

A Fine and Rewarding Experience

LIM HWEE PENG highlights his recent encounter with the heavenly wines from the much revered Burgundy region. **By Lim Hwee Peng**



LIM HWEE PENG is an accomplished wine writer, notably when he was the wine columnist of Wine & Dine publication, where he shared his passion in his monthly wine column. His contribution in wine journalism was rewarded with the winning of World Gourmet Summit Awards of Excellence, Regional Wine Article of the Year in 2002 and 2003. Currently, he has a diverse portfolio of clients, including the Singapore Airlines (SIA) Air Sommelier group; SOPEXA wine activities that include wine publications and wine training for the trade professionals, and also conducting corporate programs for banks and private institutions. Hwee Peng can be reached at hweepeng@winecraftmktg.com.



Jean-Charles of Domaine Bonneau du Martray

My first truly 'divine' experience with Burgundy wines happened two years ago at the Paulee de Singapour. Being part of the editorial crew covering the extensive tasting of wines from premiere Burgundy estates, it was a rare opportunity to take a peek and appreciate the various styles of vin Bourgogne from the generic Bourgogne level to Grand Cru

reds and whites.

Ever since I got bitten by the Burgundy bug, I have looked upon the makers of those 'romantic' wines with the utmost respect. Subsequent encounters with Burgundy wines have always humbled me further as I realised the extent of effort to craft such beautiful wines with such an unpredictable grape.

There were also incidences where unexpected encounters floored me. One such occurrence was a sharing by a fellow Burgundy wine lover, who brought along an intriguing Bourgogne wine, which none of us realised was from the humble Aligote!

My recent visit to Burgundy also led to a much deeper impression of the region, its hills and slopes, sub-appellations, and quality of each classification; while visiting the Corton Hill for the first time is somewhat surreal, I also felt a sense of being overwhelmed, much like paying a pilgrimage to some hallowed ground.

Sampling wines (fresh from the barrel and aged bottles) together with various Burgundy winemakers was an experience like never before. As compared to the straight suits and grand castles of Bordeaux, Burgundy estates and its dwellers were more down-to-earth; and their 'grand' estate and cellars are often sited along streets and corners of the village.

Even though some Burgundy wines were accorded super-star status in the wine world,



The renowned Corton Hill as seen from a restaurant



The well respected Jacques Lardiere of Louis Jadot



Humble and friendly Michel Gros



The affable Veronique Drouhin

Burgundy winemakers were less celebrity-like, such as Jean-Charles le Bault de la Morinière of Bonneau-du-Martray, Jacques Lardiere of Louis Jadot, Michel Gros of Domaine Michel Gros, and Veronique Drouhin of Domaine Drouhin. They were modest, friendly and unassuming, always putting the comfort and ease of visitors as their priority.

'Generous' was the other impression of my encounter with the many Burgundy domains and vintners. I had the luxury of spending more than an hour tasting at the Louis Jadot cellar with Lardiere and its export manager. Jean-Charles (Domaine Bonneau-du-Martray), with no hesitation, opened an early 1990s wine to compare with a 2002 one, to illustrate the ageing potential of his Corton Charlemagne. As conversation flowed and more sharing took place, he even moved over to another spot of his well-kept cellar to open a decade-old red wine to share. Mind you, each of those princely wine was not only premium in its quality but in prices, too.

I have to admit that understanding Burgundy wine was a challenge, and one that is worth taking. The best way to achieve that is to have a good grounding of its wine style, then make a trip to the holy ground to have a personal experience that will enhance the theoretical aspect of the region and its wines.

Key Burgundy Appellations & Wine Styles

There are six key wine-producing appellations within Burgundy that could produce wines of distinctive taste and style. Chablis, Cote de Nuits and Cote de Beaune (both are in the Cote d'Or appellation), Cote Maconnaise, Cote Chalonnaise and Beaujolais.

Further to the north, closer to Champagne region than its own appellation is **Chablis**, Burgundy's most famous white wine appellation.

Chablis' reputation is based on the unique expression of the Chardonnay grape, particularly from the Grand and Premiers Cru vineyards. The wine may range in style from a fairly classic, lean and mineral one, to a much richer wine, often the result

of lees-stirring and oak maturation. **Côte de Nuits** is sited at the northerly end of Côte d'Or. At the tip of Côte de Nuits is **Marsannay**, a village known for producing good value Burgundy wines; it is followed by **Fixin**, another village which can produce similarly good wines, though unfortunately, they were unable to achieve greatness.

Further south lies a series of villages that produce some of the greatest wines of Burgundy. First is, **Gevrey-Chambertin**, which impresses with the combination of its muscular, weighty style matched with a perfumed edge. **Morey-St-Denis** is a meaty, intense wine which can be impressed on the palate. **Chambolle-Musigny** may be marked by a wonderful, floral, fragrant bouquet; a classic example is the **Alex Gambal Chambolle Musigny** that exhibited an almost textbook impression of a Chambolle. In **Vougeot**, we have an unusual situation. Much of the wine is classified as Grand Cru as it lies within the walled vineyard of the Clos de Vougeot, but only selected portions of the vineyard produce truly Grand Cru quality. At best it can be a tasty, full-bodied, rich, fruity wine.



Alex Gambal Chambolle Musigny



Morey St Denis

Flagey-Echézeaux wines, however, can lay claim to being the finest wines ever created by the region. **Vosne-Romanée** is a fine set of vineyards that can produce excellent and superb wines; oozing richness and creamy, sensuous textures.

Nuits-St-Georges offers fruit purity and flavours, it is almost an unfailing option as far as Burgundy wine is concern. Unfortunately, Nuit St George with all its beauty and quality in its nuances, suffers the misfortune of producing great wines, but with no Grand Cru status being awarded.

The Renowned White Burgundy Appellation

Côte de Beaune is the southerly part of Côte d'Or. It is here that some of the great Burgundy white wines can be found.

At the tip of Beaune is **Pernand-Vergelesses**, which can be a source of some good-value Burgundy, but no great wines.

Nearby, some of the more serious red wines of Côte de Beaune can be found at **Aloxe-Corton**, though the wines of this village crafts both red and white wines. **Red Corton** should be a muscular, savoury wine, whereas the **White Corton** wines can be rich, intense, and creamy.

Beaune, Savigny-les-Beaune and **Chorey-les-Beaune** are all best known for their red wines. The wines produced here are rich in fruits, tasty, sometimes quite elegant, although they are somewhat lighter (and less expensive) than its neighbours, Pommard and Volnay.

Pommard can make wonderful red Burgundy, well-structured and meaty, whereas **Volnay** is better known for being a rather feminine style of Burgundy wines with their perfumed and delicate textured wines.

Towards the southern end of Côte de Beaune, however, are Côte d'Or's most famous white wine villages – **Meursault**, where it produces rich, complex, intense yet elegant wines.

But it is **Puligny-Montrachet** and **Chassagne-Montrachet** that lead the pack. **Puligny** bears a wonderful combination of richness with mineral complexities, while **Chassagne** is sometimes broader on the palate with more expressive flavours. My favourite white from those villages is **Alex Gambal Puligny-Montrachet 2005** it exudes youth, charm and elegance.

Nearby are the villages of **St-Romain, St-Aubin, Santenay** and **Auxey-Duresses**. All are responsible for some quality Burgundy. My personal advice is not to underestimate them, as I have very good experience in tasting some St Aubin and Santenay wines.



Alex Gambal Puligny Montrachet

Great Everyday Drinking Wines

Côte Chalonnaise lies south of Côte de Beaune, and there are plenty of value-for-money wines to be had there. Producers are turning out respectable Chardonnay and tasty Pinot Noir for a fraction of the prices as compared to Côte de Nuit and Côte de Beaune.

The four renowned wines of the Côte Chalonnaise are **Rully, Mercurey, Givry** and **Montagny**, which are named after the four main villages of the region. It is also here that very good Cremant de Bourgognes (Burgundy Sparkling wines) can be found.

Mâconnais

Another good value Burgundy wine appellation is the **Mâconnais**, which lies between Beaujolais and Côte Chalonnaise. It is also the most southern region of Burgundy where classic Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes are planted. Without doubt, the vineyards surrounding Mâcon produce some of the best Chardonnay in the whole of Burgundy.

Beaujolais

Beaujolais, though part of the Burgundy wine region, is an unusual appellation, as it uses Gamay grape for its red wine rather than Pinot Noir. It is renowned for its 'Beaujolais Nouveau', one of the world's most marketed wines. This involves labelling standard Beaujolais wines of the new vintage as 'Nouveau', and making great efforts to deliver this young wine to the consumer as quickly as possible. Officially, the third Thursday of every November is anointed as the traditional date for the release of new vintage Beaujolais Nouveau. Nevertheless, Beaujolais does produce some good and tasty wines, which often have structure, some complexity and are capable of ageing for a few years. Those wines can be found in the 10 Cru villages of Beaujolais; some personal recommendation includes Moulin A Vent that could taste like a good Pinot Noir wine!



Chevalier Montrachet

LEARNING THE INTRICACIES OF BURGUNDY WINES

For the first time in Singapore, the Burgundy Wine School, Burgundy Council and SOPEXA will be holding a five-day Burgundy wine seminar for the wine trade. Held from 3rd to 7th March 2008 at the Hilton Hotel, the **'Lecture on Wines of Burgundy'** will be the first such extensive and in-depth workshop ever held in Singapore. Helming the full day workshop is Jean-Pierre Renard. Renard (pictured here conducting a session during my recent visit to Beaune) is a true blue Burgundian and has been a veteran educator on Burgundy wines for more than two decades. He teaches wine appreciation at the Beaune Centre for Continuing Education and the University of Bourgogne, School of Burgundy Wines, which is run by the Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bourgognes (BIVB), a trade body representing the Burgundy wine industry. Not only is Renard an established wine educator, he is also a wine editor and TV wine personality. The five-day wine seminar promises to be an enlightening encounter and I will certainly be there.



Jean-Pierre Renard