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Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jenssen

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Bidding On Burgundy At The Hospice De Beaune

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Burgundy is the birthplace of not just delicious wine and Beef Bourguignon but the *grand-pere* of all charity wine auctions, The Hospice de Beaune. Now in its 152nd year, the auction, currently organized and run by the Burgundy Wine Board, the Hospice Civil de Beaune, and the venerable Christie's auction house, attracts bidders and spectators from around the globe. Three glorious days of wine tasting, black tie dinners, and street festivals precede the auction, held on the third Sunday of the month. In tandem with cooking heavier foods in the fall, we make sure our tuxedos are pressed and our bowties are at the ready--the Hospice de Beaune is one of our favorite events of the season.

Contrary to popular belief, the auction and many events are open to the public, and Beaune is a hive of activity, with wine lovers coming from across the region and around the world to celebrate the joys of Burgundy wine. We enjoy local restaurants Le Cheval Noir and Loiseau des Vignes, but you better make a reservation about the same time you book your airline ticket. A seat at Saturday night's Chapter Dinner at Clos de Vougeot is also a highly sought after commodity.

As exciting as the auction itself can be, the majority of the action leading up to Sunday's climax in the Halle de Beaune takes place over lunch and dinner in restaurants and chateaus within the medieval ramparts of the town of Beaune itself and the surrounding vineyard-covered countryside. The Chateau de Beaune, the de facto symbol of the town and home to Bouchard Pere et Fils, opens its cellars and tasting room for tours, as well as for a series of private dinners and lunches for select wine merchants, press, and high-end collectors who count Bouchard's wines among their most precious bottles. Nearby Bouchard Ainé et Fils, now owned by the Boisset family, opens their cellars for an interactive food and wine tasting. Our friend Jean-Charles Boisset designed the fun displays that help to explain the scents and flavors of wine. A short drive south of Beaune brings you to the charming village of Pommard with its picturesque town square. Anne Parent, the 13th generation winemaker at Domaine Parent will be happy to taste you through her fine line of luscious wines.

On Saturday morning, Beaune's Palais de Congres plays host to a grand-scale tasting of wine from every appellation in Burgundy, included the storied Romanee Conti. You will need a little food to soak up all that good wine, so our first stop is always the gougere stand near the entrance. The piping hot cheese filled pastry makes a perfect breakfast, and recently-vinted Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are an excellent stand-in for coffee.

The 2010 auction set a record for the highest price paid for a single barrel: The final barrel of the afternoon, 500 liters of Beaune Premier Cru, cuvée Nicolas Rolin, sold for 400,000 euro. Last year's auction brought in the highest total to date, 5,402,333 euro, although there were more barrels sold at a lower average price than the prior year. While poor weather conditions in the spring and hail at the end of July have led to a much smaller grape crop this year, by our reckoning the quality of wine from the Burgundy vintage of 2012 is excellent, and lower yields mean that the best wines will be harder to come by and thus worth more as they age. The president, or host of this year's auction, to be held on Sunday, November 18, is Carla Bruni-Sarkozy. Proceeds will go to the Carla Bruni-Sarkozy Foundation, which supports people who are physically or socially deprived of access to the arts and culture, and to the Idée

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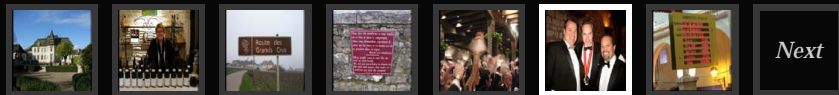
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Foundation, whose goal is to fight illiteracy.

The Chateau du Clos de Vougeot, where Saturday night's dinner is held, is a grand 16th century Renaissance-style manor house, with a wine cellar dating back to the 12th century. It has been owned since 1945 by the Confrerie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, a worldwide organization dedicated to the love of wine from Burgundy. The above-ground cellar, with its four enormous antique wine presses, is now used for monthly dinners. No matter how many times we pack ourselves into long, narrow tables with six hundred other revelers, we still marvel as servers gracefully glide down the narrow aisles, placing hot plates in front of each diner, as finely choreographed as a classic ballet. Everyone who has been to a dinner here talks about the swinging of napkins over the head as the crowd sings along to a band playing French drinking songs, and it doesn't take long to realize that with no room to dance, napkin-swinging is as rowdy as you can get without leaving your seat. One of the really fun things about this weekend wine fest is you never know who you are going to meet. Last year, we were seated shoulder-to-shoulder with wine writer Jancis Robinson, and we chatted with president Ines de la Fressange, the model and fashion designer, and the previous year we shared a train ride back to Paris with figure skating legend Dorothy Hamill.

Bidding On Wine In Burgundy

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