a touch of meunier exotica perking up the long and focused finish. Fine juice, with plenty of personality right out of the blocks! (*Disgorged March 2017.*) 2017-2030+. **91.**

Arnaud Margaine “le Brut” Premier Cru NV (Villers-Marmery)

Arnaud Margaine’s new release of “le Brut” is a blend of ninety-two percent chardonnay and eight percent pinot noir and hails from the base year of 2014. However, Monsieur Margaine always uses a significant percentage of reserve wines in this cuvée (this is probably at least forty percent reserve wines), so it is already showing very nicely on the nose and starting to stir on the palate. The bouquet is pure and classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, delicious apple, chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still youthfully zesty, with a good core, fine mineral undertow, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the focused and still fairly youthful finish. This is a lovely wine, but it could use a couple of years in the cellar to blossom. (*Disgorged March 2017.*) 2019-2030+. **90.**

Moussé Fils “l’Or d’Eugène” Solera Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Cuisles)

The “l’Or d’Eugène” bottling from Moussé Fils is composed of a blend of eighty percent pinot meunier and twenty percent pinot noir. The wine is fifty percent base year 2013 and fifty percent from the reserve wine solera that dates back to 2003. The *vins clairs* all go through malo and the wine aged twenty-four months *sur latte*. The bouquet is quite lovely and shows the delicacy of pinot meunier, offering up scents of white peach, brioche, very gentle nuttiness, dried flowers and gentle chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and frothy, with fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is eminently drinkable out of the blocks, but will have a bit more gravitas with a couple of years in the cellar. 2017-2030. **90+.**

Moussé Fils “l’Or d’Eugène l’Extra” Solera Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV (Cuisles)

The “l’Extra” bottling of the cuvée of Moussé’s “l’Or d’Eugène” is the same *cépages* as the Brut version (eighty percent pinot meunier and twenty percent pinot noir), but as this is finished with little or no *dosage*, this gets an extra year in the cellars *sur latte* and the base year here is 2012. The bouquet is absolutely singing with the extra year in the cellars (the superb base year of 2012 does not hurt either!), offering up a deep and complex aromatic constellation of apple, white peach, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a hint of brioche in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, refined *mousse*, superb focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and zesty finish. This is really drinking beautifully right now, but will age long and gracefully as well. Most impressive! 2017-2035. **91+.**

Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” Extra Brut NV (Reims)

I had included a note on the current release of Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” Extra Brut back in part one of this annual report, but as it was our opening wine for the unveiling of the last 2002 wine from the *maison* a couple of weeks ago, I include a note on the wine with a bit more bottle age on it. As readers may recall, this wine is from the base year of 2012 and spent three years aging *sur latte*. The *cépages* is forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty-three percent chardonnay and twenty-two percent pinot meunier and was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine is really starting to blossom, as the bouquet offers up a fine blend of apple, lemon, bread dough, spring flowers and a complex base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with burgeoning complexity, a superb core, utterly refined *mousse* and a very long, focused and vibrant finish. Four more months in bottle has really allowed this wine to uncoil on the palate and it is drinking beautifully already, though like all Bruno Paillard wines, it is really built for the long haul. (*Disgorged June 2016 .*) 2017-2040+. **93.**

Pehu Simonet “Face Nord” Grand Cru Brut NV (Verzenay)

The new release of Pehu Simonet “Face Nord” non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay. The wine is from the base year of 2013, with thirty percent made up of reserve wines from the family’s solera that was started in 2005. The *vins clairs* are vinified in stainless and do not go through malo, with the wine spending three years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is excellent, offering up a refined blend of apple, lemon, chalky minerality, bread dough and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is a fine bottle of Brut NV. (Disgorged February 2017.) 2017-2030+. **91+**.

Champagne Salmon “Montgolfière” Brut NV (Chaumuzy)

Champagne Salmon is located in the small village of Chaumuzy, which sits on the northwest side of the Montagne de Reims, due west from the village of Ludes. Michel Salmon family bottled their first wines in 1958, and his son Olivier Salmon joined him in the decade of the 1980s. The family farms ten hectares of vines, with eighty-five percent of the vineyards planted to pinot meunier. The Montgolfière bottling from the house is their entry level Brut NV and is composed of a blend of fifty percent pinot meunier and twenty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir. This is from the base year of 2013 and all of the *vins clairs* go through full malolactic; the *dosage* is seven grams per liter. This is an elegant and quite classy example of non-vintage Brut, offering up a stylish nose of white cherries, tangerine, wheat toast, chalky soil and a nice touch of cinnamon in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still fairly youthful in profile, with a good core, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the focused and still fairly primary finish. This is good juice and will be even better with another year’s worth of bottle age. It is a very good value. 2017-2030+. **90**.

Champagne Salmon “Meunier” Brut NV (Chaumuzy)

This non-vintage Brut bottling from Champagne Salmon is made up entirely of pinot meunier and hails also from the base year of 2013. It has the same finishing *dosage* of seven grams as the above wine, but out of the blocks, this is more tightly-knit and bound up in its structure and could use a bit more time in the cellar to blossom. The primary bouquet is young and promising, offering up scents of apple, plenty of floral tones, a good base of soil and a nice dollop of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is tight, young and fairly snappy, but with a good core, fine soil signature, frothy *mousse* and a long, focused and racy finish. This is not quite as refined stylistically as the Montgolfière bottling, but it may just need more bottle age and my score may prove quite conservative a year down the road! I do not know when this wine was disgorged. 2018-2030. **88+**.

Champagne Salmon “A.S.” Brut NV (Chaumuzy)

The Champagne Salmon “A.S.” Brut bottling is their *Tête de Cuvée*, with the current release all hailing from the 2008 vintage, though the bottling itself is not vintage-dated on the front label. Given the Salmon family’s penchant for growing pinot meunier, it is interesting that their “A.S.” cuvée is composed of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, from some of the oldest vines and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The *vins clairs* for this bottling are aged in older casks by the Salmon family, with the pinot noir spending eight months in barrel and the chardonnay fully twenty months in cask before *assemblage*. The wine shows a nice touch of maturity from the extended aging of the *vins clairs* in cask, offering up scents of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, a good base of soil, gentle leesiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint

bubbles and very good length on the complex finish. My only reservation with this wine is the grip is not quite as pronounced as one would expect from a 2008 wine, which may be a reflection of the longer sojourn in barrel for the chardonnay portion of the blend. But, that said, this is still good juice. 2017-2030. **91.**

Champagne Frédéric Savart “l’Ouverture” 1er Cru Brut NV (Écueil)

The l’Ouverture cuvée from Monsieur Savart is composed entirely of pinot noir. For this bottling, half of the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and the other half fermented in stainless steel. The wine is composed of a blend of one-third each from 2015, 2014 and 2013, with the aging *sur latte* under cork, rather than crown cap. This is a partial-malo wine and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is excellent, offering up a youthfully complex constellation of white peach, apple, *patissière*, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of oak, orange zest and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, excellent transparency, elegant *mousse* and just a touch of oak influence on the long, focused and beautifully balanced finish. This is high class juice that will age beautifully. (*Disgorged April 2017.*) 2017-2035+. **93.**

Champagne Frédéric Savart “l’Accomplie” Vieilles Vignes 1er Cru Brut NV (Écueil)

The new release of old vine bottling of Savart “l’Accomplie” is composed of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay. Eighty-five percent of the *vins clairs* for this wine are barrel-fermented and do not go through malo. The wine delivers excellent precision in the bouquet, which wafts from the glass in a fine blend of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, a touch of almond and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full and racy, with a rock solid core, great mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and plenty of cut and grip on the very long, perfectly balanced and nascently complex finish. This will age beautifully, but is not all that hard to drink out of the blocks! Fine, fine juice that is a touch oaky out of the blocks, but which will absorb this component effortlessly with some time in the cellar. (*Disgorged April 2017.*) 2017-2040. **93+.**

Guillaume Sergent “les Prés Dieu” Extra Brut (Vrigny)

Guillaume Sergent only produced his first wine in 2011, after he and his brother split up their family’s small parcels of vines, so that Guillaume ended up with only a hectare and a half, with the majority in the village of Vrigny. This bottling is composed entirely of chardonnay, taken from two different *lieux à dits*: “les Vignes Dieu” in Coulommès and “les Prés” in Vrigny. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts, with no enzymes and bottled without fining or filtration. The bouquet is deep, pure and classy, offering up scents of pear, fresh almond, *crème patissière*, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and still youthfully brisk, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the primary finish. This is still a very young wine (I am guessing this is 2014 base year) and the wine needs some bottle age to really be ready to drink. But, it will be excellent when it has settled in and blossomed. (*Disgorged June 2017.*) 2020-2035+. **91+.**

Guillaume Sergent “le Chemin des Chappes” Extra Brut (Vrigny)

The le Chemin des Chappes bottling from Guillaume Sergent is a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier, hailing from two different, old vine parcels in the village of Vrigny. Again, the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented naturally and the wine is finished with a very low *dosage*. The wine offers up a beautiful, complex nose of apple, white peach, gentle meunier floral tones, *patissière*, chalky soil tones and a touch of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully mineral in personality, with a fine core,

elegant *mousse* and a long, very young and promising finish. This too needs plenty of bottle age to blossom, but it is going to be lovely. (*Disgorged June 2017.*) 2021-2035+. **91+**.

Varnier-Fannière “Cuvée St. Denis” Grand Cru Brut NV (Avize)

The Varnier-Fannière “Cuvée St. Denis” is a single vineyard wine that hails from a parcel of seventy year-old chardonnay vines in the *lieu à dit* of Clos de Grand Père in Avize. The wine is base year 2012, with forty percent of the blend from the previous year and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The youthful bouquet is very classy, offering up scents of pear, a hint of orange, limestone minerality, almond, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite frisky, with frothy *mousse*, a fine core, brisk acids and a long, minerally and nascently complex finish. This is a young wine in need of a few years in the cellar to really blossom, but it will be excellent when it is really ready to drink. (*Disgorged June 2016.*) 2019-2035. **91+**.



Brut and Extra Brut Rosé

L. Aubry Fils “Premier Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Jouy-les-Reims)

The new release of L. Aubry Fils non-vintage Brut Rosé hails entirely from the fine 2012 vintage and is composed of a combination of fifty percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier, with three-quarters of this still red wine. The *vins clairs* for this bottling go through full malo, with the chardonnay fermented in older casks and the red grapes in stainless steel. As last year’s version was base year 2012, I am assuming the new

release is base year 2013. The wine is quite light in color and offers up a high-toned and very appealing nose of strawberries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, wheat bread and a nice touch of dried rose petal in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and racy in personality, with a good core, fine mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. I do not have information on the *dosage* of this bottling, but I would guess this is fairly low, as the wine finished quite dry. Good juice. (*Disgorged May 2017.*) 2017-2030. **89+**.

H. Billiot Fils “Brut Rosé” Grand Cru NV (Ambonnay)

The Billiot family’s non-vintage Brut Rosé bottling is composed of a blend of seventy-five percent of pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* not going through malo. The wine is fifty percent from the base year of 2013 and the balance a split of reserve wines from 2012 and 2011. The wine was quite recently disgorged and is still a bit unsettled at the present time, but underneath there is promise, as the bouquet offers up scents of blood orange, rhubarb, chalk, bread dough and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and well-balanced, with frothy *mousse*, zesty acids, a good core and fine length and grip on the youthful finish. This will be very good, it just needs to recover a bit more from the disgorgement. (*Disgorged June 2017.*) 2017-2030. **90+**.

Gaston Chiquet Premier Cru Brut Rosé NV (Dizy)

I did not get a chance to taste the Maison Chiquet non-vintage Brut Rosé last year, so I was very happy to see it arrive as part of my sample parcel this fall. The wine is from the base year of 20a1 and has a *cépages* this go-round of fifty-two percent pinot meunier and twenty-four percent each of pinot noir and chardonnay. Fully eighteen percent of the cuvée is still red wine, hailing from the 2009 vintage and the blend was aged three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of tart orange, rhubarb, chalky soil, gentle spice tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and good backend mineral drive on the long and still fairly youthful finish. Good juice that will be even better with a bit of bottle age. (*Disgorged May 2016.*) 2017-2030. **90**.

José Dhondt Rosé de Saignée Brut NV (Oger)

The current release of José Dhondt Rosé de Saignée is from the base year of 2014, and is composed once again entirely of pinot noir and this year’s version was finished off with a *dosage* of ten grams per liter. Not surprisingly for a *maison* based in the heart of the Côte de Blancs in Oger, this is not one of the house specialties, but is always a good, ageworthy example of Rosé. The youthful bouquet offers up a vibrant blend of blood orange, rhubarb, rye toast, chalky soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full, young and frothy, with a good core, bright acids and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Today, the *dosage* is still sticking out a bit on the backend, but I assume this is just a passing phase. (*Disgorged April 2017.*) 2017-2030. **88+**.

Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Rosé de Blancs” Brut NV (Cuis)

The new release of Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Rosé de Blancs” is from the base year of 2014 and is composed of ninety-two percent Côte de Blancs chardonnay and eight percent still red wine from Bouzy. The lifted bouquet is delicate and very attractive, offering up scents of strawberries, spring flowers, chalky soil tones, a touch of pastry cream and brioche. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied and soil-driven, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and fine backend mineral drive on the long and still very youthful finish. This was only aged two years *sur latte* and should really blossom nicely with a bit more bottle age, as it needs to relax a bit structurally. (*Disgorged December 2016.*) 2019-2030. **89+**.

Marc Hébrart Brut Rosé Premier Cru NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The new release of Jean-Paul Hébrart's non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed of its customary blend of fifty percent chardonnay and fifty percent pinot noir, with just over eight percent of the pinot noir in the blend still wine, which was aged for a year in cask prior to being added to the cuvée. I believe this is from the base year of 2013, with the still red wine in the blend from 2012. The wine offers up a lovely nose of strawberries, a touch of tangerine, chalky soil tones, bread dough and roses. On the palate the wine is bright, elegant and full-bodied, with frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and balance, good depth at the core and a long, nascently complex and zesty finish. A lovely example. (*Disgorged March 2017.*) 2017-2030. **91.**

Jean Lallement et Fils "Réserve Rosée" Brut NV (Verzenay)

There was no back label with disgorgement date information on this particular bottle of Lallement Réserve Rosée, but I assume this was the most recent disgorgement reported on in the market, which was September of 2016, in which case the base wine is 2013. This is made entirely from pinot noir, with eight percent of the blend still wine. The bouquet is precise and nascently complex, offering up scents of strawberries, cloves, tangerine, a bit of rye toast and a fine base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit youthfully brisk, with a good core, slightly coarse *mousse*, good focus and grip and a fairly long, primary finish. This needs a bit of time to uncoil, but it seems a bit short on the finish to ever reach the first division. 2018-2028. **87+.**

Domaine Georges Laval "Cumières" Brut Nature Rosé NV

This is Vincent Laval's Cumières Rosé bottling from the base year of 2011 and it is drinking very nicely indeed today. I last drank this wine a year ago and it continues to blossom nicely, offering up a lovely nose of cranberry, cherry, a fine base of soil, rye toast, plenty of smokiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and wide open in personality, with refined *mousse*, fine focus and cut and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. Good juice. (*Disgorged September 2016.*) 2017-2035. **91.**

Gérard Lorient Rosé de Saignée Brut NV (Mesnil le Huttier)

The current release of Gérard Lorient's non-vintage Brut Rosé de Saignée is base year 2014 and is composed of one hundred percent pinot meunier. The *dosage* was eight grams per liter this year and the wine delivers a fine bouquet of orange, white cherries, wheat toast, a fine base of soil and those gentle meunier floral tones that recall violets and lavender. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely complex, with good balance, a light on its feet profile, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused and classy finish. Last year's version seemed just a touch longer on the backend. (*Disgorged March 2017.*) 2017-2030. **89+.**

Champagne A. Margaine Brut Rosé NV (Villers-Marmery)

The new release of Margaine's non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed of a blend of seventy-five percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot noir, with pinot being from a solera that ranges from 2009 to 2014. Ten percent of the pinot noir is also still red wine in the blend. The base year for the chardonnay is 2014. The wine is a classic salmon color and offers up a youthful bouquet of cherries, rhubarb, chalky soil tones, bread dough and orange peel. On the palate the wine is fullish, aperitif weight and vibrant, with frothy *mousse*, crisp acids and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is tightly-knit and should unwind nicely with a bit of bottle age. (*Disgorged March 2017.*) 2018-2030. **89+.**

Champagne Minière F & R “Influence” Brut Rosé NV (Hermonville)

This was the first wine I had tasted from Champagne Minière and I was very impressed. Their Brut Rosé “Influence” is composed from a *cépages* of thirty-five percent each of pinot noir and chardonnay and thirty percent pinot meunier. This is old vine juice, with all of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented and not undergoing malolactic fermentation. The wine is from the base year of 2012, with twenty percent reserve wines from 2011 in the blend and it was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter, after aging *sur latte* for three years. The wine delivers lovely aromatic complexity in its blend of strawberry, blood orange, rhubarb, chalky soil tones, a touch of caraway, bread dough and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still snappy from its lack of malo, with a lovely core, excellent focus and soil signature, elegant *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is certainly approachable today, but I would love to tuck it away in a corner of the cellar for at least a few years and let the wine really open up on the palate. (*Disgorged May 2016.*) 2020-2040. **92+.**

Moussé Fils “Rosé Effusion” Brut NV (Cuisles)

Cédric Moussé makes his bottling of “Rosé Effusion” from a solera he started in 2003, so this current release ranges from 2014 back to ’03. The wine is ninety-two percent pinot meunier and eight percent pinot noir, with the twelve percent of the blend that is still red wine being meunier (from the 2012 vintage). The *vins clairs* here are fermented in stainless steel, with the exception of the still red meunier, which is barrel-fermented. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of blood orange, cherry, rye bread, a fine base of soil and plenty of pinot meunier-derived floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely focused, with frothy *mousse*, a good core and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a very tasty bottle of Rosé. 2017-2030. **90.**

Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” Rosé Extra Brut NV (Reims)

This was my first look at the new release of Bruno Paillard’s Première Cuvée Rosé and the wine was showing very well indeed. This too is still from the base year of 2012 and offers up a fine, pure nose of red berries, warm bread, tangerine, chalky minerality, almond and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full and quite crisp, with a fine core, impressive, nascent complexity, elegant *mousse* and a long, poised and very elegant finish that closes with a nice touch of minerality and excellent grip. (*Disgorged February 2017.*) 2017-2035. **92.**

Pehu Simonet “Face Nord” Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV (Verzenay)

The Pehu Simonet “Face Nord” non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir, six percent still red pinot noir and twenty-four percent chardonnay. Like all of David Pehu’s wines, the *vins clairs* here do not go through malo, including the still red wine in the Rosé blend. As the last disgorgement (January 2016) was base year 2012, I am assuming this is base year 2013. The wine offers up a lovely nose of tangerine, discreet strawberry, the steely minerality so typical of Verzenay, rye bread and a delicate touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite racy, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is still tight on the palate and will be far more generous with another year’s worth of bottle age. Good juice that should age very well indeed. (*Disgorged March 2017.*) 2018-2035. **90.**



Champagne Frédéric Savart “Bulle de Rosé” 1er Cru Brut NV (Écueil)

Frédéric Savart’s “Bulle de Rosé” is comprised of a blend of seventy-eight percent pinot noir and twenty-two percent chardonnay, with eight percent of the blend still red wine. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine delivers excellent aromatic complexity in its constellation of tangerine, wild strawberries, chalky soil tones, a hint of cardamom, brioche and a gentle base of oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a lovely core, pinpoint bubbles, great cut and fine length and grip on the energetic, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is a beautiful wine. (*Disgorged January 2017.*) 2017-2035. **93.**

Champagne Frédéric Savart “Bulle de Rosé” 1er Cru Brut NV (Écueil)

I am not sure if this is a different base year than the above wine, but I drank this bottle of Frédéric Savart’s “Bulle de Rosé” in Beaune at the end of October and it was disgorged three months ahead of the bottle above, and is a different blend, so I assume that this is from the previous base year. The *cépages* here is sixty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and five percent still pinot noir, with the same finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine is lovely, offering up a still fairly youthful blend of tangerine, tart strawberry, wheat toast, chalky soil tones, smoke and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with refined *mousse*, bright acids and a very long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice. (*Disgorged October 2016.*) 2017-2035. **92+.**

Vazart-Coquart Brut Rosé NV (Chouilly)

This is the same release of Vazart-Coquart non-vintage Brut Rosé as I reported on a year ago, still hailing from the superb base year of 2012. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. It is composed of a blend of ninety percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir, with all of the pinot being still red wine from vineyards in Chouilly. The wine offers up a fine and vibrant bouquet of strawberries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, wheat toast and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and good, but not great length on the focused and complex finish. Good juice. 2017-2025+. **90.**

Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs

2012 Demièr-Ansiot “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Vintage Brut (Oger)

The 2012 Vintage Brut Blanc de Blancs from Nicolas Demièr was finished with a low four grams per liter of *dosage*, and today, this non-malo wine is still very young. The bouquet offers up plenty of promise in its blend of pear, apple, brioche, lovely chalky soil tones and a topnote of almond. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still plenty snappy, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, frothy *mousse* and a very long, still quite primary finish. Given how well Monsieur Demièr’s vintage bottlings age, I would not be surprised to see my score today turn out to be quite conservative on this wine, but it is really still a puppy and needs time in the cellar to allow the acids to relax a bit. (*Disgorged Jan. 2017.*) 2020-2045+. **91+.**

2012 Dhondt-Grellet “le Bateau” Blc de Blc Gr. Cru Extra Brut NV (Flavigny)

The 2012 le Bateau from Dhondt-Grellet is an old vine cuvée that hails from a parcel of chardonnay planted in the village of Cramant in the *lieu à dit* of le Bateau that were planted in 1951. Adrien Dhondt’s father, Eric, had bottled this wine on its own as an experiment in the 2000 vintage, and it was not produced again until 2010, when Adrien took over from his father. The *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and the wine was finished with a low *dosage* of 1.6 grams per liter, after a bit more than three years aging *sur latte*. The wine offers up a beautiful bouquet of pear, fresh almond, delicious apple, chalky minerality, brioche and a deft framing of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, young and full-bodied, with excellent focus and grip, refined *mousse*, bright acids and lovely nascent complexity on the long, well-balanced and gently oaky finish. This needs a few years in the cellar to better absorb its wood and allow the acids to relax a bit more on the backend, but it is going to be excellent wine and all it requires is a bit more patience. (*Disgorged July 2016.*) 2019-2035+. **92.**

2010 Demièr-Ansiot “Neyrot” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Oger)

It had been a year since I last tasted a bottle of the 2010 Demièr-Ansiot “Neyrot” Blanc de Blancs non-*dosé*, and the wine has blossomed nicely and is starting to drink with some real generosity on the palate. This was a touch bound up in its structure last year, but this is not the case today, as the wine jumps from the glass in a fine aromatic constellation of apple, orange zest, chalky soil tones, almond and a lovely topnote of gently musky floral tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and still shows a hint of youthful reduction, with a fine core, bright acids, very elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Last year, I thought this wine was best suited for those who really focus in on non-*dosé* bottlings, but the extra year of bottle age has allowed this wine to really settle in and I no longer have that reservation about its style and would happily serve it to anyone who liked classy Blanc de Blancs. 2017-2035. **92.**

2010 José Dhondt “Mes Vieilles Vignes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Oger)

As I mentioned last fall, the 2010 vintage of José Dhondt’s “Mes Vieilles Vignes” bottling, which hails from a half hectare parcel of vintage planted in 1941 is an excellent wine in the making. This wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter and offers up a lovely nose of pear, apple, a touch of hazelnut, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip, still brisk acids and a very long, very well-balanced and promising finish. This is still three or four years away from really starting to blossom, with its apogee probably eight to ten years out. A lovely bottle in the making, but a bit more patience will be required. 2020-2040+. **93+**.

2009 Vazart-Coquart “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Chouilly)

The 2009 Special Club bottling from Jean-Pierre Vazart is a good example of this ripe vintage, but served ahead of the 2008, it is easy to decide where my vintage allegiance lies! This wine was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter, perhaps as Monsieur Vazart was anticipating that it would be drunk ahead of the 2008 version and offers up a ripe nose of peach, apple, toasted almond, plenty of smokiness and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, plump and wide open, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles, sound acids and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and already *à point* finish. This does not have the same precision and mineral drive as its 2008 counterpart, but it is still a good drink. 2017-2030. **90**.

2008 Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Cuvée Fleuron” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Cuis)

The 2008 Pierre Gimonnet “Cuvée Fleuron” was aged an impressive eight years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is lovely, offering up the precision and purity of the 2008 vintage in its aromatic mélange of pear, almond, chalky minerality, incipient notes of pastry cream and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and still nicely youthful in profile, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the long and still quite primary finish. After eight years on its fine lees, this wine is certainly approachable today, but it is still youthful and will be even better with a bit more time in the cellar. 2017-2035. **91+**.

2008 Robert Moncuit “les Chétillons” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Mesnil)

This is the first vintage of “les Chétillons” that Robert Moncuit has bottled up on its own and it is outstanding. The *vins clairs* here are fermented in a mix of older casks and stainless steel and the wine spent fully six years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of pear, *crème patissière*, chalky minerality, almond, apple blossoms and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a fine core, lovely *mousse*, bright acids and a long, youthfully complex and laser-like focus. This is still a young wine and needs further bottle age to really blossom, but it is going to be outstanding when it is really ready to drink. *Disgorged April 2015.*) 2020-2040+. **92+**.

2008 Vazart-Coquart “Special Club” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Chouilly)

Another year has passed since my last bottle of the Vazart 2008 Special Club bottling, and the wine continues to cruise along beautifully and is now drinking with style and grace. Last year, I thought it would be best to give this more time in the cellar, but it is getting hard to hold to that sentiment, as the wine is really wide open aromatically at the present time and is a wonderful drink. The bouquet is a complex and classy blend of pear, delicious apple, fresh almond, brioche, chalky minerality and a gentle floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure,

full-bodied, complex and quite elegant in profile, with a rock solid core, refined *mousse*, bright, zesty acids, impressive complexity and a very long, very pure and classy finish. One of my favorite vintages of Special Club from Monsieur Vazart. 2017-2040+. **94.**

2006 Le Brun Servenay Blanc de Blancs “Vieilles Vignes” Extra Brut Millésime (Avize)

The 2006 Le Brun Servenay Blanc de Blancs “Vieilles Vignes” is produced from vines that range from forty to more than eighty years of age. The wine spent ten years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The wine is showing nice secondary development in its bouquet of apple, baked bread, nutskin, chalky soil tones and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and broad-shouldered, with a fine core, slightly coarse *mousse*, good focus and grip and a long, slightly rustic finish. This has good raw materials, but there is just a touch of elegance missing here that one finds in the domaine’s superb 2008 Exhilarante bottling. (*Disgorged January 2017*). 2017-2030+. **89.**

2002 Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blanc Brut Millésime (Reims) Served from Magnum

The 2002 Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs is an exceptional example of the vintage, and out of magnum the wine is absolutely singing at the present time. I had never had a chance to taste this wine previously, so I was delighted that Monsieur Paillard had included it at our tasting to unveil the 2002 N.P.U. The ’02 Blanc de Blancs is stunning on the nose, soaring from the glass in a gorgeous blend of pear, apple, almond, brioche, chalky minerality and a nice touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, superb focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and complex finish. Great, great juice. 2017-2040+. **94+.**

1995 Charles Heidsieck “Blanc de Millenaires” Brut (Reims)

Like many Champagne lovers, I am curious to see what the next vintage of Blanc de Millenaires that the team at Charles Heidsieck will release into the market, but as further stocks of the 1995 keep coming out of the cellars here, there is no rush for the next vintage! If I recall properly, this marvelous wine has now been released with three different labels, as the folks at Charles Heidsieck continue to fine tune the packaging here, and one of my friends has bottles with all three labels and is promising to taste them side by side, so I may be able to report on the different disgorgements one of these days. In any case, this most recent bottle was outstanding, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, pear, a touch of *crème patissière*, chalky minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a great core, fine focus and soil signature, very refined *mousse* and a great cut and grip on the long and vibrant finish. Great juice that is presently at peak drinkability, but with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2017-2040. **94+.**

Vintage-Dated Brut, Extra Brut and Non-Dosé

2012 Marc Hébrart “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

Jean-Paul Hébrart’s new release of Special Club is outstanding. The wine is a blend of fifty-five percent pinot noir and forty-five percent chardonnay, with each varietal split between old vine parcels in two communes. For the pinot noir, thirty-five percent comes from Mareuil, with the other twenty percent from Aÿ; for the chardonnay, it is twenty-five percent of the blend from Monsieur Hébrart’s home village of Mareuil and the other twenty percent from his parcels in the Côte de Blanc grand cru of Oiry. The wine spends four years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and is still quite youthful on the nose, offering up scents of white peach, apple,

chalky soil tones, warm biscuits and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and still quite primary, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and good focus and grip on the backend. This is just a tad short on the finish, which is my only complaint with what will be a very tasty wine with a bit of bottle age. (*Disgorged April 2017.*) 2018-2035+. **89.**

2012 Champagne Salmon “Special Club” Brut Zero (Chaumuzy)

This has to be one of the outliers in the Special Club lineup, as I cannot imagine that one will find another cuvée from the twenty-eight domaines in the Special Club that is composed entirely of pinot meunier and is non-*dosé*. Forty percent of the *vins clairs* here are raised in barrels, with the balance in stainless steel tanks. This is a beautifully balanced wine and surprisingly approachable for a 2012, non-*dosé* bottling, offering up a fine nose of tart orange, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil, plenty of meunier floral tones and a hint of cardamom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, perfectly integrated acids and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is marvelously fine-tuned to be drinking with such style at such a young age, but should also age quite nicely. 2017-2035+. **92.**



2009 René Geoffroy “Cuvée Empreinte” Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The 2009 René Geoffroy “Cuvée Empreinte” is composed of a blend of thirty-six percent pinot meunier, thirty-four percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with eighty percent of the *vins clairs* barrel fermented. The wine was aged a five and a half years *sur latte* prior to

disgorgement. The bouquet is lovely and shows little of the ripeness of the vintage, as it delivers a fine blend of apple, white peach, warm biscuits, a good base of soil, gentle nuttiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is a bit top heavy in the style of 2009, but full, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the complex finish. Like so many of the 2009s today, this is wide open and drinking very well, but probably will not make old bones. (*Disgorged September 2016*). 2017-2027. **91**.

2008 L. Aubry Fils “Aubry de Humbert” Brut Millésime (Jouey-lès-Reims)

The 2008 Aubry de Humbert is composed of a blend of thirty percent each of Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier and Pinot Noir, with five percent of Arbanne and five percent Petit Meslier. Of the *vins clairs* that make up the *cépages* here, only the chardonnay is barrel fermented, with everything else raised in stainless and the wine spent three years aging *sur latte*. The 2008 offers up a fine and complex mélange of apple, almond, dried flowers, a fine base of soil, fresh nutmeg and a touch of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, tight and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and fine length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. Give this puppy time in the cellar, but it will be very tasty once it has blossomed properly. 2020-2040. **91+**.

2008 Alexandre Filaine “Sensuum Vertigo” Brut Millésime (Damery)

This was my first taste of the 2008 vintage of Sensuum Vertigo from Fabrice Gass, which happens to be only the second vintage-dated wine he has produced in his career. The *cépages* here is the same as in the Cuvée Spéciale, which is forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier, with the wine aged under cork, rather than crown cap, during its time *sur latte*. The bouquet is pure and beautifully expressive already, despite the wine still being quite young, as it delivers a fine constellation of pear, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of *crème patissière*, apple blossoms and hints of the smokiness that will come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with superb depth at the core, elegant *mousse*, laser-like focus and impressive grip and balance on the very, very long and vibrant finish. This is a great wine in the making, and while it is very easy to drink right now, it deserves more bottle age to allow the next wave of complexity to emerge fully. 2020-2050. **95**.

2008 Le Brun Servenay “Exhilerante” Vieilles Vignes Extra Brut Millésime (Avize)

The 2008 Le Brun Servenay “Exhilerante” bottling is comprised of a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and ten percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine spent eight years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The bouquet here is lovely, offering up a blossoming blend of pear, apple, toasted almond, brioche, spring flowers and a nice touch of nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and still quite youthful, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, a serious girdle of acidity, pinpoint bubbles and a long, nascently complex and well-balanced finish. I would opt for tucking this serious 2008 away in the cellar for a few more years and let it blossom properly on the palate, as it will be an excellent bottle in due course. (*Disgorged January 2017*). 2019-2035+. **92**.

2008 Lallier Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The 2008 Lallier Brut Millésime is a very good example of the vintage, but still a fairly young wine and more palate generosity is bound to arrive with further bottle age. The *cépages* here is fifty-five percent pinot noir and forty-five percent chardonnay, with the wine having been finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The nose wafts from the glass in a fine, youthful blend of apple, bread dough, fine soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp,

full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and fine length and grip on the focused and still fairly primary finish. This is certainly drinkable today, but a couple of years in the cellar will really allow it to blossom properly. (*Disgorged June 2016.*) 2017-2030+. **91+**.

2008 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Nature Millésime (Ambonnay)

I like the balance of the 2008 Brut Nature from Madame Ledru even better than the 2006 version (please see below), and this is a classic example of this outstanding vintage and is destined to be a cellar treasure in the fullness of time. Today, it is still on the young side, but shows plenty of promise in its very pure bouquet of apple, lemon, stony minerality, a touch of caraway seed, sourdough bread and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and beautifully focused, with a rock solid core, very elegant *mousse*, excellent balance and a very long, youthfully complex finish. Fine, fine juice in the making. 2020-2050. **94+**.

2008 Vilmart et Cie “Coeur de Cuvée” Brut Millésime (Rilly-la-Montagne)

The Coeur de Cuvée bottling from Vilmart et Cie is composed of a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir, all hailing from the *lieu à dit* of Les Blanchés Voies Hautes in Rilly. The vines here are all in excess of fifty-five years of age and this is the plot that Laurent Champs uses for his *selection massale* cuttings for replanting all of his other vineyards. The *vins clairs* do not undergo malo and spend ten months in cask prior to *assemblage* and aging *sur latte* for six and a half years. The wine is starting to show some lovely secondary layers on the nose, delivering scents of apple, pear, chalky minerality, a nice touch of pastry cream and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, crisp and focused finish. This is starting to drink with plenty of style, but still has years and years ahead of it. (*Disgorged May 2015.*) 2017-2035. **92**.

2006 Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut Nature Millésime (Ambonnay)

Readers know how much I love the wines from Madame Ledru, but this is one bottling where I feel a bit of *dosage* would have given this wine even better balance. At age eleven, the wine is still admittedly still on the young side and may be better to drink down the road, but to my palate, the absolute lack of *dosage* leaves the wine just a touch austere on the backend. The bouquet is lovely, offering up fine complexity in its blend of desiccated peach and apple, wheat toast, fine, dusty stone soil tones, a touch of beeswax, walnuts and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite wide open now, with a good core, fine *mousse*, bright acids and fine backend mineral drive on the long, complex and bone dry finish. Good juice, but really for purists at this point in its evolution. 2017-2035+. **91**.

2004 Krug Vintage Brut (Reims) ID# 116006

The new release of 2004 Krug is absolutely beautiful and is already quite elegant and open on both the nose and palate and is drinking with great finesse. I had expected this wine to be a bit more steely in structure out of the blocks, but the refinement of the blend this year has produced a wine that is already a joy to drink at age thirteen, though it will continue age gracefully for many, many decades to come. The *cépages* in 2004 is thirty-nine percent chardonnay, thirty-seven percent pinot noir and twenty-four percent pinot meunier, with the wine having been disgorged in the winter of 2016. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a refined mix of apple, a touch of walnut, warm bread, lavender, a superb base of soil tones and a topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly seamless, with vibrant acids,

great focus and grip, a lovely core, refined *mousse* and a very long, complex, racy and energetic finish. There is marvelous precision here on both the nose and palate, not to mention a sense of harmony and grace that is fairly rare in the 2004 vintage. *Chapeau!* 2017-2060. **97.**

2002 Bruno Paillard “Assemblage” Brut Millésime (Reims)

It had been fully five years since I last tasted a bottle of the 2002 Assemblage from Bruno Paillard, and the wine has blossomed beautifully over that time and is now drinking with great generosity and precision. The wine is composed of a blend of forty-seven percent pinot noir, forty-two percent chardonnay and eleven percent pinot meunier and was aged eight years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement in the fall of 2011. Today, the bouquet is flat out stunning, offering up a complex constellation of white peach, hazelnuts, a very complex base of chalky minerality, gentle smokiness and a discreet topnote of pinot meunier-derived floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full and full. with a superb core, great focus, grip and complexity, refined *mousse* and a very long, balanced and zesty finish. This is simply superb. (*Disgorged September 2011.*) 2017-2050. **94.**

2002 Bruno Paillard “Nec Plus Ultra” Brut Millésime (Reims)

The newest vintage of Bruno Paillard’s N.P.U. is utterly brilliant and a glorious example of the magical vintage of 2002. The bouquet soars from the glass in a very refined blend of apple, white peach, stony minerality, hazelnut, fresh-baked bread and a lovely touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays marvelous mid-palate depth, with racy acids, very elegant *mousse*, laser-like focus and a very, very long, complex and simply stunning finish. This wine is young, precise and so beautifully balanced that it is already a joy to drink, though it is clearly built for the long haul and its true apogee is at least a decade down the road! Stunning wine. 207-2075+. **97.**

1979 Krug Vintage Brut (Reims)

I cannot even recall the last time I tasted the 1979 vintage bottling from Krug, but this wine showed beautifully as the opener for one of the Bruno Giacosa dinners that form the basis for the article on older Piemonte wines coming in the next issue. This is the original release and the wine is drinking beautifully today, offering up a pure, vibrant and fully mature bouquet of peach, walnuts, a glorious base of soil tones, caraway seed and *pain grillé*. On the palate the wine is pure, crisp and full-bodied, with a very fine core of fruit, excellent complexity and grip, delicate *mousse* and a very, very long, poised and supremely elegant finish. I have had the pleasure to drink the 1976, 1981 and 1982 Krug a few times over the last couple of years, but this was the first bottle of the 1979 that I have seen in a very, very long time and I was quite impressed with how it is drinking today. 2017-2035. **93.**

1975 Moët et Chandon “Grand Vintage” Brut Magnum (Épernay)

I reported on the 1975 Moët et Chandon “Grand Vintage” Brut Millésime out of magnum last summer, and I was very pleased to have a chance to drink it again this past September and found the wine showing even better than the last time. What I find most appealing about this wine is its fine mineral drive on the palate, which gives lift and precision to the mature, but still vibrant flavors. The bouquet offers up a fine, mature blend of wizened apples, orange peel, a touch of pecan, complex minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a solid core, still quite sound *mousse*, the aforementioned, fine backend mineral drive and good length and grip on the fairly complex

finish. Some examples of Moët et Chandon vintage Brut from this era can be a bit to leesy for my tastes, but this is not the case with this lovely 1975. Good juice with plenty of life still ahead of it in magnum. (*Disgorged 2002.*) 2017-2035. **91.**



Vintage-Dated Rosé

2012 Champagne Salmon “Rosé de Saignée” Extra Brut Millésime (Chaumuzy)

The 2012 “Rosé de Saignée” from Champagne Salmon is a single vineyard, wine made entirely from pinot meunier grown in the *lieu à dit* of Bouxin in the village of Chaumuzy; it was finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. After eighteen hours of maceration on the skins, the juice for this cuvée is racked off for fermentation. The bouquet is pure and vibrant, jumping from the glass in a blend of raspberry, chalky soil tones, a potpourri of delicate floral elements and white cherries. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with bright, well-integrated acids, frothy *mousse* and lovely focus and balance on the long, complex and zesty finish. Lovely juice. 2020-2040. **92+.**

CLOS ROUGEARD'S SAUMUR BLANC "BRÉZÉ"



When I wrote my feature on Clos Rougeard a few issues back, one of the fairly gaping holes in my coverage was the scant number of tasting notes I had on the family's white wine, which they produce from the Brézé vineyard in Saumur. Happily, I was able to recently fill in this hole a bit, as I was invited to participate in a dinner of the Foucault family's white wine that included a dozen vintages of Brézé. As readers may recall from my last article on the estate, the Brézé Saumur blanc bottling from Clos Rougeard hails from a one hectare parcel of chenin blanc vines in this very well-placed vineyard, which lies in the southern part of the appellation, away from the riverbanks of the Loire and a few kilometers from the family domaine in the village of Chacé. The Foucault brothers, Charly and Nadi, originally bought their plot of vines here in 1993 and the first bottling of "Brézé" blanc from Clos Rougeard was inaugurated in this vintage. This is hardly a venerable bottling by the long historical perspective of the Foucault family, who can trace their family history as *vignerons* in Saumur all the way back to the seventeenth century! However, as I noted in the article on the estate, the Foucaults had produced a white wine at Clos Rougeard for many decades prior to buying their vines in Brézé, as there was always a small bit of chenin blanc planted in their primarily red wine vineyard of les Poyeux, and this was bottled (essentially for family consumption) throughout at least the entire twentieth century and probably long before. This old Clos Rougeard Saumur Blanc bottling produced from les Poyeux was never

commercially released, but I am sure a few bottles would find their way occasionally to long-time clients of the estate.

The domaine's chenin blanc vines here in Brézé are now more than sixty years of age, as the parcel was already planted to fairly old vines when the Foucault brothers bought it in 1993. As is the case with the Clos Rougeard red wines, I have heard observations that the Foucaults' Brézé bottling is an oaky wine, but I have never found this to be the case with either the white or red wines at Clos Rougeard. I think that much of this perception is simply that we are not accustomed to seeing many high-powered chenin blanc wines from the Loire raised with even a small percentage of new oak, so the perception of oakiness will stick out a bit more as it is so out of the ordinary. The Clos Rougeard Brézé Saumur blanc is raised in twenty percent new wood in each vintage, with the rest of the casks used for the *elevage* of this wine a range of older barrels, which the photo below will attest are really quite old casks. Twenty percent new oak and a range of ten to twenty year-old (or even older) barrels for the rest of the blend is hardly an overtly oaky wine by my definition. It is true that the wine needs to integrate its oak after it is first bottled, so a year or two of bottle age is often necessary for the small percentage of new wood here to get this element buried into the other constituent components of the wine, but the wood here barely registers to my palate once the wine has had a bit of extended bottle age.

Like all of the Clos Rougeard wines, the white wine here is built for the long haul and is really not meant to be drunk until it has had many years' worth of bottle age. I did not really have a sense of how long the wine needs in bottle prior to our tasting, as I had only previously tasted the wine on a few occasions, but based on this vertical, I would say that fifteen years in the cellar is really the minimum amount of time one would want to give a top vintage of the wine prior to starting to drink it with expectations of some vestige of maturity. I would say that fifty to seventy-five years of potential longevity is the norm for the Clos Rougeard white in most vintages, particularly in top years that come with a firm chassis of acidity. As I mentioned in my previous article on the domaine, the Foucaults' Brézé Blanc is always a taught and racy wine, as it almost never undergoes malolactic fermentation, and there is always plenty of structure here in the younger vintages. The structure, as is the case with many top wines produced from chenin blanc, will generally have the upper hand over the other elements of the wine in its early days, with the underlying generosity of fruit and fine soil signature often quite masked for this bottling in its adolescence. In fact, this was one of the most telling aspects of our fine vertical tasting, as we ranged only as far back as the 2002 vintage, and in reality, this was the only vintage of Brézé in our lineup that was really starting to drink at its plateau of maturity and showed true generosity on the palate. Everything younger from Brézé was all about potential glory down the road, rather than overt pleasure in the glass.

The Brézé Blanc from Clos Rougeard is quite a rare bottling, as a single hectare of vines does not produce a whole lot of wine for a loyal bastion of the domaine's fans. This is the same size as the estate's very old vine parcel of cabernet franc in le Bourg, whereas they own three hectares of vines in les Poyeux and four and a half hectares in a dozen or so different *lieux à dits* in the appellation of Saumur-Champigny that form the basis for their le Clos bottling. As I mentioned in my previous article on Clos Rougeard, the *tuffeau* chalky soils of Saumur are the firm foundation of *terroir* for all of the bottlings at the domaine, with the le Clos and les Poyeux generally on heavily limestone-influenced soils and the le Bourg having *argilo-calcaire* topsoils

over the *tuffeau*, which accounts for its broader shoulders and sturdier structure *vis à vis* the other two red wines produced at the estate. In contrast, the chenin blanc vines planted in Brézé are on soils with more clay, as this vineyard is a bit further from the Loire River than the principal red grape vineyards in the Saumur-Champigny appellation. This area, removed from the river is where the chenin blanc grape has always excelled in Saumur, with the soils here not all that dissimilar from the top sites in Vouvray. With the Clos Rougeard parcel in Brézé planted with vines all in excess of sixty years of age, this is a deep, structured and long-lived wine that takes many years to unfold and start to drink with the generosity of a wine at its plateau of maturity. As I said above, fifteen years out from the vintage seems to be the logical spot to really start drinking Brézé Blanc from Clos Rougeard, and this is only the beginning of its long period of primetime maturity.



Older casks of the Brézé Blanc bottling aging quietly in the cellars at Clos Rougeard.

I should mention that, as of the writing of my last piece on Clos Rougeard back in February, the impending sale of the domaine was still up in the air, with all signs pointing to an eventual purchase by Martin Bouygues, who is owner of Château Montrose in Ste. Estèphe, as well as one of France's wealthiest businessmen. As readers may recall, Charly Foucault and his brother Nadi ran the estate together for decades, but Charly passed away in December of 2015 and his sudden passing left the question of family succession for the next generation completely up in the air. The problem was that Charly's brother Nadi and his wife Anne have no children,

and Charly's son, Antoine Foucault has not gotten on swimmingly with his uncle Nadi for a long time, so there seemed to be little likelihood of Nadi allowing the estate to be passed on to Antoine, once Charly Foucault has passed away. So despite Antoine Foucault having effectively made the wines at Clos Rougeard after his father's death, he has not inherited the domaine and his uncle has opted to sell the property. Given the complexities of inheritance in France now that wine-producing estates have gotten so valuable, this is not an uncommon occurrence these days, but it is also rather sad that the Foucault family will no longer have any stake in the great estate of Clos Rougeard, which has been a labor of love for generations of the family. Welcome to the cold, cold, cold modern world of wine.

However, given Monsieur Bouygues' absolutely stellar track record with Château Montrose, which remains utterly classical in style and is probably making its finest wines today since the legendary 1921, there is some reason for optimism that the new chapter at Clos Rougeard will simply build upon the legacy of the Foucault family's ownership here and the wines will continue on at their impressively high level of quality. From the reports that I have heard, Monsieur Bouygues has hired a winemaker from Saumur to take over the duties in the cellars at Clos Rougeard, and the estate continues to have all of the very old vines and beautifully situated parcels that served as the foundation for so many legendary wines here, so there is no reason not to hope that the future here at Clos Rougeard cannot be every bit as dazzling as its recent past. Still, the traditionalist in me would have loved to have seen the domaine stay in the hands of the Foucault family for another generation, particularly since the very good work that Antoine Foucault did for the domaine after his father Charly passed away. *C'est la vie.*

The following wines were all tasted at a recent Brézé vertical tasting held at the end of September and staged, very generously, by Michael Pitts, here in New York. All of the wines were from Michael's superb cellar, and other than an off bottle of the 2008, we were quite lucky with how the wines showed on this particular evening. As this is old school chenin blanc, most of the wines were still in their adolescence and not ready for primetime drinking, but the blossoming generosity of the 2005 and the sheer brilliance of the 2002 vintages of Brézé here showed just how good some of these younger vintages will be if they are given more time in the cellar. I had written in my feature on Clos Rougeard that the Foucaults always allowed the vintage characteristics to dictate the style of their Saumur Blanc bottling, and the Brézé could be anywhere from a Sec to a Demi-Sec to even a Moelleux in style, depending on how the vintage would best be expressed stylistically. However, with this dozen vintages on the table, I did not find that to be the case, and all of the wines were quite dry in style. Perhaps this was just the range of vintages we happened to have at our tasting, but based on these wines, I would have to suppose that most vintages of Clos Rougeard Brézé Blanc are quite dry in style and I was incorrect in my last article on the domaine. As the notes below will attest, the Brézé Blanc bottling from Clos Rougeard is an excellent wine in its own right, and not just an afterthought from a great red wine-producing estate.

2012 Saumur Blanc "Brézé"- Clos Rougeard

The 2012 Brézé from Clos Rougeard is a still a very young wine, but it has lovely promise and should start drinking quite nicely in another eight to ten years. The youthful bouquet offers up a fine mix of apple, quince, chalky soil tones, lanolin, beeswax and still a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and primary, with a good core, fine

focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. Good juice in the making- just add time in the cellar. 2025-2060. **92+**.

2011 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard

I was not really sure of this showing of the 2011 Brézé from the Foucault brothers, but as I had never tasted the wine before, this may just be how it is in this vintage. The wine was still a touch reductive on the nose, and yet also showing some signs of advancement in its aromatic package of almond, dried apple, a touch of orange peel, lovely soil tones and a topnote of paraffin. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and showing some blossoming complexity, with a good core, fairly modest acids and good length and grip on the wide open finish. This seems like it will be a fairly short-lived vintage for this bottling- if this bottle is representative. 2017-2025+? **88?**

2010 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard

This was the first time that I had the pleasure to taste the 2010 vintage of Brézé from Clos Rougeard and this wine has enormous potential. The bouquet is still fairly tight and young, but there is purity and precision here that augur very, very well for its future development. The nose is a blend of quince, apple, chalky soil tones, orange peel and just a whisper of vanillin oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and focused, with a rock solid core, excellent focus and grip, nascent complexity and a very long, very pure and racy finish. This will be a very long-lived vintage for this fine Saumur Blanc. 2025-2075. **94.**



2009 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard

The 2009 vintage of Clos Rougeard’s Saumur Blanc is starting to blossom very nicely, with the riper year giving the wine a bit of uncharacteristic generosity in its adolescence, but with the structure to still age long and gracefully. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a fine blend of tangerine, honeysuckle, a nice touch of almond, beeswax, lovely soil tones, a touch of new leather and a very discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite broad-shouldered in profile, with a fine core, less generosity than the nose suggests, bright acids and a long, focused and snappy finish. This is only a few years away from really starting to hit on all cylinders, and though it will most likely never be quite as precise as the 2010, this is going to be a very good bottle for a long time. 2020-2060. **93.**

2007 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard

This most recent bottle of the 2007 Brézé Blanc bottling from Clos Rougeard was again showing a bit of reduction when first poured and took quite some time to start to blossom. With air, the wine offers up a fine bouquet of apple, hazelnut, beeswax, chalky soil tones and a nice touch of white lilies in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still fairly closed on the attack, with a fine core, bright, zesty acids, very good focus and a long, well-balanced and nascently complex finish. I have had far more open and impressive bottles of this wine in the recent past, but this example was still quite closed and in need of further bottle age. 2021-2050. **91+.**

2006 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard

The 2006 vintage of Brézé from the Foucaults is drinking very nicely today, and though this is not a great vintage for this cuvée, it is a very good one and the wine has plenty to offer on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a wide open mélange of quince, apple, hazelnuts, spring flowers, soil and a touch of honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core and complexity, fine focus and structure and a long, poised and well-balanced finish. 2017-2035+. **90.**

2005 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard

The 2005 vintage of Clos Rougeard Brézé Blanc is an excellent wine that is getting very close to its plateau of drinkability. The nose is flat out singing at age twelve, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of apple, nutty tones, salty soil, a touch of sweet corn, white flowers and a touch of iodine in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still a bit more reserved than the nose suggests, with a rock solid core, lovely balance and impressive length and grip on the blossoming and complex finish. The 2005 Brézé is quite approachable today, but is still climbing in and will be even better five years from now. 2017-2045+. **92+.**

2002 Saumur Blanc “Brézé”- Clos Rougeard

The 2002 Brézé remains one of the finest vintages of this wine that I have yet had the pleasure to taste. This most recent bottle at our vertical tasting was absolutely stunning, for at age fifteen, the wine was clearly into its prime and offered up a beautiful bouquet of walnut, apple, tangerine, chalky soil tones, a touch of paraffin and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full, with excellent depth at the core, bright, zesty acids, laser-like focus and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice. 2017-2040+. **94.**