



SITE SEARCH: Advanced Search

FOR: Manage My Subscription



The Independent Consumer's Guide to Fine Wines



BEIJING · SHANGHAI · HONG KONG
MALAYSIA · SINGAPORE

[HOME](#) [SUPPORT](#) [VIRTUAL TOUR](#) [SITE MAP](#) [CONTACT US](#) [BULLETIN BOARD](#)

[Explore Wines](#)

[My Wines](#)

[Hedonist's Gazette](#)


[Article Archive](#)

[Video Archive](#)

[Wine Journal](#)

[In Asia - Pacific](#)

[E-Zine](#)



Article Archive
Vintage Profile

Burgundy 2012: To the Brink and Back - The Meeting (Part 1)

Article Archive Links:

- [Show the Wines](#)
- [More for this Region](#)

Quick Links

- [What's New](#)
- [Weekly Wine Buys](#)
- [Gift Subscriptions](#)
- [Shop The Wine Advocate Store](#)
- [TWA Editorial Calendar](#)

Ratings On The Go

- [Robert Parker Mobi](#)

More Information

- [Articles of Merit](#)
- [Cartoon of the Week](#)
- [Executive Wine Seminars](#)
- [Find It Online](#)
- [Glossary of Wine Terms](#)
- [The Vintage Chart](#)
- [The Wine Advocate](#)
- [Wine Education](#)
- [TWA Rating System](#)

Our Reviewers

- [Robert Parker](#)
- [Jeb Dunnuck](#)
- [Luis Gutierrez](#)
- [Monica Lamer](#)
- [Neal Martin](#)
- [Lisa Perrotti-Brown MW](#)
- [David Schildknecht](#)
- [Mark Squires](#)
- [Past Reviewers](#)

Links

- [Educational](#)
- [Retailer](#)
- [Accessory/Storage](#)
- [Other](#)

Article Archive
Vintage Profile

Burgundy 2012: To the Brink and Back - The Meeting (Part 1)

God convenes His annual management meeting to discuss the particulars of the forthcoming growing season. Members chatter amongst each other as they form a horseshoe around a large oak table upon which is spread Sylvain Pitiot's comprehensive map of the Côte d'Or. God surveys the crazy paving of lieux-dits. Or are they climats? Letting out an audible sigh, he scratches his head and looks up towards the heavens.

"Who invented this?" he exclaims, sweeping a wrinkled hand over the map from Marsannay down to Santenay. He secretly wishes he could just replace the whole damn thing with a simple Norwegian fjord. The committee turns in unison to glare at the representative from the Benedictine order, who simply shrugs his shoulders and maintains his vow of silence.

"Oh well," God says resignedly. "Burgundy 2012. Mother Nature, what you got for me babe?"

"The vigneronns of Burgundy enjoy a challenge," she chirrups with a trace of malevolent glee, butterflies fluttering around her tousled hair. "They like to be challenged. Apparently 2009 and 2010 were both easy. We need to keep them on their toes. I'm considering of a couple of deep frosts, persistent showers and maybe..."

"Nein, nein, nein," interjects Rudolf Steiner. Today he is attired in his favourite hemp-woven, "Age of Aquarius" shirt and reeks of horn manure. "The rain will wash away my preparations and..."

He is drowned out by loud groans around the table. God ignores him. He is constantly irritated by his godlike pretensions. Who does he think runs the gaff round here?

"We ought not to be too vindictive," cautions Saint Vincent, accustomed to curtailing Mother Nature's sporadically venomous disposition, but his words fall on deaf ears.

"I suggest a dose of inclemency to upset flowering," pipes up the head of the Natural Disaster Department. "Nothing too biblical, mind you. We have recently improved our unforeseeable hailstorms. They're always a hoot to watch. Hey, you should see what we have up our sleeves for 2013."

Saint Vincent bristles with concern and empathy for his beloved flock of winemakers. He sits helplessly as the committee eggs each other on. All matter of calamities is proposed: freak blizzards in July, an earthquake in Meursault, even a downpour of walnuts in "Les Gruenchers". Finally, God realises that they are getting carried away, raises his arms to calm everyone down.

"Guys, this is the deal. Let's hurl everything at them early in the season: frost, storms, coulure, millerandage, wild boars, the odd cheeky hailstorm..."

Mother Nature squeals like door-mouse and claps her hands.

"But, we play fair. I've got an image to keep up. I'm the good guy round here, remember. We recompense them with a benign and benevolent latter-half of the season so that their suffering is rewarded. At the very least they deserve to see the fruits of their labour. We'll spare them grey rot. Agreed?"

"Agreed," rings out the chorus of approval. Papers are signed and stamped so that Mother Nature can start planning...

(...continued at the end of this report.)

Introduction



The village of Puligny, shrouded in mist funnelling down from Saint Aubin.

It is true to say that the 2012 Burgundy vintage was harried from the start, buffeted by catastrophe from budburst to picking. Hopes and fears swung wildly at the whim of Mother Nature, as if she took great pleasure in doling out one misfortune as soon as she thought up another. A succession of tumultuous vintages have rendered Burgundy almost a spectator sport. Through the medium of the Internet, Twitter or *ye olde* word-of-mouth, we, the audience, instantaneously learn of every calamity and good fortune, privy to hopes raised and dashed by a spiteful frost or a hailstorm straight out of Exodus, a game of jeopardy that yields no more, no less than a bottle of wine.

A Burgundy growing season is a tightrope upon which winemakers pray to reach the opposite side without falling. Victims of the most pernicious hailstorms and those burdened with empty cellars whose income streams have been reduced to all but a trickle - they are wobbling up there. There is no safety net enjoyed by the cosseted *Bordelais*, whether that safety net is their overflowing coffers and its corollary deselection *in extremis*; economies of scale, an acquiescent *négoçant* system or a more libertarian use of land unencumbered by an immutable geographical hierarchy.

You fall from the Burgundy hire-wire - you're going to suffer a very hard landing.

No wonder, as one winemaker said to me, that nowadays you are a total fool if you do not have some kind of insurance cover.

During five weeks trawling the Côte d'Or, visiting growers and tasting 2012s from hundreds of barrels, I would pass a man dressed head to toe in overalls near Chambolle, labouring over his vines on the cusp of harvest. I would spot him early in the morning amongst his dew-dappled vines and late in the evening amongst the long shadows. One time, I drove past him with a friend, who recognized this gentleman as no less than Christophe Roumier. It was a pertinent reminder that in testing vintages such as 2012, those "*little footsteps in the vineyard*" are crucial, and the footsteps are frequently those of famous *vignerons* whose names are emblazoned upon precious bottles.



My tasting at Jean-Noël Gagnard had to wait until Caroline L'Estimé had finished submerging the cap of her 2013 Clos Saint-Jean.

Later, entering domaines amongst the static of barrels fizz-popping with fermented joy, I found those same winemakers perched over vats and punching down the cap, shovelling discarded grape skins, washing down their chai and topping up barrels. Sure, there is usually a small troupe of hired hands during harvest and fermentation. But when you constantly spend the entire weeks in and out of wineries, it becomes patently clear that here in Burgundy winemakers do not simply manage their domaines, but muck in, sweat and graft like everyone else. And in 2012, that made all the difference.

The *vignerons* of Burgundy are constantly exposed to fate and the last four unpredictable seasons have tested them to the limit, both physically and mentally. In any other occupation, I suspect many would have quit, however few occupations demand the same passion or resilience as the ancient ritual of turning grapes into wine. And in 2012, what were the compensation for their perseverance; their skill and endless hours of toil, not to mention sleepless nights? The answer is quite simply a rationed quantity of exceptional wines interspersed with one or two legends apparent.

The 2012 Growing Season

The 2012 growing season went extremely well until 1st January.

I am being facetious, but in actual fact that is not so far from the truth. Nobody knows exactly what upset Mother Nature or why she showed so much caprice and enmity, but whatever it was, it must have been serious.

January was fairly warm and above average but in February the average temperature base-lined at zero. If you can, take a look at the graph of average month temperatures published by the BIVB. It looks as if somebody stole the February column. At Drouhin-Laroze in Gevrey they reported 13 days with no thaw. Jacques Devauges at Domaine de l'Arlet recalled frozen pipes inside houses during that bitterly cold month. When Burgundy is cold, it freezes the marrow. That coldness penetrated some of the nascent buds and their fate was sealed before the season had really started.

It was an omen of things to come.

The vegetal cycle kicked off with budburst promptly in the middle of March when temperatures reached 22 degrees Celsius and it was notably dry: just 40% of the average precipitation despite unseasonal thunderstorms towards the end of the month. April witnessed much cooler temperatures that dallied with minus figures, retarding the cycle and inflicting frost damage up in Chablis. It was particularly acute on the night of 16 April when exposed parcels were severely affected. From mid-April, a succession of heavy downpours threatened mildew and *oidium*, and as Pierre-Yves Colin amongst many others remarked, winegrowers struggled to find dry windows during which they could treat their vines and maintain healthy sanitary conditions. To put some figures on that, April was the wettest month of the year at 93mm compared to an average of 58mm - 70% more than in 2011. In May the rains continued, averaging 113mm compared to the average of 71mm. The vines located on slightly steeper slopes would have had a slight advantage insofar that rain can run off more efficiently than flatter areas that risked water-logging. But it was little recompense.

Flowering took place in June under (again) relatively rainy conditions that staggered the process and consequently *coulure* and *millerandage* had a major impact upon yields. The Chardonnay in the Côte de Beaune flowered around 5 June and continued for the next 15 to 20 days, during which fluctuating temperatures reduced potential yields further.

To exacerbate the situation, hailstorms on 30 June and 1 August devastated vineyards, its path of destruction extending from the upper reaches of Puligny and also Volnay, the Côte de Nuits untouched except for the south of Nuits Saint Georges. Growers spoke of whole vineyards being laid to waste (Pommard Noizons in particular will want to forget 2012.) It was the first hailstorm that inflicted the most damage to vines, centred over the mid-slope premier crus, slicing and dicing relentlessly. One winemaker in Volnay happened to be in the company of fellow *vignerons* when the storm struck. *"I saw men with tears in their eyes,"* she told me. *"It was terrible."* Many vineyards in this area suffered around 40-50% damage, 5-to 10% courtesy of the August storm.

Alain Chavy explained that a devastating aspect of this hail was that it fell diagonally rather than vertically, Mother Nature's jab to the kidneys. These hailstorms necessitated some leaf removal and close inspection of the vines to pre-empt diseases. If the clouds of hail had one silver lining, it was their timing. Since they came relatively early in the season compared to 2004, at the end of June, the inchoate berries were green and yet to fill with juice. Therefore, many growers told me that damaged berries tended to just fall off onto the ground, instead of scars bleeding pulp over the bunch and creating the perfect environment for rot and disease.

No wonder winemakers' brows were as furrowed as their fields. Mildew was a constant threat. At Drouhin-Laroze they make it very clear: *"2012 will truly remain in memory as one of, if not the greatest years of mildew ever experienced in our vineyards."*

And that was not all.

Several winemakers reported a growing problem of wild boars feasting upon their precious fruit. Hiding up in the forests that crown the incline, lunch and dinner is ripening in front of their eyes and

laws prohibit their mass culling. Some growers have resorted to installing protective netting around vineyards on the highest slopes that abut the woods (for example at Domaine Fontaine-Gagnard in Chassagne) although there is no effective solution. The closer you approach harvest, the more appetising the vineyards become and I heard one of two instances where bunches were eaten just one or two days before harvest commenced. How galling must that be?

Returning to matters meteorological, the weather improved during a warm and thankfully more benign July followed by clement, hot conditions in August that put a lid on fungal diseases, whilst allowing the small, thick-skinned berries to accumulate sugar. The heat was so intense that some areas suffered sunburn, for example in Beaune Pertuisots where David Croix lost up to 20% of his crop through this alone. This mini-heatwave caused "*grillure*": dehydration of berries caused by excessive sun exposure that further reduced the pulp/skin ratio. Benjamin Leroux actually said it was not just the heat per se, rather the extreme diurnal temperature variation that stressed the berries, like an over-eager sunbather having insufficient time to apply their lotion. September saw more clement weather descending over the region that partially alleviated uneven flowering and most of the harvests were conducted in the final two weeks of September when temperatures fell slightly, thus capturing the acidity. Most picked up their secateurs on 15 September to tackle the Chardonnays, the Pinot Noir a couple of days later, though the more quality-driven producers waited a little longer until the 21 September.

Small and Smaller: The 2012 Vinification

The fruit arriving at winery receptions were generally **small bunches with small but thick-skinned, concentrated berries**. Data courtesy of the BIVB shows that in the Côte de Beaune the average weight per 100 berries of Chardonnay was around 95-gms compared to a 1998-2011 average of around 130-gms, whilst for Pinot Noir it was around 110-gms compared to 120-gms. In the Côte de Nuits the berry weight is recorded as average (although this contradicts the first-hand accounts from growers and perhaps skewed by less quality conscious growers and fruit for high volume brands.) This diminutive berry size inhibited any outbreak of grey rot by improving air circulation both around and through bunches, but the bottom line is that **quantities were reduced from 10% to 40%** depending on the vineyard, more in those that stood in hail's line of fire. The upside was that the benevolent latter half of the season ensured that the sunlight and photosynthesis was distributed amongst a reduced number of bunches/berries - a nightmare for accountants, but a potential Godsend for oenophiles.

Speaking to many winemakers, vinifications were fairly straightforward except for the fact that berries had so little juice (see forthcoming video with *Frédéric Barnier* of Louis Jadot discussing this point.) You had to be very careful not to extract too many polyphenols and overwhelm the fruit, so a gentle press was necessary. In some instances it became problematic filling the vats and to this end, some remained unused. This deprivation rendered some single vineyards unviable and consequently winemakers had no choice but to create multi-blend, vineyard-indeterminate premier crus or demote grand and premier crus to "premier" and "village" status respectively. Don't be too dismayed. These can actually be well worth seeking out, especially in the instance of two decent premier crus joining together.

Further still, many found that there was insufficient fruit to fill even a barrel. Louis Jadot's Criots-Bâtard-Montrachet and Anne-Claude Leflaive's Montrachet are just two examples, but I encountered a dozen others. The former managed to fill up his single barrel only after a lot of pleading and the latter made a special small barrel to hold the wine. Vinifying in a smaller vessel than 228-litres is precarious and winemakers try to avoid it, principally because it is extremely sensitive to temperature variation and difficult to control. It can quite easily take a nasty turn and bingo - your entire production, what little there is of it, has a one-way ticket to the distillery. Some of these inevitably elusive bottlings will surely be secreted out to grateful customers in magnum only, the most prominent example being perhaps Comte Armand's Clos des Epeneaux.

Most *vignerons* reported normal alcoholic fermentations, though some like Véronique Drouhin noted how there was often a four to five hour pause before the sugar commenced its conversion to alcohol. This momentary hesitation allowed what she termed "interesting polyphenols" to be extracted before the heat began to rise. Similarly, there was often an extended post-fermentation period that continued this process. Questioning growers about chaptalization, generally they replied either not at all, or if they did, only by a modest 0.1 to 0.3 degrees of alcohol, since the clement weather at the end of the cycle had ensured decent sugar accumulation.

One crucial decision, and one that fascinates this writer, was whether to de-stem or to *vendange entier* i.e. ferment whole clusters in order to impart greater complexity and/or freshness. In 2012, each producer has his or her own take. There was no consensus. Some growers opined that there was insufficient sunshine to fully lignify the stems by the time of picking, even if they *had* wanted to add whole cluster bunches. It was a risk that Grégory Gouges stated that he was simply not willing to take, whilst around the corner, Thibaut Liger-Belair explained how he "layer-caked" de-stemmed and whole cluster fruit inside the barrel because he feels that it lends the wines freshness. Others appear to have successfully used whole clusters without imparting green, under-ripe elements such as Philippe Pacalet, Nicolas Rossignol, Etienne de Montille and the late Patrick Bize to name but a few.

Certainly, the soil profiles play an important role in deciding whether to use whole cluster or not. Nicolas Rossignol restricted whole clusters to clayey soils in order to counterbalance the heaviness of those soils, whereas those occupying limestone soils were essentially inborn with freshness and therefore stem addition risked losing the original expression of those *terroirs*, and turning tense wines into shrill, teeth-shattering wines. Therefore it was not necessarily a *carte blanche* decision whether to de-stem or not: growers needed to carefully assess the vagaries of each *cru* before deciding their approach.

At the end of the day, having perused my notes it seems that a majority flicked the "On" switch of their *egrappoirs* to de-stem the entire crop, but there is certainly a movement, a growing willingness to experiment with whole cluster fermentations at the very least, for example, Gérard Mugneret in Vosne, who henceforth intends to add stems into the vat when appropriate. This is a positive development. That is not implying that whole cluster ferments are implicitly superior, but it does foster stylistic diversity from one grower and indeed, one vineyard to another and adds a sense of unpredictability, especially as the wines mature in bottle.

In terms of barrel maturation, then the depleted crop posed a conundrum for growers and the percentage of new oak. Those ordering in advance potentially found themselves burdened with an excessive amount but used them anyway, simply because they cannot afford to let them go to waste (the only alternative being to fill them with water to prevent the wood from cracking.) One or two growers regretted this, ruing the fact that they had insufficient juice to reuse the old barrels.

The malolactics were generally tardy, one or two not finished by the time I started visiting from October onwards. Most winemakers prefer drawn out malolactics and so there were few complaints (apart from the likes of myself since it prevented me from tasting some barrel samples.) C'est la vie. The process was probably retarded by the eerily vacant cellars, Guillaume d'Angerville being one who suggested that emptiness creates a sterile, infertile environment for microbiological activity. In tandem was a consensus that the less racking the better, normally just two, one to nudge the *élevage* along and the other just before bottling. Some growers had elected to bottle early in order to maintain the freshness, others choosing to wait until spring.

Assessing the Quality of the 2012s

Let us start with the prosaic question: Are the Burgundy 2012s any good?

The answer to that is "Yes".

It is a great vintage rescued by the timing of calamities that clustered during the first half of the season and secondly, the fact that Burgundy was spared grey rot. There are tentative parallels being made with the 2010 vintage, although that has more tannic backbone, greater dimensions. That is a muscular vintage with bravado and ambition. The 2012 tend to be more **athletic**, tannic yet more **feminine** and **approachable**. They are nonchalant wines. There is an inborn breeziness to them. If a 2010 walked up to you in a street, you could not fail to notice its sinew and impressive physique. The 2012s would rather engage in conversation and casually mention that it ran a sub three-hour marathon at the weekend and *then* you notice how toned and how lithe they are.

The 2012s are generally vibrant and crisp, with freshness to spare, which made them relatively easy to taste from barrel. Acidity levels are noticeable but counterbalanced by the intensity of fruit - there are few shrill wines but there is a surfeit of **nervosité**. There is no shortage of extraordinarily **pure** fruit at the core of these nascent 2012s: remarkable given the traumas earlier in the season, logical when examining the season in detail. There was almost an effervescent quality in some ways, a sorbet-like richness that occasionally tempted you to run down to Ma Cuisine and drink it there and then. There was also evidence of quite brilliant **delineation** of these young wines. If the 2010 have the grandeur of a church organ, then the 2012s are like listening to a harp: each note naturally separate and distinct from others, as if you could pluck each scent and flavour from the air.

Another word that kept springing to mind and tapped onto Pinot-splattered keyboard was **"energy"**.

These were like wind-up miniature cars.

Remember when you were a kid and you wound the metal key as far as you possibly could? Remember the tension you felt in your fingertips the split second before you let go? Tasting the 2012s from barrel was like meeting these prenatal wines at that precise moment, before you watch the car shoot off. I guess it is my job is to ascertain in which direction and how far that car will go.

In 2012, there is a lucid translation of **terroir**. Your Richebourg is unmistakably a Richebourg; your Meursault Les Perrières definitely not a Genevrières, the Clos de Bèze adamant that they are not Chambertin (sort of). This is partly down to low yields; though I opine that if you reduce yields down to miniscule figures then the wines tend to translate more the exacting standards of the winemaker, whereas when *Nature* does the culling, the nuances of **terroir** remain *in situ*. The latter rings true apropos 2012, which renders it an intellectually absorbing vintage that will be accentuated as the wines adopt their own evolutionary path.

In terms of flavour profile, they generally veer more towards the red fruit spectrum subject to the

vineyard, bouquets that are imbued with floral scents, in particular dried violet petals at this early stage. On the palate, I frequently noticed attractive marine scents: seaweed, brine and estuary mudflats, particularly on the finishes that tended to be linear rather than lush and fanning. Allied this is a tang of saltiness on the finishes, a positive trait that neatly counterbalances the fruitiness of the wines and leaves you wishing to take another sip as soon as possible.

Examining the whites first, my gut feeling is that these might be overlooked, partly due to the quality of the reds and partly due to the spectre of premature oxidation, which cannot be ignored but is frustratingly unpredictable. I found much to savour within many of the white Burgundy 2012s. I would advise readers not to ignore the wines from Chassagne-Montrachet this year: a village appellation too often overlooked vis-à-vis Meursault or Puligny-Montrachet. I am not sure why that is. Perhaps the others have stylistic traits that make them identifiable, lend them personality: the nuttiness of Meursault, the razor-sharp *mineralité* of Puligny, whereas Chassagne is almost an "everyman" white Burgundy, one less attractive to label posers. But I adored the thrilling *mineralité* demonstrated by the limestone soil based wines such as "Caillerets", "Clos Saint Jean" and "Les Chaumées". If defining great wine by its magical ability to momentarily transfer the drinker to the place of birth, then some of these wines did that effortlessly, as if it were their *raison d'être*. I was often reminded of potholing as 17-year old student: inhaling the potent scent of limestone bedrock fifty-metres underneath the rain-soaked Lake District. That sensory affect was manifested in such wines, as if they do not come from the surface where the vines reside, but deep underground, from the tips of the roots penetrating the rock. "*Mineralité*" is a somewhat abstract and often misused descriptor. However, if you wish to disabuse a cynic of this concept, go seek a 2012 white Chardonnay from limestone soils from a great grower and ask that person to just breathe.

Moving on to the reds, the Côte de Beaune was clearly hampered more than the Côte de Nuits, although that does not imply there is not a cluster of outstanding reds from the former. I felt that Volnay shows more potential than neighbouring Pommard. Whilst the former demonstrated impressive levels of fruit concentration from the like of Thierry Glantenay and Domaine de la Pousse d'Or, those in Pommard seem discombobulated by the growing season, denuded of substance, the thick skins occasionally overloading the tannins and oppressing the fruit to create some quite dry, slightly attenuated finishes. There are intermittent successes in Pommard, but at this stage Volnay appears to be more consistent. They have that appealing roundness and richness that should see many being approachable in their youth and yet they possess the substance to age.

Naturally, the Côte de Nuits is host to a clutch of scintillating, occasionally spellbinding reds. I was particularly impressed by the performance of Chambolle-Musigny and those on tight budgets or deprived their usual allocation of grand and/or premier crus (that's all of you incidentally) should not dismiss the village crus. Many of them punch above their weight. As you would expect, Vosne-Romanée produced small quantities of exceptional wines that reveal intense levels of concentration, offering the aforementioned sorbet-like freshness reminiscent of 2005 at this early juncture. The usual suspects have overseen some of the most astonishing wines that I have ever tasted from barrel, but there is a wave of new names that are really raising their game: the likes of Domaine Georges Noellat and Gérard Mugneret to name but two I would be hunting down now.



Who loves his wine, eh? Here's Philippe Charlopin getting up close and personal.

Gevrey-Chambertin is particularly strong and weathered the travails of 2012 better than most. I was taken by the *terroir* expression here, the articulation of each vineyard enhanced by the naturally small yields. These are "HD" wines. I observed that they obey the Burgundy hierarchy: the grand crus the apogee of the appellation and should you be unable to find your favourite Chambertin, see if you can pick up any Mazis-Chambertin or Ruchottes-Chambertin, or save a few pennies a trade "down" to a clutch of superlative premier crus, especially those with higher limestone soils that produced mineral-rich, tense, occasionally electrifying expressions of Pinot Noir.

I also found much to savour within the environs of Corton and Aloxe-Corton. Corton used to produce

generally foursquare, "chunky" Pinot Noirs that lacked the finesse despite their elevated grand cru status. But over the last decade they have become more refined and elegant and in 2012 that has been translated down the slopes within Aloxe-Corton. Look out for some lovely wines from the likes of Domaines Follin-Arbelet or the under-the-radar Domaine Meuneveaux.

Mon Dieu: A Perfect Wine!



Hubert Lignier with his son, Laurent, who are making astonishing wines in Morey-Saint Denis.

Readers will note that there are four wines, or more accurately barrel samples, that are candidates for perfect wines. Those familiar with my scoring will know that this is a rare occurrence. I suppose one or two of them you might easily guess, the other two might raise a few eyebrows. It is a reflection of my belief that the apex of Burgundy is not necessarily DRC, Leroy, Roumier or Rousseau. We should not be corralled into thinking that a perfect wine can only come from these addresses, though they may well do so. I believe that there is perhaps a dozen outstanding, exceptional domaines that under the right circumstances have the potential to create an amazing, profound wine that will forever live in our memories, the likes of Hubert Lignier, Mugneret-Gibourg, Denis Bachelet, J.F. Mugnier and so forth. To me, their wines are imbued by something magical that cannot be put into words. This vintage has produced wines that *may* touch perfection. We will find out once they are in bottle and prove themselves.

Burgundy 2012: Should I Be Reserving Cellar Space?

In terms of longevity, I will make two important points. Firstly, I have declined to state drinking windows for the wines in barrel since that is too difficult to predict. Unlike most Bordeaux, you need to have the finished Burgundy in front of you to make a judgement and even then, you must accept that there is a higher variance. But that should not preclude me from offering my thoughts. With respect to the whites, many of the top wines possess both the concentration and acidity levels to merit long-term cellaring, if you wish. The prevailing forces against ageing are strong: the deliciousness of white Burgundy in the flush of youth and less savoury aspect of premature oxidation. With respect to the reds, the best 2012s have the freshness to make many nigh irresistible in their first five years. They are definitely more approachable than the 2010 because that tannins a less rigid, yet there is the intensity of fruit, the substance and length to suggest that the best premier crus will cruise for 15 to 20 years, the grand crus 20 to 30 years or longer in some cases. I would just caution that the more I experience older Burgundy, the more I discover how longevity is not totally correlated to status insofar that I have recently tasted a number of mature village crus.

This leads me on to my second point. This is one vintage hiding something up its sleeve: something deep within, preternatural and abstruse. There is a sense that the DNA of these 2012s, the product of a unique growing season unlike any other, has determined that their true personalities will only be revealed with bottle age. It is an intuitive thought that crossed my mind on several occasions. As the weeks rolled on, I enquired whether winemakers felt similarly and most of them answered that they too detected a little opaqueness, hidden traits and secrets locked deep within these wines. And bearing this in mind, I would prefer to let my 2012 reds reside in cellars for a long time, withstanding a possible dumb period when they will close up, then see them through to the other side when they will blossom with time-enhanced complexity.

The Market

Burgundy holds the title as the "hottest" region at the moment, usurping Bordeaux as wine aficionados' Holy Grail. Whether the location is New York, London or Hong Kong, Pinot Noir has gained more currency than any other grape variety. Cellars once dominated by the Left or Right Bank have been reassigned to accommodate the likes of precious Coche-Dury or Rousseau. Auction

houses salivate over Burgundy's most prestigious names and in some cases; prices have reached such stratospheric levels that the current Rudy Kurniawan trial seems like an inevitability. (The question that we should ask is: how much of the tip of the iceberg did we witness in court?)

Whilst the "cooling off" of Bordeaux was inevitable, no longer flavour of the month because of relentless price hikes, I cannot envisage the same happening with respect to Burgundy's crown jewels by dint its finite supply. Whilst the plenitude of Bordeaux has fostered a flourishing secondary market as investors barter and trade in meaningful volume, the scarcity of many Burgundy names means that those blessed with a direct allocation would be foolish to flog them off for something as meaningless as a few extra quid. The wines are too irreplaceable. Moreover, Burgundy-lovers foster a human bond with their most coveted bottles, a relationship rare in all but few addresses in Bordeaux, stymying a secondary market further. It is almost as if Bordeaux has been rendered a brand, a commodity, whereas a bottle of Burgundy is something created by the human hand, an individual with soul and personality.

When you factor in the depleted harvests of 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013, the basic principles of supply and demand come into effect. The former is down, the latter up - prices will react accordingly and figures direct from growers suggest ex-cellar price increases anything from 15% to 20%. Intermediaries and merchants' cuts will exaggerate that figure, many of whom will be able to name their price for the most coveted grand crus and growers. Then factor in exchange rate fluctuations: you'd better start saving, even if money might be irrelevant.

Hankering after one of Denis Bachelet's 750 bottles of Charmes-Chambertin, slashed from its usual 2,400-bottle production? Form an orderly queue. Imagine trying to bag one of Bernard Dugat's blink-and-you'll-miss-it bottles of Chambertin. There will be around 150 bottles minus whatever he decides to keep for himself. Better hope your merchant is your newest best friend - either that or start begging outside Bernard's house in Gevrey. Allocations will either shrink or vanish: it's just the mathematics of 2012. In this report I have stated numbers of barrels wherever I can, so that you don't feel *too* bad when your dreams of Anne-Claude Leflaive's Montrachet remain just that.

Whilst I have castigated the *Bordelais* for their avarice in recent years, I bear fewer grudges against those in Burgundy that have increased their prices. Much of the income generated from their wines has been invested back into their wineries, rather than otiose sculptures or a palatial pad in Cap Féret. The diminished quantities produced in Burgundy means that price rises are unavoidable if income streams must flow. Think of the recent untimely deaths that this region seems to have tragically born the brunt of. Who can blame them for ensuring that their coffers are full in order to safeguard livelihoods in such unforeseen and tragic circumstances. On a number of occasions, I observed that escalating prices sit uncomfortably with a majority of growers in Burgundy. Whereas the *Bordelais* seem to have become practically spellbound by price as if it is the only measurement of quality, it creates a sense of unease in Burgundy, the genuine fear of losing traditional markets that were loyal before the hoopla, which really began after the 2005 vintage. One grower told me that they had received a telephone call during which their importer in Hong Kong was encouraging them to accept his cheque for the entire 2012 and 2013 vintages. Their reply was "Thanks, but no thanks."

About This Report



A morning's work: Louis Jadot's 2012 white lining up for inspection.

To conduct a serious, in-depth report then you have to go there. That is a maxim that I have always carried with me. And there is no other region that is as complex, convoluted, time-consuming, frustrating and yes, enjoyable as Burgundy. Therefore, as soon as I accepted responsibility for the

region for The Wine Advocate, I sectioned off autumn 2013 as "Burgundy Time", forewarning loved ones that they might see less of me than usual. As already mentioned, I devoted **five weeks** in the region conducting my tastings throughout the day. During that period, I visited **126 growers**, including the likes of Louis Jadot who presented over 100 wines (tasted over two morning sessions.) Henceforth, my policy will be to eschew the marathon round of London primeur tastings because I encountered too many winemakers who strongly advised me that at this level, notes are more representative taken at the domaine than pre-prepared samples shipped overseas (although I still support these tastings, which serve as a priceless opportunity for consumers.) Of course, this does not apply to finished wines.

Having tasted in barrel in Burgundy since 2002 (and irregularly prior to that), in my experience, the worst thing you can do is to rush. Alarm bells start ringing whenever I hear of ten appointments crammed into one day, which is inevitably detrimental to the wines that need two or three minutes to settle down and dispense with any free sulphur that may be lurking. That period of time counts as little in Bordeaux where there is often but one or two samples presented. However, it eats up your day if you have an average of 10 samples per address, each one deserving a couple of minutes aeration in order to "stretch their legs" so to speak. With this in mind, I limited my appointments to a modest five or six, the maximum seven per day, which is sufficient to "do my rounds" without frantically rushing. So yes, it was an intense 5 weeks, but at least by the end I felt that I had done my utmost to do justice to these samples. The visits were split into weeks before but mainly after the harvest. As much as possible, I was flexible with my timing, so that growers could show the wines when it was appropriate to do so. As usual, I made sure that samples were as close to the final blend as possible, refraining from new barrels and preferring used ones if the choice existed. However, most of the time, growers assembled a mixture of new and used barrel that were a very close approximation to the final blend.

These are prenatal scans, glimpses of what might be. I was mindful to seek vigneron's guidance on how representative some of the more mercurial barrels showed. Some generic wines and village crus, indeed one or two growers, had actually bottled their wines already and so these scores are not in parenthesis.



Michel Bardet, winemaker at Domaine Albert Grivault in Meursault.

Whilst impossible to cover the 2,000 odd growers in Burgundy, I have endeavoured to review the crown jewels such as Leroy, Roumier and Rousseau; historical négoçiants such as Louis Jadot and Albert Bichot; the burgeoning contingent of bijou négoce such as Pierre-Yves Colin and Benjamin Leroux. Perhaps what was important for me was to cast my net far wider than ever before and introduce new names such as Vincent Boyer (Yves Boyer-Martenot) and Maxime Cheurlin (Domaine Georges Noëllat) and oversee the return of some old faces that have been missing in recent years, such as Albert Grivault and Sylvain Cathiard. This report is nothing more than "Part One", the prologue of a vintage. Readers should note that a follow-up trip is already planned at the end of January to cover more growers, including a couple you might know: Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and Coche-Dury.

The sheer onslaught of tasting notes, over which there are approximately **1,650** or thereabouts, meant that whilst I was able to file them all by early December, inputting such intricately-titled wines on the database takes time. All the notes should be accessible either on the TWA database or if not, through readable pages (*à la* Wine-Journal) by early January and the latter will be uploaded onto the database by the end of that month. More will follow in the February issue. With this in mind, I have given readers an overview, a breakdown of growers covered per village appellation. Those in **bold** are those that are "new" in the sense that they have not been covered in the last three or four vintages, and in some instances, never at all. Expect many more "bold" growers down the line.

Breakdown of growers per village:

Gevey-Chambertin: Denis Bachelet, Alain Burguet, Charlopin-Parizot, Bruno Clair, **Drouhin-Laroze**, Claude Dugat, Bernard Dugat-Py, **Frédéric Esmonin**, Sylvie Esmonin, Jean-Marie Fourrier, **Dominique Gallois**, **Mark Haisma**, Denis Mortet, Rossignol-Trapet, **Joseph Roty (Philippe Roty)**, Armand Rousseau, Christian Serafin and Jean-Louis Trapet

Morey-Saint Denis: David Clark, Dujac, Domaine des Lambrays, Hubert Lignier, Virgile Lignier-Michelot, Christophe Perrot-Minot, Ponsot, Clos de Tart, Taupenot-Merme and Cecile Tremblay.

Chambolle-Musigny: Louis Boillot, Ghislaine-Barthod, **Hudelot-Baillet**, J.F. Mugnier and Comte Georges de Vogüé.

Vosne-Romanée: **Sylvain Cathiard**, **Domaine d'Eugenie**, Jean Grivot, **Anne Gros**, Michel Gros, **Gros Frère & Soeur**, Alain Hudelot-Noëllat, **François Lamarche**, Leroy, Comte Liger-Belair, Méo-Camuzet, **Dominique Mugneret**, **Gérard Mugneret**, Georges Mugneret-Gibourg, **Georges Noëllat** and **Jean Tardy**.

Nuits-Saint-Georges: Domaine de l'Arlet, Robert Chevillon, **J.J. Confuron**, David Duband, Henri Gouges, **Philippe Gravignet**, **Thibault Liger-Belair**, **Michele & Patrice Rion** and Domaine de la Vougeraie.

Aloxe-Corton/Chorey/Pernand: Bonneau du Martray, **Dubreuil-Fontaine**, **Follin-Arbelet**, **Meuneveaux** and **Comte Senard**

Savigny-lès-Beaune: Simon Bize, **Louis Chenu** and Jean-Marc Pavelot.

Beaune: Roche de Bellene, Olivier Bernstein, **Albert Bichot**, Camille Giroud, David Croix, Joseph Drouhin, Dublere, **A.F. Gros**, Louis Jadot, Benjamin Leroux, **Lupe-Cholet**, Philippe Pacalet, **François Parent**, Remoissenet, Nicolas Rossignol and **Seguin-Manuel**.

Pommard: **Coste-Caumartin**, **de Courcel** and **Anne Parent**

Volnay: Marquis d'Angerville, Comte Armand, **Jean-Marc Bouley**, Thierry Glantenay, Michel Lafarge, Domaine de Montille, La Pousse d'Or and **Joseph Voillot**.

Meursault: **Yves Boyer-Martenot**, **Albert Grivault**, Patrick Javillier, Remi Jobard, Domaine de Comtes-Lafon, **Martelet de Cherisey**, **François Mikulski**, **Xavier Monnot** and Guy Roulot.

Puligny-Montrachet: François Carillon, Jacques Carillon, **Jean Chartron**, **Alan Chavy**, Olivier Leflaive, Anne-Claude Leflaive, **Château de Puligny-Montrachet** and Etienne Sauzet.

Chassagne-Montrachet/St Aubin: **Blain-Gagnard**, **Marc Colin**, **Philippe Colin**, Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey, Fontaine-Gagnard, Jean-Noël Gagnard, **François Jouard**, Hubert Lamy, **Marc Morey** and Michel Niellon.

Others: **Bachelet-Monnot**, **Collotte**, **David Moreau** and Sylvain Pataille.

Finally, whilst much Burgundy reporting is excellent, I often feel it is a little po-faced; dry and conservative, which to me misrepresents what this visceral region is actually like. At the heart of Burgundy is not the terroir, but the winemakers. It is populated by some of the most charming, charismatic and downright funny people you could meet. It is also populated by the most wine-critic-phobic (I must invent a work for that), parochial, obstreperous and occasionally frustrating *vignerons*, but they are all part of what makes Burgundy special. This report contains a wealth of background information, mini-interviews with winemakers explaining their personal take on the 2012 vintage plus my own personal take on growers that I have endeavoured to make enjoyable and entertaining to read and God forbid, might even raise a chuckle at some points. Remember, the score is just the full stop at the end of a sentence.

The Meeting (Part 2)

God sits in his leather-bound swivel chair at the same table where a few months earlier, he had convened a meeting to discuss the minutiae of the 2012 Burgundy vintage. He opens his laptop, types in his password for erobertparker.com and begins reading the report, then begins jotting down wines for his private cellar. After an hour or so, he pulls out his mobile phone and speed-dials his wine merchant.

"Morning sir. I'd like to order a few 2012s. I was thinking of a few village crus: easy-drinking fare for drinking over the next couple of years - perhaps a smattering of premier crus from Chassagne-Montrachet; a cheeky Chevalier-Montrachet that you might recommend. Oh, some of that Beaune L'Enfant Jesus to share with my Son. Finally, a selection of grand crus from around Vosne-Romanée. You cannot go wrong there...and...let me see...of yes, why not...a Musigny from Freddy Mugnier. Just add them to my account."

There is a short but ominous pause on the other end of the line...

"Sorry mate. We completely sold out weeks ago."

"Bugger," *exclaims God and irritably slams down the receiver. When it comes to Burgundy 2012, even omnipotence has its limitations.*

He starts sketching a Norwegian fjord.

(Thanks to the BIVB and especially Mathilde Paturaud for assisting with my epic itinerary. Also thanks to Gabrielle Jung for accompanying me on some visits and helping with the video.)

Neal Martin

eRobertParker.comSM is a service of The Wine Advocate, Inc
Email: info@erobertparker.com
Copyright © 2001-2014 - The Wine Advocate, Inc.

Except as otherwise expressly permitted under the [Subscription Agreement](#) or copyright law, no copying, redistribution, retransmission, publication or commercial exploitation of this material is permitted without the prior written consent of The Wine Advocate, Inc.