



Sacavin Courier



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On Thursday 26th January some 48 members and friends gathered at the 'In & Out' Club for a tutored tasting of *Fine Burgundy Wines*. Now, on Good Friday, with the help of my notes and a book or two I have the task of writing this report for the 'Courier'. The evening was arranged by Déléguée-Générale Fay Landau and proved to be most enjoyable, interesting and highly educational. We purchased the wines from Berry Bros & Rudd, and Gavin Powell from their St. James shop presented the wines.

For comparison we looked at the wines in three groups, with Gavin giving us both background information on viticulture and vinification, and tips as to what we should look for regarding, sight, smell and taste, relating this to the other wines in each group. Although at first I was a little disappointed to find that all of our tasting would look at the 2000 vintage, all of them were of the highest quality and at least eliminated the need to consider the vintage as we looked to find the subtle differences between the wines in each group.



The Wines

Group 1

Puligny-Montrachet, Les Caillerets, 1er cru.

Domaine Hubert de Montille 2000 £65.00

Chassagne-Montrachet, Les Chenevottes, 1er cru.

Colin-Deleger 2000 £36.00

Group 2

Santenay,

Domaine G&P Jouard 2000 £13.95

Volnay, Les Santenots, 1er cru.

Nicolas Potel 2000 £25.95

Corton, Grand cru.

Domaine Tollot-Beaut 2000 £37.00

Group 3

Gevrey Chambertin,

Domaine Gallois, 2000 £19.95

Gevrey Chambertin Clos St. Jacques, 1er cru

Armand Rousseau 2000 £69.00

Charmes Chambertin, Grand cru.

Domaine Gallois 2000 £44.95

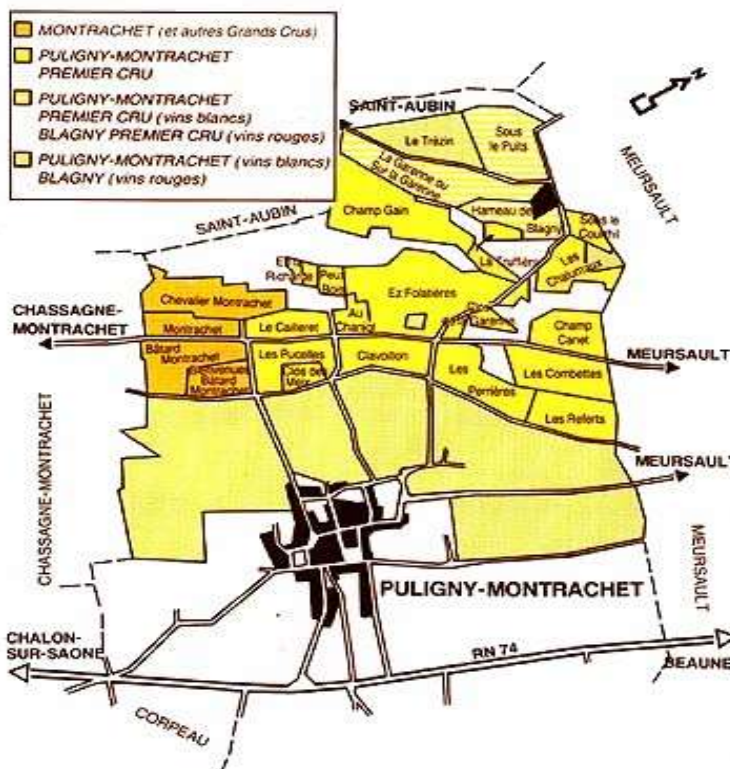
Note: Prices are per bottle ex. Berry Bros.

The Tasting

I will not attempt to go through my tasting notes line by line, but will explain the process and maybe elaborate on some points that I found particularly interesting in relation to our forthcoming visit to Burgundy.

Perhaps I should point out that I have never tasted a range of Burgundy of such quality and which so aptly illustrates the frailties of AC. It is always worth remembering that the AC system in France is not a guarantee of quality, much as we would like it to be.

The wines were presented in three groups, with Kevin providing a commentary, covering background information on each wine, viticulture, vinification, what to look for in terms of sight, nose and taste, challenging us to find those subtle or not so subtle variations between wines in the same group. To save repetition, I would remind you that the principle grapes in Burgundy are Chardonnay and Pinot Noir for the reds.



Group 1

Two white wines from the Côte de Beaune and the great vineyards of Montrachet:

The first was the **Puligny** produced using traditional methods, the other, **Chassagne**, was made using more modern techniques. With the two vineyards less than a mile apart, the difference between the two could not be more marked, the **Puligny** was light in colour, excellent nose and typical of a good white burgundy! While the **Chassagne-Montrachet**, also made by a highly renowned maker, was too dark in colour, over oaked and the only wine to disappoint me!

Both wines are Premier Cru, same grape from adjoining Vineyards, the vinification process is the difference in my view!

Group 2

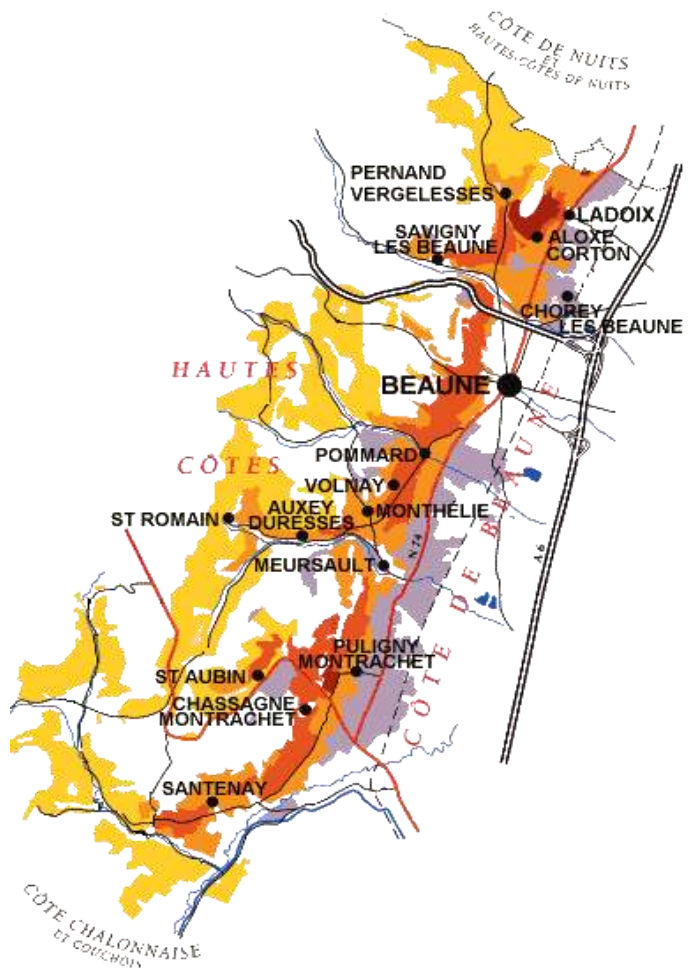
Three red wines from the Côte d'Or:

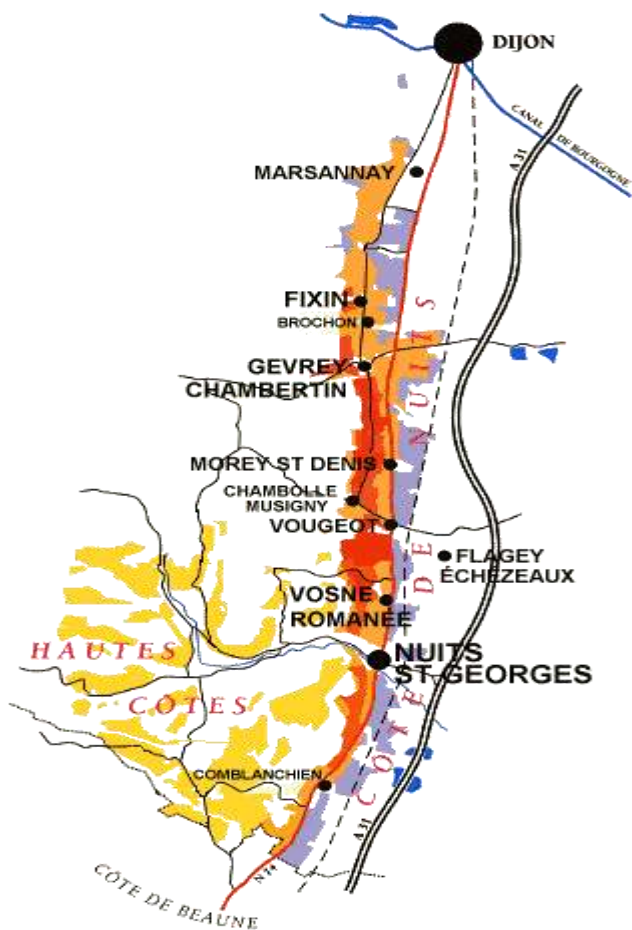
Santenay, This is the most southerly appellation of the Côte d'Or (but not of the Côte de Beaune) considered to be source of Burgundy that is good value. Nicholas Potel decided to set up his own **négociant** business after the death of his father in 1996. Nicolas is one of Burgundy's young turks, personally buying in & vinifying fruit from hand-selected sites from across the Côte d'Or.

Volnay, 'Santenots' This confusing appellation is in Meursault, not Volnay, although it does run up the boundary of that village.

Corton, Grand Cru, The Tollot-Beaut family Domaine is based at Chorey-Les-Beaune, often thought of as a slightly old-fashioned backwater. Their vineyard holdings, however, extend to Beaune, Savigny, Aloxe-Corton and a tiny holding in the Corton Charlemagne vineyard.

For me the star of this group was the Corton Grand cru, although the Santenay will improve with bottle age.





Group 3

Our final group, three reds from the Côte de Nuits. In fact all our final group were Chambertin, from my notes the best of the evening! and from the AC view, one from the top three classification:-

Gevrey- Chambertin- AC-Village or Commune

Gevrey- Chambertin- Clos St Jacques-AC- Premier Cru

Chames- Chambertin- Grand Cru

Interesting to note that both the Village and Grand Cru are from **Domaine Gallois**, Dominique Gallois took over this domaine from his father in 1989, "My skill is only aiding nature's natural course," says Dominique and thus the policy here is minimum interference and as far as possible letting the wines make themselves.

I think both these wine are excellent and will improve over the next decade, but for me the best of "show" as they say, was from next door, the **Clos St Jacques Armand Rousseau** .

Domaine Armand Rousseau is revered as one of the grand old domaines of Burgundy, resplendent with 14 hectares (half Grand Crus) and noble old vines. The simple principle of old (but not ancient) vines and sensible yields dictates the Rousseau style. Sometimes the wines can appear light in their youth but they nearly always take on weight as they age. Rousseau retains around 15 per cent of the stems, giving tannin and structure to his wines and aerating the juice and skins. All the wines are moved by gravity, never pumped.

Although a little confused at the end of the tasting, we had seen a splendid range of quality Burgundy. Looking back the two that I would choose as best in the “show” were:

Puligny-Montrachet, Les Caillerets, 1er cru.

Domaine Hubert de Montille 2000

£65.00

Gevrey Chambertin Clos St. Jacques, 1er cru

Armand Rousseau 2000

£69.00

I much preferred the traditional Puligny to the “new world style” chardonnay. The vineyard at Clos St. Jacques is highly regarded and although the Charmes Chambertin lies directly next door this is not as good despite its Grand Cru classification.



Our evening included a 3 course Dinner accompanied by two very good house wines. Once again our thanks to Fay for organising this successful event.



The Vintage 2000

A good to excellent vintage for white burgundy and Chablis. Mildew attacked the grapes during the growing season, but the Chardonnay, which has greater resistance to rot, suffered less than Pinot Noir. The growing season started off warm and dry and flowering was early but July turned wet. The Harvest started in Mâconnais on 6 September and just four days later in Côte de Beaune where raging storms actually brought picking to a halt. Chablis didn't start until 23 September. The Côte de Nuits reds are on the whole better than the Côte de Beaune. Low acidity and large crops have resulted in wines that are for relatively early drinking. Those growers who took great care to reduce the yields have produced good-quality wines

Appellation d'origine contrôlée

Although the AC rules are currently under review, the Burgundian authorities seem to oppose the new proposals of the INAO (Institut National des Appellations d'Origine). What the existing laws do endeavour to do is guarantee the geographical origin of the wines, and lay down viticultural and vinification precepts which should lead to better quality.

The specifications cover:

Area of production;
Grape varieties permitted;
Minimum alcohol level before chaptalization;
Maximum yield per hectare;
Methods of planting, pruning, and treating vines;
Vinification;
Maturation;

The Hierarchy :

Grand Cru 2% of total production (33 ACs)

Premier Cru 11% of total production (562 climats)

AOC Communale (village wine) 33% of total production (44ACs)

AOC Régionale (generic/regional) 54% of total production (22ACs)



This was clearly a memorable evening. We are very grateful to our Chef de Cuisine, Des Holland, for this report and for sharing with us his impressions of the wines being tasted.

WINES OF THE LOIRE – just how much do you know?

Chevaliers might like to try their hand at the following list of questions on the wines of the Loire. The standard is very high, since they were the special subject questions put to a BBC Mastermind competitor. Commandeur Ernest Lee kindly noted them down for us.

- (1) Which town is the centre of the Loire sparkling wine industry, as well as being home to a famous cavalry school?
- (2) What name is given to the soft limestone around Vouvray, which is ideal for cellars to mature wine?
- (3) Who owns the Château de Tigné, where the cuvées of Mozart and Cyrano are made?
- (4) Which grape, commonly blended with Gamay, is usually the dominant variety in Rosé d'Anjou?
- (5) Produced by a handful of Communes around Esvres, which rare wine is made from 3 Pinot grape varieties – meunier, gris and noir?
- (6) Which of the Pouilly Fumées, for which Didier Dagenau is famous, is known by a Latin name meaning “flint”?
- (7) The appellation Cour Cheverny was specially created for which white grape, now unique to the Loire?
- (8) Who produces wine entirely by biodynamic principles in his vineyard Coulée de Serrant in Savennières?
- (9) Which appellation is a sweet white wine, produced by the Château de Fesles, that dates back to medieval times?
- (10) What is the name of the oldest appellation in the Loire region, which includes the commune of Brinay?
- (11) Pouilly-sur-Loire is a dry white wine that is principally made from which grape?
- (12) Which vineyard (or clos), owned by Charles and Nadie Foucault, produces oak-fermented Saumur Champigny wines?
- (13) Which term on the labels of many Muscadets indicates that the finished wine has been left on its sediment after fermentation?
- (14) In which French town does an annual Loire Valley wine festival take place, in the Parc des mini-châteaux

Answers to be found on page 11

Whither the French wine industry?

The world of wine is clearly changing as evidenced by numerous articles that have appeared recently in the media. Many of us will have the opportunity of getting closer to the subject in September, when we visit Burgundy, but the BBC's Europe Editor Mark Mardell stole a march on us and sent back his own report, in June, from the area around Beaune.

His visit was prompted by radical EU proposals to tackle over-production across Europe. With about 300 million litres of French and Italian wine is being turned into ethanol or surgical spirit this year, a process termed "crisis distillation", at a cost of 500m euros to taxpayers, the European Commission's blueprint calls for more than 10% of Europe's vineyards to be grubbed up over the next five years and the land put to alternative use. Other suggestions include changes to techniques governing winemaking, such as the permitted levels of sugar and alcohol, with the aim of allowing European producers room to innovate by embracing techniques used by US, Australian and South African wine producers - flavouring wine with wood chips, for example. To make European wine more recognisable to consumers, labelling could be altered to allow greater prominence for familiar grape types rather than geographical origin.

Mark Mardell's observations might alarm us lovers of traditional French wines. Concerning the Commission he says, "It wants to pay wine makers to dig up one eighth of Europe's vineyards. It also wants them to deal with the reason that they aren't competing with the New World, by loosening the rules on what can and can't be done. One thing in their sights is the law that stops more than half of European wines being labelled simply by grape variety and vintage. They would like to see "Chardonnay 2005" replace mind-boggling *domaines* and *chateaux* for the simpler wines."

Burgundy seems an odd place from which to be sending a report which does so little to acknowledge the great panoply of quality wines

to be found in France. On over-production, he does accept that Burgundy is not a big offender, but continues, "there are tales of whole regions of France and Spain where "crisis distillation" has become a way of life. You produce cheap bad wines you know you cannot sell and - hey presto! - the EU buys it anyway."

So it is really a different argument that is being addressed by one young Beaune vigneron of five generations, interviewed, when she admits they have trouble selling their wine but insists it is her heritage, her right, to go on producing. She says, "wine is not about money, it's a passion, it comes from the heart".

A viewpoint that is dismissed as an ostrich-like obstinacy in the face of hard economic facts. Nevertheless, the article ends with an emotive question: "Do the French have a point? France is what it is partly because of its agricultural landscape. How many of the British who flock down south every summer want that to change?"

So what threat does all of this pose to those classic Loire wines that we Sacavin members have learnt to enjoy? Something of an answer was provided in Le Monde's International Edition for 6 May, in an article by Jean-Claude Ribaut entitled "Wines: the matter of the chippings". While the use of oak chips to flavour wine, symbolic of the new international oenology, instead of putting the wine into oak barrels according to ancient practice, is only one of the many issues raised by the European Commission, M. Ribaut's approach and the conclusions he draws could just as well be for the industry as a whole.

His introduction sets the scene: "On 15 September 2005, an agreement between the European Union and the United States was signed authorising the sale in Europe of wines developed in accordance with oenological practices peculiar to the New World in return for a restriction in that country on the use of 17 trade names, such as Chablis, Chianti, Porto... The sale in Europe of wines having contained oak chips in order to give them a woody taste will be authorised, while the Americans commit themselves to limit the production of wines and spirits using European names."

The point is made that the use of chips is one tenth the cost of new wooden barrels. However, cost isn't everything. While oak chips make their presence known via a touch of woodiness and vanilla flavour, they fail to provide "the natural micro-oxygenation that comes from the porosity of the wood."

While chippings work rapidly on wines to be drunk young; they are not considered suitable for wines to be laid down. This, says M. Ribault, "puts the strategies of the New World in direct conflict with the Old." But to set this into context, according to accepted figures, "less than 10% of wines in France and hardly more than 3% of production from the rest of the world comes from casks."

The article embraces other processes intended to improve the wine, or to mask its flaws - the

use of powdered tannins and gum arabic for flavouring, the employment of gases: nitrogen to expel carbon dioxide from red wine, micro-oxygenation to accelerate their maturing, carbon dioxide to give vitality to white wines - leading to the comment by one disillusioned vigneron: "Industrial wine is fed through tubes like a bedridden invalid in intensive care."

While wholesale adoption of such practices would be resisted by traditional wine makers, innovations that prove beneficial could still have their place. For instance, "the barrel," M. Ribaut reminds us, "was a Gallic invention for the transport of wine. It is only much later that one is learning to use alternatives." And thus research into possibilities of natural micro-oxygenation using vats of differing shapes and alternative materials is progressing.

For the future, the article suggests a "two-speed viticulture" will develop. The one, based on certainty and results, will continue to produce those traditional wines for which reputation is sufficient to guarantee their demand. The other vignerons, according to the vintage, will make wines as the opportunity dictates, to be drunk young, more or less woody, but not having benefited from the advantages of natural oxygenation. The inference is that it is to this second group that the EU is directing its proposals. Time, perhaps, to remember our pledge, "to spread knowledge and appreciation of the wine and culture of Anjou."

JMI



Answers* to the wine quiz:

(1) Saumur (2) tuffeau (3) Gérard Depardieu (4) groslot (or grolleau) (5) Noble-Joué (6) sillex
 (7) Romorantin (8) Nicolas Joly (9) Bonnezeaux (10) Quincy (11) Chasselas (12) Clos Rougeard
 (13) sur lie (14) Amboise

*In the opinion of the editor, half marks (i.e. 7 out of 14) is quite a respectable score!

**SHIRLEY WEBSTER**

Shirley Webster was born on 7 January 1936 in Southend-on-Sea where she lived for the rest of her life. She worked for Bacon & Woodrow, a large firm of actuaries in Southend, until in the early 1990's she was promoted to the position of Office Manager of their new London Office, St Olaf House at London Bridge. She took on her new role with ease and enjoyed looking after such a renowned and admired example of the best of 1930's building. The Board Room there was famous for being used as the setting for a British Airways prime time television advert and there the firm hosted lunches and dinners for both UK and international clients. The arranging of menus and choice of wines was one of Shirley's responsibilities. This, together with her many trips abroad, developed further her appreciation of food and good wines. Her other interests included a love and knowledge of opera shared with her late husband, and reading avidly, which was a great comfort once she was confined to the house by her illness.

It was in St Olaf House that she met Mollie, wife of Commandeur Roy Clements, a long-time member of Sacavin. Her introduction to the Commanderie was accompanying them on a couple of visits to the Loire (the photograph was taken on one of the many happy occasions) and this lead up to the invitation

for her to become a Chevalier on November 16 1996.



Shirley seated between Derek & Hazel Sheen and Roy & Mollie Clements

It was after returning from a Spring holiday to the Dutch bulb fields in 2003 that she felt unwell and was immediately diagnosed as having cancer. She was a "guinea pig" for a new treatment and responded well initially, but despite fighting her own battle using weapons of a positive attitude, humour and always hope, she started becoming weaker towards the end of 2005 and died after only a week or so in hospital, on Boxing Day 2005, just before her 70th birthday.

Shirley, a widow of many years, is survived by two sons and two granddaughters.

RC



DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Burgundy Trip Tuesday 12 to Saturday 16 September 2006



Management Committee meeting Wednesday 4 October 2006
at the Kings Arms Buckingham Palace Road at 11 am



Chapitre 2006 at Armourers' Hall Wednesday 29 November 2006
Calling letters will be posted mid October



AGM and Supper at The Queens Club Saturday 24 March 2007
Calling letters will be posted early February