



Sacavin Courier



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Our Chef de Protocole surveys the Côte d'Or

@ Sacavin visit to the Côte d'Or



Hôtel Château de Saulon

Tuesday 12 September 2006, late in the evening and 12 km south of Dijon. In a former stable block, now a handsome vaulted dining room, Sénéchal Geoffrey Wheal was welcoming a party of 46 chevaliers, spouses and guests as they sat down to dinner together. At last our long anticipated visit to Burgundy's Côte d'Or was under way. Four guests were given special mention, Stuart and Sue Craggs from Suffolk, together with John and Marie Foley from Sevenoaks. Geoffrey also voiced our appreciation of Chef des Expéditions Ernest Lee and his wife Krystyna, now that all their planning was, at last, coming to fruition.

The dining room belonged to the Château de Saulon, our home for the next 4 nights. With Crème de Cassis de Dijon produced just up the road and the region famous for Crémant de Bourgogne, the Vin d'honneur was no surprise, Kir. However, somebody had taken note of our Loire loyalties, as a St-Nicolas de Bourgueil had been selected to accompany the main course.

A brief note about our hotel. Initially built in the 14th century, Le Château de Saulon was burned down in 1656, to be rebuilt immediately after. It was re-modelled in the 1830's by the Marquis de Clermont-Montoison and is now a "listed" building ("monument historique"). The building was bought in 1997 by Didier and Lionnel Petitcolas and has been progressively repaired and renewed. There are now 22 rooms in the main building and 8 rooms in the "pavillon". Guillaume Senellec manages the operation of the hotel and the Chef de Cuisine is Denis Carre.

Wednesday morning and we were introduced to our coach driver, not French but Italian, whose name was Bruno. Any tour of the Côte

d'Or has to begin with a visit to the Château of Clos de Vougeot, the home of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, that august body which, twice a year, holds the Tastevinage, when Burgundy wines are submitted to be judged in blind tastings for the award of the prestigious, individually numbered, Tastevin label of quality. As the sun began to burn through the early morning mist, our coach turned off the N74 Dijon-Beaune road and took the long narrow track across an immense vineyard, until we arrived beneath the eastern façade of a squat, elegant château, standing like an island amidst a sea of vines.



Le Château de Clos de Vougeot

The “Clos” in Clos de Vougeot, we were subsequently told, just means enclosed by walls. However, with the vineyard extending to around 50 hectares, this was some wall! Chef de Cuisine Des Holland has kindly offered some comments, reproduced here, and also, later on in the text, his notes on the tastings.

Clos de Vougeot

The land inside the Vougeot walls belongs to some 70 different growers who have on average less than a hectare each, some producing as little as 1000 bottles a year. Given this great fragmentation – and the resultant diversity of wines – the Clos de Vougeot could be regarded as representing Burgundy in miniature. It is essential that you select your wine according to the reputation of its producer, the words Clos de Vougeot are not enough.

There is no doubt that to have a hope of an element of real class in your Clos de Vougeot it would be as well to choose proprietors with vineyards in the upper part of the Grand Cru. Unfortunately, however, it is not as simple as that. The hand of man counts, as always, for a great deal, and as much also depends on the size of the parcel owned, as vinifying small amounts of wine is always difficult and a certain mass is necessary for really satisfactory results. To this end, people with several plots in various parts of the Clos will put their grapes together to make one cuvée. This is sometimes beneficial when all plots are well placed, but in other cases it dilutes the real grand Cru plot by mixing it with grapes from a piece of land which would barely merit Premier Cru status in another commune.

Wine is no longer made in the château itself and this wasn't to be a tasting. Instead we were given a guided tour of the principal rooms, with Ernest providing the translation.

It was a group of monks, we were told, strict observers of the Tenants of St Benedict, who in 1098 AD founded the “New Monastery of Holy Mary” in the Fôret de Cîteaux, about 8 km to the east, and started the Cistercian order. It was they who planted the first vineyards at Vougeot, from which to produce sacramental wine for mass.

The local nobility, anxious to secure themselves a place in heaven, proved themselves generous patrons and by the 13th century the vineyard had grown to its present size. The building we were in dated from the 16th century.

A change of fortune came with the French Revolution when the property was confiscated by the state. It subsequently went through many owners until, in 1920, the vineyard was bought by one Etienne Camuzet. A keen supporter of the then newly founded Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, (motto: “Jamis en vain, toujours en vin”), he initially lent them the château and then, in 1944, agreed to sell it. It has been their headquarters ever since.

Those of us asking questions about the Tastevin were quickly put right on one thing, forget the “s”, the correct pronunciation is “tâtevin”.



Lesley Garner, Marie & John Foley, Chris & Lorraine Wilkinson, Valerie Ingram, Laura Garner and Ernest Lee



The main courtyard

We were struck by the scale of everything. The immense roof with seemingly acres of small clay tiles, archways wide enough for horse-drawn carts to pass through and, in the fermenting rooms, even an American would have been impressed by the extraordinary, monstrous devices located in each corner. With the appearance of Roman war machines, they were actually wine presses and were already old before Columbus made his famous voyage of discovery. Their performance was remarkable, they could achieve a pressure of 7 tonnes per square metre.



One of four wine presses in the fermenting room

The Confrérie hold their inductions in the “cellar” but curiously this is above ground. However, walls 1 metre thick, just a few slit windows and 2/3rds of a metre of rubble above the ceiling maintained the cool conditions necessary for wine making.

In a Courier report one can give the reader only the briefest glimpse of all that we saw, but those on the tour were evidently impressed.

So, with that introduction and the sun now high in the sky, we set off southwest for Beaune, where Pernilla, a tall, blond and youthful Danish lady awaited us. She was to be our guide through the most extensive cellars in Burgundy, those of Patriarche, Père et Fils. 5 km of cellars, she told us, or 2 hectares, in which were stored an unbelievable 4 million bottles of Burgundy wine!



The Trésorier contemplates 4 million bottles of Burgundy

These premises, too, owed their origin to a religious order, having started life as the Convent of the Ladies of the Visitation. Indeed, their chapel was still maintained by the present owners.



John Foley, Robert Timperley and Des Holland

We didn't walk all 5 km, but sufficient to exhaust a number of our party, so our arrival in the vaulted 14th century cellar now used for tastings was very welcome. Here Pernilla presented each of with our own tastevin, the dimpled metal saucer in which the wine to be sampled is poured. She introduced us to eight wines, first mentioning the Burgundy grape varieties: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Gamay and Aligoté.

Wednesday: Patriarche Père et Fils, Beaune**Bourgognes Blancs**Bourgogne Aligote 2004:

No like, harsh unfinished, but then I have never liked the Aligote grape.

Pouilly-Fussè 2001:

Smooth with crisp after taste, good wine .

Petit-Chablis 2002:

Good nose, lots of fruit, but I found the after taste harsh.

Bourgognes RougesBourgogne Pinot Noir 1999:

Typical Pinot Noir! nice wine, good.

Marsanne 1998:

Delightful, ready to drink , good nose, good flavours.

Fleurie 2003:

Fine, but nothing special.

Gevrey-Chambertin 2003:

I think this will be a good wine! although I can't tell at this stage.

Beaune 1er Cru 2001:

Again I find it difficult to evaluate this wine, it's great pedigree is there, I think! I just do not have the skills to judge how these wines will develop over the next few years?

Pommard 2002:

Nice wine, good nose, not ready to drink yet !

This was the only tasting where I made notes of my views in detail, but throughout our tour we were presented with wines of great potential, many the great wines of Burgundy, names that I have known since my teens but seldom tasted. So for the rest of the tastings I will only write notes of, what was for me, the best of the bunch, the ones that I actually purchased. From Patriarche it was the Marsanne 1998 @ €14.

Returning to our coach, we headed back up the A31 autoroute to Nuits-St-Georges and the Hôtel St-Georges for lunch.

An unscheduled, involuntary but nevertheless agreeable post-prandial perambulation confronted us that afternoon. Correspondence from the Domaine de Thomas-Moillard gave the impression our next stop was an address in Beaune. So back down the autoroute to find it. Beaune and coaches don't go well together and we spent a happy half hour on foot, wandering along cobbled streets until we found a small wine merchant with the name Moillard over the door. No,

this was not the place, but they pointed us in the right direction – Nuits St-Georges again! The autoroute was quite familiar by now. It wasn't long before we found, not Thomas-Moillard, but Moillard-Grivet. Nevertheless, this proved to be our correct destination. It seems that within the company hierarchy there are a number of firms all involving the name Moillard, but with various other family names attached to it.



Lesley guards his purchases!

A young Englishman, Alastair, welcomed us with profuse apologies for the misleading address. He told us Moillard is one of the oldest wine families in Burgundy, although only comparatively recently selling to the public under its own label, having formerly supplied in bulk to other houses. Today the family manage over 100 acres in Burgundy and an area twice that size in Pay d'Oc.

Alastair himself had an interesting history, having previously made wine in Romania. He was now working his notice with Moillard-Grivet prior to taking a position with a vigneron in Chablis. Which perhaps explained his effervescent approach to the tasting, but all the more enjoyable!

Wednesday: Caves Moillard-Grivot

Although we tasted some great wines here, including 2 Puligny-Montrachets and a Grand Cru Corton 2002, my choice was a white, Bourgogne Hautes-Cotes de Nuits 2004, young fresh Chardonnay, good nose, light dry, excellent value @ €6.30.

Wine-tasting is a tiring business but a few souls found the energy for a swim in the hotel pool that evening, prior to dinner.



This side of the table, Keith Lockyer, Sue & Stuart Craggs



Fouad & Laila Ghali

Thursday was a day of contrasts, modern and traditional. Our morning visit was to the Dommaine Henri de Villamont, where the previous year €3m had been spent in installing state of the art wine-processing equipment.



Savigny-lès-Beaune

Their property lies in Savigny-le-Beaune, just 5km north-west of Beaune itself and for this visit our guide was another Bruno. Some of an organiser's concerns about a trip like this could be appreciated when we learnt that Bruno had only at the very last minute found himself in this rôle, because the lady handling our arrangements had left the company! Nevertheless, he proved a good host, not only as a guide and sommelier but also single-handedly dealing with our wine purchases.



Trevor Harris, Lorraine Wilkinson & Gillian Ridler



Domaine Henri de Villamont: Bruno conducts a tasting

Thursday:

Henri de Villamont, Savigny-lès-Beaune

After our tour of new stainless steel production unit and cellars, again we tasted 2 fine Puligny-Montrachets and amongst the reds a Chambolle Musigny Le Baudes. My choice here was Savigny-Beaune 2003 Clos des Guettes (we could see the Vineyard at the top of the hill), this excellent Pinot Noir was well formed, full of fruit and ready to drink now @ €16.

Lunch was just a short drive into the next valley where, on the edge of the village of Pernand-Vergelesses, the Lees had discovered Le Charlemagne, a restaurant very modern in style and most unexpected in such a rural setting, overlooking the slopes of Corton-

Charlemagne. Here, Laurent and Hiroko Peugeot provided a menu that combined the culinary culture of both France and Japan. We didn't go too far down the Japanese path, limiting ourselves to the oil, vinegar and soy



*Peter & Chris Bouch, Brenda & Geoffrey Wheal
and Laila Ghali*

sauce mixture that accompanied the skewered bread, but the rabbit and fennel in aspic, followed by chicken on a bed of buck wheat couscous, not to mention the plum tart tartin with ice-cream and chocolate, were delicious. Curious, but equally enjoyable, were the lollypops, marshmallows, honey-cake and vegetables decorating the tables.



Providing the balance to the morning tour was our afternoon visit to the Domaine Eric de Suremain at the Château de Monthélie. The village of Monthélie itself has only 200 inhabitants and its streets proved almost too narrow for our coach.



Le Château de Monthélie



Dominique welcomes us to Domaine Eric de Suremain

Once through the gates, however, we were greeted by Dominique, our host, who showed us around. To us, it looked as if nothing much had changed since the Second World War but the excellent wines we tasted were testament to the traditional production methods employed there.



*Laila Ghali, our host Dominique, Chris Bouch
and Richard & Gillian Ridler*

Thursday: Domaine Eric de Suremain, Le Château Monthélie

Amongst the wines we tasted in the courtyard was one of Ernest's favourites, Rully 1er Cru. This is understandable as Eric de Suremain has a great reputation for producing excellent wines, Surena Sutcliffe in her latest book on Burgundy says "Eric de Suremain has become the best of the Monthélie Appellation". However my choice was Château de Monthélie 1er Cru Sur la Velle 2000, the wine has a big nose, full of fruit and berries, a good body and ready to drink now @ €17.10. This beautiful valley can be seen from the courtyard.

This being a lovely warm late-summer afternoon, our return to the Château de Saulon was early enough to allow some serious relaxation in the pool. So on this occasion there was a rather more noteworthy Sacavin presence with, at one point, should it have proved necessary, sufficient of the Management Committee immersed to form a quorum.

“Le Météo” had been threatening storms from the west since Tuesday, so it was no surprise that Friday dawned overcast. The renowned Château de Mersault was our first port of call, one of Burgundy’s most beautiful and extensive domaines, 10 km south west of Beaune. It is truly representative of the Côte de Beaune, owning more than 100 different parcels of land in the villages of Aloxe-Corton, Savigny-les-Beaune, Beaune, Pommard, Volnay, Mersault itself and Puligny-Montrachet.



At Le Château de Mersault

However, before sampling the produce of such famous names, we first visited the former Orangerie dating from the 19th century, now housing a collection of contemporary paintings.



From the collection at Château de Mersault



Cellars dating from the 14th century

A cellar visit had become almost routine by now but this was preceded by a film giving the history and viniculture of the domaine. Once in the cellars we were presented with the now familiar sight of row upon row of large oak barrels, but our questions here gave rise to an interesting fact, that each one costs between €800 and €1,200. Some are kept for 3 years, others for 10, whereupon they are sold to Spain, but the price achieved then is only €100. Oak chips must surely be a tempting alternative!

Friday: Château de Meursault

After a tour of this beautifully restored mansion, full of fine art, we moved through the cellars to taste a fine selection of wines from the Côte D'or, including, as we would expect, 1st.Cru Meursault and the inevitable Puligny Montrachet. After choosing a couple of bottles of excellent Volnay Clos des Chenes 1er Cru 2001 as gift from our group to Ernest, in appreciation of all his hard work in arranging our most enjoyable first trip to Burgundy, I decided on Beaune Greves 1st.Cru 1997. This wine, made from grapes grown on small rocky mid-slope, shows beautiful colour, good nose, emphasizing roundness rather than tannins, so can be ready to drink earlier than most @ €23.

Santenay, around 10km from Meursault, marked the furthest point south on our tour, where we visited the Domain Chapelle. Here vineyards extend to 20 hectares, leading to a wide range of production, with the vendanges this year due to start, weather permitting, the following Monday for machine picking and the Thursday by hand. The end result would normally be 100,000 bottles but had been as low as 60,000 in recent hot summers.



The château at Domaine Chapelle, Santenay



In the Caveau des Jacobines at le Domaine Chapelle

Friday: Domaine Chapelle, Santenay

Our last tasting was held in the working area where work was in hand for the start of this year's Vintage, so we were surrounded by equipment and concrete vats. Our tasting wines were served by Yvette Chapelle and included Chassagne Montrachet 1er Cru Rouge as well as a range of Santenay wines. My choice was Santenay 1st.Cru Les Gravières 2001, well made wine, will improve with 2/3years bottle age, good nose with big fruit finish.

Between Santenay and Mersault lies the town of Chagny. Here, in Le Chagny Restaurant, we sat down to another “light” lunch.



In the foreground, Sue Holland, Keith Lokyer & Margot Boss

This was to have been a brief stop before a free afternoon in Beaune but with the weather closing in, the meal turning into something of a feast and Beaune itself already familiar territory from Wednesday’s walk, we decided a long, leisurely lunch was the more sensible choice.



Lorraine Wilkinson

It was a most relaxed and satisfying meal, and it wasn’t until we dragged ourselves back to the coach that concerns were raised about the proximity of the five course valedictory dinner in prospect back at our château! There was nothing for it, waste-lines were going to have to give a little.



Richard & Gillian Ridler and Fay Landau

There are, of course, ways to spin out a dinner. Lesley Garner, who had provided an amusing interlude on Thursday evening by telling one of his tales, provided an even longer one this time with a story about a young man who asked his sister to help him buy some gloves as a present for his new girlfriend. Those who remember it will, no doubt, still be chuckling. Those that can’t should give Lesley a call, as it probably wouldn’t do to repeat it here!



A toast: “The Ladies and Guests”

Then Terry Hatton found good reason to speak, to propose a toast to the ladies and guests. Perhaps in response to that, or maybe because she is, as she put it so well herself, the Matriarch of our Commanderie, Daphne Mackenzie rose to offer a few words of advice, notably a reminder that in coming to Burgundy we were out of our territory. Something that might be permitted once in a while, but for 2008 our true home, the Loire, was beckoning.

It was left to Geoffrey, in the absence of the Grand Commandeur caught up in the business of moving house, to sum up everyone's feelings. The trip had been most enjoyable, not least because of the very noticeable team spirit that had prevailed. He thanked Lesley for his contribution as Chef des Raconteurs, before turning to congratulate Ernest and Krystyna on another successful expedition. The applause that followed carried with it our whole-hearted appreciation as Geoffrey presented Ernest with the two bottles referred to earlier, purchased from the Château de Mersault.



*Chef de Protocole Owen Collins calls us to order.
"Commandeurs, Officiers, Chevaliers and Guests, please
raise your glasses to Her Majesty the Queen!"*

Jl/DH

We are grateful to Madeleine Forster, Fouad Ghali, Des Holland and Richard Ridler for the photos used in this report.



While we were enjoying ourselves in Burgundy, preparations were being made in the vineyards of Maine-et-Loire for the wine harvest there. In sympathy with the previous article's matriarchal reminder as to our true loyalties, we give here the following account of how it went, taken from an October report in *Le Courrier de l'Ouest* and kindly translated for us by Michel Leterme.

The year 2006 will be remembered by wine-growers as another exceptional one – earlier and drier than 2005 – until the heavens, as though disturbed by climate change, decided to redress the balance and sent heavy downpours onto the vineyards of Angevin and Saumur.

From then on one can in broad terms divide the vintage hopes into two parts. On the one hand there are those who picked the grapes before there was any question of rot and on the other hand are those who, from lack of time or because the grapes were not ready have had to face increasing dampness. In this lottery the first grapes – Chardonnay and Chenin, intended for sparkling varieties, have

proved to be excellent. So too are the grolleaux which are exceptionally good and destined for the rosés. The quality of the red cabernet is more uncertain – so early has it been – something never seen before. Those who went into action quickly have obtained a good pressing. As for the liqueur-like Chenins, there will be wide differences. Here and there, a record harvest has been noted where good use was made of a summer often superior to the 20° possibilities. Elsewhere, where the noble rot has degenerated, the result is uncertain. Once again, the attention given to the vine, its ventilation, its ability to dry after rain – all these things will make a difference.



SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Trésorier's Note

- Subscriptions are due on January 1st. The rate stays the same at £15, or £22.50 if your spouse is also a Chevalier.
- Most of you pay by bankers order so there is nothing more for you to do but accept my thanks for making my life simpler.
- If you prefer to pay by cheque, please send this to me, Michael Forster, payable to Sacavin, rates as above at:- The Clearing, Deepdene Wood, Dorking, Surrey. RH5 4BQ



POSTSCRIPT

A rare event indeed for the Commanderie, but it is with delight that we offer our congratulations to Chevalier Christopher Mackenzie and his wife Lucilla on the birth of their son, Oscar Hunter James, and to Commandeur Daphne Mackenzie, Oscar's grandmother. Third generation Sacavin perhaps?



DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES

Management Committee meeting **Wednesday 24 January 2007** at
The Kings Arms Buckingham Palace Road at 11.30 am



Wine-tasting & Supper at the National Liberal Club **Friday 16 February 2007**
Calling letters will be posted in December



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

With this Courier come warm wishes from the Management Committee to all Commandeurs, Officiers, Chevaliers and their families for this Christmas and the coming New Year. Rabelaisian greetings to you all!