

Côte de Beaune

This southern stretch is 18 miles long and produces twice as much wine as its northern neighbor. Here the valleys are open and rolling and the vineyards have more of a southeasterly exposure. The Côte de Beaune is more famous for its whites. There are very good reds produced in the villages of Corton, Pommard, Volnay and Beaune, but its Chardonnays are world renowned.

Aloxe Corton/Perndand-Vergelesses

General Characteristics - The Emperor Charlemagne owned vines here in the eight century, and legend has it that his wife insisted he planted white grapes so as not to spill red wine down his beard and clothes. Corton-Charlemagne is always white. Corton is almost entirely red but there are a few white wines too. Rich and dense are common descriptors. Pernand-Vergelesses itself also makes some reds and whites which tend toward lead, racy and mineral (in both colors).

Grand Crus - These two grand cru vineyards Corton and Corton-Charlemagne lie astride three villages at the northern end of the Côte de Beaune -Ladoix, Aloxe-Corton and Pernand-Vergelesses. Corton-Charlemagne is sometimes considered “a white wine in red clothes” as it is generally more powerful than the Grand Crus further south. Corton is red is considered an underrated Grand Cru, and can be a bit rustic in its youth. It sometimes appears on the label with a sub-parcel designation Corton...Clos du Roi, Bressandes, Clos des Cortons, Pougets, Renardes, Rognet.

Benchmark Producers – White : Bonneau du Martray, Coche-Dury, Roumier, Leroy ; Red : Chandon de Briailles, Meo-Camuzet, Faiveley

Savigny-les-Beaune

General Characteristics - The top wines of Savigny are sappy, spicy, and mineral-driven, and often show best at three to five years old, obviously depending on the vintage and producer. A small amount of white wine is also made.

Grand Crus - None. La Dominode is the most famous of 1er Crus.

Benchmark Producers - Bize, Pavelot, Bruno Clair

Pommard

General Characteristics - The most powerful red wines of the Côte de Beaune comes from Pommard, where complex soils with a high proportion of iron-rich clay over a limestone bedrock produce deep colored, relatively tannic wines that often require significant aging to come around.

Grand Crus – No Grand Crus. Two vineyards stand out: the lower part of Les Rugiens (Les Rugiens-Bas), which has been nominated for promotion to grand cru, and the 5 hectares walled Clos des Epéneaux, a monopoly of Comte Armand.

Benchmark Producers - Comte Armand, de Montille, Michel Gaunoux

Volnay

General Characteristics - The finest and most elegant red wines of the Côte de Beaune are grown in Volnay, a village which is thought of as the twin counterpart to Chambolle-Musigny in the Côte de Nuits, due to the high active chalk content in the soil and comparatively low clay content.

Grand Crus - None. Famed 1er Crus include Clos de Chênes, Clos du Château des Ducs, Les Taillepieds.

Benchmark Producers – D’Angerville, Lafarge, Comte Lafon, de Montille.

Meursault

General Characteristics - There are more top producers in Meursault than any other commune of the Côte de Beaune. As a result, it has become the most famous and popular of the great white appellations. Its wines are typically rich and savory with nutty, honeyed hints and buttery, vanilla spice from the oak.

Grand Crus - Meursault contains no Grand Crus. Its three best Premier Crus -- Les Perrières, Les Genevrières and Les Charmes -- produce some of the region’s greatest whites: they are full, round, powerful and age very well.

Benchmark Producers – The « big 3 » : Comte Lafon, Coche-Dury, Roulot, also, Arnaud Ente, Jobard, Fichet.

Puligny-Montrachet

General Characteristics - Puligny was one of two villages in the Cote de Beaune (along with Chassagne) which gained permission in 1879 to hyphenate the name of its most famous vineyard, Montrachet, to its own. The reputation of Puligny-Montrachet is based around its four Grand Crus, though there are a bevy of outstanding 1er Crus. Compared to Chassagne and Meursault, Puligny tends to be the finest and most precise with aromas tending towards citrus and minerals.

Grand Crus - Le Montrachet (part), Chevalier-Montrachet, Bâtard-Montrachet (part) and Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet. Montrachet labels often boast a noble, triumphant ‘Le’ in front of its name. Many consider Montrachet to be the greatest white wine in the world. At its best it has an intensity, complexity and elegance that make you wonder how such a heavenly thing could come from the earth. Puligny 1er Cru Caillerets, which abuts Montrachet, is often considered a “super 1er Cru”.

Benchmark Producers - Leflaive, Carillon, Sauzet

Chassagne-Montrachet

General Characteristics - When it comes to the world's greatest white wines, the border between Chassagne and Puligny is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Within a few hundred meters sit five Grand Crus, three of which are in Chassagne proper. Chassagne's style is often described somewhere between the styles of Puligny-Montrachet and Meursault: less fine than Puligny, less rich than Meursault but containing elements of both. Chassagne is mineral yet succulent, often with aromas of orchard fruits and white flowers.

Grand Crus - Le Montrachet (part), Bâtard-Montrachet (part) and Criots-Bâtard-Montrachet.

Benchmark Producers - Ramonet, Niellon, Fontaine-Gagnard, P-Y Colin-Morey (+ St. Aubin)

Santenay

General Characteristics - The small spa town of Santenay, just over the departmental border into the Saone-et-Loire, produces full, rich, chunky red wines which can offer good value for money. Because of the heavier, clay-rich soils, the wines don't have the same complexity as those further north.

Grand Crus - None. Reputable 1er Crus include Les Gravières, La Maladière, Clos de Tavannes.

Benchmark Producers - Lucien Muzard