



# *Uncork a beautiful* Burgundy

If you see someone with black teeth in the middle of the day, chances are they have been to a wine tasting. January means it is time for Burgundians to leave their rural vineyards behind to face London's rat race to show their latest offerings.

**Y**ou could easily spend a whole week tasting the region's Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. Wine buyers and journalists might attend four tastings in one day across the capital before heading home tight-lipped on the underground to avoid flashing their wine-stained teeth at unsuspecting commuters.

The leading UK merchants all hold tastings of the new vintage (a vintage means a year's harvest), which means the wines made from grapes picked in September 2009 will be on show in January 2011. Many of the wines will have been taken straight from the barrel to be tasted in London and will stay in the barrel for another six to twelve months so you'll be tasting the product

before it is bottled. This is what is called *en primeur* sales, ie wine futures. If you think you might like to buy a few cases or simply try plenty of delicious Burgundies at a fraction of the cost, snap up a ticket to one of these January tastings.

Wine tastings should not be intimidating but for the uninitiated they could be rather scary. Thankfully Burgundy tastings are less pretentious than Bordeaux events - and remember that many of those pouring their wines at these tastings are just grape growers who would rather be in wellies than suits. However, you might want to scratch up on your Burgundy knowledge so you do not feel like a complete buffoon when you get there.

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Burgundy has four wine growing areas: Chablis, the Côte d’Or, Macon and Beaujolais. You might know Chablis for its steely unoaked whites, Macon for its fuller Chardonnays and Beaujolais for its fun, bubblegum reds. However, when people say ‘I love Burgundy wine’, they are usually referring to the Côte d’Or. The Côte d’Or, literally the golden slope, is a narrow 30 mile-long escarpment running south of mustard-making town Dijon and ending in Santenay, a village famed for its casino (it first opened in 1892) and thermal spring as well as its red wines.

The Côte is split into two parts: the Côte de Nuits in the northern half, and the Côte de Beaune in the southern half, south of Beaune. I usually remember it as North=Nuits and Below=Beaune. See, that is not too hard. The Burgundians have made life easy on the Côte d’Or: the reds are made from Pinot Noir and the whites are made from Chardonnay. In case there are any sticklers reading this, there is a little bit of an inferior white variety named Aligote also planted on the Côte d’Or but hopefully you will never ever have to taste it – think sucking on a lemon and you will have the right idea. Pinot Noir is predominant in the northern Nuits in famed villages such as Chambolle-Musigny, Gevrey-Chambertin and Nuits-St-Georges. Chardonnay dominates the more southerly area, the Côte de Beaune, and here you will find villages like Meursault and Puligny-Montrachet.

The classification of this narrow strip of land is probably the most intricate in the world. You can cross a country lane and be in a different appellation or different ‘quality’ vineyard without

even realising. Experts spend a lifetime trying to understand the complexities of the system. In simple terms, there are four classifications of vineyard: generic Burgundy (Bourgogne in French); appellation wines; Premier Crus and Grands Crus. Grand Crus are the grand daddy of Burgundy. They are deemed to be the best sites, mainly in the Côte de Nuits and will have Grand Cru written on the label plus the name of the vineyard eg: Corton or Montrachet. Expect to pay mega bucks for these. The next tier is Premier Cru – often abbreviated to 1er Cru on the label. You will see a village name like Meursault followed by the name of the vineyard eg Perrieres and 1er Cru. With more than 600 Premier Crus, the quality can range from outstanding to a load of rubbish. Next comes the ‘Villages’ wines. The village vineyards are not as good as the Premier or Grand crus, which sit on the prime escarpment slopes with a high limestone soil content. These wines will just have the village’s name on the label such as red wine village ‘Pommard’ or ‘Volnay’ and once again, quality can be variable. At the bottom of the pyramid you will find Vins de Bourgogne, which are not entitled to any village name. While they are clearly inferior to the top wines of the region, there can be some good value quaffing on a Wednesday night.

It is easier to understand the vagaries of Burgundy wine by tasting. This can turn into an expensive learning curve so take advantage of the January tasting season and taste your way down from mustard land to casino central without losing all your chips. **m**

Rebecca Gibb is winner of the Louis Roederer emerging wine writer of the year 2010.



## INSIDER’S GUIDE

Jasper Morris

### What’s your hot tip for Burgundy 2009?

There was no problem in ripening the grapes in 2009 so look for wines from the cooler sites such as Benjamin Leroux’s Auxey Duresses among the whites. There are many reds to fall in love with, I have not tasted them all yet – but the Nuits St Georges from Nicolas Potel’s Domaine de Bellene is one that stands out.

### Which producers offer value, in your opinion?

There is great value in the Mâconnais at the moment thanks to a revival in quality from a clutch of producers. Also look out for first rate Côte d’Or producers who are flying just under the collectors’ radar – Rossignol Trapet or Grivot for example.

### Any value to be had at village and Bourgogne level?

Certainly. Whereas the premiers crus and grands crus from great producers can sell for fiendishly high prices, their village wines are much more reasonably priced – and in some cases they also have generic Bourgogne from vines just the wrong side of the road, and consequently terrific value.

*Jasper Morris MW, is a buyer for Britain’s oldest wine merchant, Berry Bros & Rudd. He splits his time between the UK and Burgundy, and is author of the new book, Inside Burgundy*

## TASTINGS WE RECOMMEND

*Get in early to book tickets as these events usually sell out.*

**11 January 2011**

*Bibendum’s Burgundy tasting*  
1800-2030hrs  
RIBA,  
66 Portland Place, London  
£30 per person  
www.bibendum-wine.co.uk

*Berry Bros & Rudd Grand Burgundy tasting*  
1730-2130hrs  
One Great George Street,  
London  
£30 per person  
www.bbr.com

**13 January 2011**

*Corney & Barrow’s Burgundy tasting*  
1700-2030hrs  
New Armouries room,  
The Tower of London.  
£35 per person, £50 for two  
www.corneyandbarrow.com