

New World Wines

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Newsletter

January 2001

No. 2

The dust has now settled, literally and figuratively, with the new warehouse completed and newly arrived wines safely stored away.

The year ahead should be interesting with wine dinners starting to fall into place starting with a Grand Cru Burgundy dinner on 1st February, a potential wine dinner in March and a visit by Robert and PJ of Deerfield Ranch in late April/early May.

Tastings will also be held in the tasting room at the warehouse, dates and times to be advised.

This issue is dedicated to Burgundy. Subsequent issues will focus on different regions with touring tales and tasting notes.

Like many wine enthusiasts my first foray into “serious” wine study started with Bordeaux. This was partly because I had been exposed to more Bordeaux wines as I developed my tasting skills but also because it seemed easier to understand the wines and vintages helped, of course, by the classification system in place for most of the region.

Burgundy was left to one side while first the wines of Bordeaux and then California were explored. It seemed too complicated and the few pinot noirs tasted had failed to excite the imagination. Then about 3 years ago I attended a dinner tasting of older burgundies in London. It was a revelation. I can still remember the taste and smell of the Armand Rousseau Clos de Beze 1991.

The good news for Burgundy lovers is that quality continues to improve. There are now many less tannic and herbaceous wines. Better vineyard practices, controlled yields and better winemaking has generally improved quality across the board. It is also fair to say that criticism and praise from wine writers and new publications with a wider audience (Wine Advocate, Wine Spectator) has forced many underachievers to improve. However in spite of this the key to understanding Burgundy is to focus on the individual producers because even in a great vintage mediocre wines can be made from grand cru vineyards and in a poor vintage conscientious producers can make an excellent one.

Tasting and Touring

My most recent visit to Burgundy took place in early October 2000. The weather was cool and showery and it appeared that strict selection would be necessary for this vintage as many bunches contained both ripe and unripe grapes.

I started out in the village of Gevry Chambertin in the Cote de Nuits, the northern section of the Cote d'Or. I had not made any appointments in this village ahead of my visit vaguely thinking that I could somehow charm some wines out of the top domaines. The eternal optimist!

I decided to start with Armand Rousseau whose 91's had so enthralled me. I wandered through the entrance and saw Charles Rousseau (recognised from pictures) in his office. I had been advised to ask for Corine and with a polite shrug he pointed to a door across the courtyard. I knocked and a pretty petite lady answered. Hurriedly I mumbled my opening remarks first in French and then more comfortably in English knowing that time was of the essence. The response I came to know and dread soon came back "je suis desolee". By then though she had taken pity on me and soon we were discussing vintages and her recommendations regarding other producers. After some time I walked back down the hill to Denis Mortet. A knock on the door, then "je suis desolee". At domaine Michel Esmonin his daughter or wife delivered the now dreaded phrase, indicating that Monsieur was in the middle of winemaking and could not be disturbed. By now I realised that my timing could have been better, the harvest having just been completed and fermentation underway.

Dispirited but not defeated I ventured into the village to another recommendation from Madame Rousseau. This was Dominique Gallois. I had never previously heard of him but noted that his wines had been very positively reviewed in Guide Hachette. Arriving at the end of his driveway I saw Monsieur Gallois and his very large dog in the distance. He looked very busy and his dog looked very hungry.

Summoning up my courage I walked ahead and made my case. Surprisingly he did not dismiss me out of hand but rather took me into his cellar and handed me a bottle of his 98 Gevry Chambertin Premier Cru to taste. After a discussion it was agreed that he would make available 20 cases of his 98's and some 97's, both premier and grand cru's. I now had my Cote de Nuits producer and, I believe, a very good one.

After the tension of Gevry it was a pleasure to visit domaine Hubert Lamy in St. Aubin. We tasted through his St. Aubin's and I chose some 98 and 99 vintage Clos de la Chateniere and Les Frionnes for purchase. He is an excellent producer and the wines superb value.

My next stop was Vincent Girardin in Santenay. Heavy rains had made his new courtyard into a swamp, but in the cellar we spent several hours tasting through some of his hundreds of barrels. The 1999's look very promising and the Bonnes Mares was truly gorgeous. I will buy as much of this as I can.

My final stop was a small village near Chablis where Jean Marc Brocard is based. In Chablis, as in Sancerre and Pouilly Fume in the Loire, there are two schools of winemaking – oak or no oak. Brocard does not use oak at all. Here I was greeted by the girlfriend of one of Jean Marc's sons, who poured a dozen different wines for me. Tasting different vineyards from the same vintage can be tricky but I was able to conclude that of the premier cru's Montmains seemed the most consistent. On subsequently meeting Monsieur Brocard I was able to persuade him to release 15 cases of their remaining stock of 1996 Les Clos, a grand cru from a great vintage, and bought some 98 and 99 Montmains together with some Chablis.

Unlike California or Bordeaux there are few grand wineries in Burgundy. Other than the negociants hardly anyone makes more than a couple of thousand cases of wine a year and almost all is sold to the "trade" long in advance of its release. With a few exceptions appointments are necessary although at quieter times of the year hotels can make arrangements for you. Like most things if you show enough interest and enthusiasm doors will open for you.

Hotels and Restaurants

La Table de Bourgogne on the N.74 near the Savigny les Beaune turn off. Wonderful prix fixe lunch for 60FF (about eight dollars) for four courses.

Le Montraget in Puligny Montraget. A hotel with an excellent (if pricey) restaurant and wine list. Terrific coq au vin. The hotel is about \$100 a night double and is very comfortable.

Hotel des Grand Crus on the outskirts of Gevry Chambertin. Recently refurbished and convenient to all the sights. About \$80 a night double. No TV.

France remains unsurpassed for inexpensive restaurants with good food. Wines from the best known producers are not cheap, however, either in shops or restaurants. Indeed expect to pay more in Burgundy at a restaurant for a good bottle than you would at Le Figaro.

Reviews

I have selected a few reviews for wine we have in stock. I have many others as well so please feel free to contact me.

Vincent Girardin 1997 Pommard Rugiens (91 points Wine Advocate)
 "Reveals gamey, spicy red fruit scents. This is a broad, expressive, firm wine with flavours reminiscent of cedar, tobacco, and sweet red cherries. It is medium to full-bodied, powerful, and possesses a back-bone loaded with well-ripened tannins. Projected maturity: 2000-2007."

Vincent Girardin 1997 Volnay Santenots (90+ points Wine Advocate)
 "Crafted from purchased grapes the ruby-coloured 1997 Volnay Santenots displays fresh, blackberry-scented aromas. This refined medium-bodied and mouth-filling wine is

packed with flowers, licorice and blueberry flavours. It reveals lovely depth of fruit, breadth, and a long supple finish. Drink it over the next 7 years.”

Vincent Girardin 1998 Charmes-Chambertin Grand Cru Vieilles Vignes

(94 points Best Burgundy Wines & Spirits Magazine)

“The colour and flavours of this pinot glisten like a jewel, bearing a brightness from depths that cannot be perceived. Out of its density comes the perfume of the forest, of violets and wild berries, mulberries and woodland cherries. The texture is grand without being weighty, aristocratic without being overbearing. The finish lasts with that foresty depth, bright and shining. Though it’s remarkably accessible and compelling to drink right now, if you can afford 6 or 12 bottles, it will be fascinating to follow the development of the wine as it ages over the coming 10 years.”

V. Girardin 1998 Puligny-Montrachet Les Referts (88 points Wine Advocate)

“Well-ripened pears, minerals and lemons are found in the 1998 Puligny-Montrachet Les Referts’ nose. Medium-bodied, plump and well-balanced this flavourful wine displays white fruits, talcum powder, perfume and flowers. Beautifully fashioned and extroverted, it should be consumed over the next 5 years.”

Hubert Lamy 1998 St. Aubin Clos de la Chateniere (90 points Wine Spectator)

“Doesn’t smell much, but the juicy, succulent and ripe mouthfeel, where clean fruit sings beautifully, makes this wine stand out. Has gorgeous lemon-honey-tropical character. Long and elegant finish. Best from 2000 through 2008. (680 cases produced)”

Vincent Girardin 1998 Meursault Les Narvaux (93 points Wine Spectator)

“Gorgeous. Powerful, full-bodied white Burgundy, bursting with intense yet refined smoke, toast and ripe fruit aromas. The flavours follow in densely packed texture, and the seductive finish is exciting. Drink now through 2010. (750 cases produced)”

Vincent Girardin 1998 Clos de la Roche (90 points Wine Spectator)

“Super ’98. Fresh and supple, a rich and ripe red with clean, pure blackberry and raspberry aromas that follow through to the joyful, lingering finish. Medium-bodied. Best from 2002 through 2010. (260 cases produced)”

V. Girardin 1998 Pommard Les Chanlins Vieilles Vignes (90 points Wine Spectator)

“Wonderful. Ripe, balanced and delicious. Dark in colour, with massive but sweet tannins. Full-bodied, long and impressive, bringing the soil and minerals to the palate along with the blackberries. Tannic finish but tempting now. Drink now through 2010. (250 cases produced)”

John M. Sharpe

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