



HIDDEN
GEMS

DISCOVER GOOD-VALUE JEWELS
AMONG BURGUNDY'S WINES.

BY DEBORAH GROSSMAN

Medieval Burgundian monks were onto something when they built stone walls around plots of vines that made wine they liked. Centuries later, wines from these plots garner top prices.

“When you make wine here, you can’t cheat. You have one grape from one vineyard and one winemaker to create it,” says Grégory Patriat, winemaker at Jean-Claude Boisset in Nuits-Saint-Georges.

Pinot noir and chardonnay—these two grapes consume the majority of Patriat’s time, and that of winemakers at the 3,890 *domaines* (wine-producing estates), 282 *négociants* (wine merchants) and 17 cooperative cellars.

Along with the plethora of wineries, Burgundy comprises 100 AOCs (*appellation d’origine contrôlée*)—a whopping 22% of all AOCs in France. The most acclaimed are in the Côte d’Or, comprising the Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune, running north-south from Dijon to Santenay.

On top of the complex geography and multiple ownership models, a reduced wine supply due to climatic conditions has resulted in burgeoning prices. Finding good-value Burgundy wine is a challenge. Yet winemakers such as Patriat and other vintners believe that hidden *joyaux* (jewels) are currently produced in the Côte d’Or and geographically contiguous AOCs.

DISCOVERING THE HIDDEN GEMS

On her wine list at The Restaurant at Meadowood, St. Helena, California, wine director Victoria Kulinich honors the highest-level AOC grand cru wines. But the next level, premier cru, are often as exciting to drink, she says. “For a hidden gem, consider the wonderful whites from an AOC such as Meursault, which is not as sought-after, say, as the Montrachet premier crus.”

Pierre Jhean, president/winemaker at Henri de Villamont based in Savigny-lès-Beaune, makes both grand cru and premier cru wines, but enjoys crafting the latter more. “With grand cru, you can only use grapes from one vineyard plot or *climat* (named vineyard for an AOC). Many smaller plots within the same *climat* can be used for premier cru. The additional selections give more choice and more elegance,” says Jhean.

The next level are the 44 villages designated as AOCs. Kulinich has a wide variety of village wines to choose from. “These entry-level wines are often very good,” she says. “We list Domaine Roulot Meursault village wine, which I would recommend over some premier crus.”

Kulinich also recommends several of the six regional AOCs that contain grapes from across Burgundy, adding that regional Bourgogne white and red wines are excellent value. The regional appellations, including Crémant de Bourgogne sparkling wines, are half of Burgundy’s production.

Hidden gems can also be found by acknowledging that the quality of winemaking can evolve affirmatively. “Jean-Claude Boisset is only 50 years old, but in 2002, we extensively upgraded



the vineyards and took major steps in winemaking to improve quality,” says Patriat.

Kulinich recommends seeking out smaller villages such as Mercurey in the Côte Chalonnaise region south of Côtes de Beaune. There are no grand cru *climats* here, but producers focus on excellent-quality premier cru and village wines.

DOMAINES DEVILLARD

Amaury Devillard, owner of Domaines Devillard, is president of the Chalonnaise winegrowers. “In the Chalonnaise, we work together on improvements. The area is booming, with 160 growers and a growing list of awards,” says Devillard. “What is important to vintners in Mercurey and Burgundy is the vision of the land and the taste in the glass,” he adds.

The third-generation owner’s home estate is Château de Chamirey in Mercurey. Devillard is especially pleased with Chateau de Chamirey Mercurey La Mission premier cru monopole (single-owner vineyard) and the village AOC wine Chateau de Chamirey Mercurey En Pierrelet, another monopole. The latter white wine is fruity with well-balanced acidity to pair with *jambon persillé*, a local ham and parsley dish served at the winery’s bistro. “We dislike flabby wines, and seek power and finesse with freshness,” Devillard says.

Other Devillard wineries include Domaine des Perdrix, with a wide range of AOCs, Le Renard, with regional and village appellations, and La Garenne, which offers well-valued wines from the Mâconnais, the most southern Burgundian region.

OPPOSITE: Henri de Villamont Clos des Guettes *climat*.
ABOVE: Burgundy wine route D974 from Dijon to Santenay.

HENRI DE VILLAMONT

At the winery, the story is told that Jhean was born in a barrel, because he lives and breathes Burgundy wine. Joining Henri de Villamont in 1999, he applied his obsession to quality winemaking in the historic cellar, one of the largest in Burgundy, modernized in the mid-2000s.

One of Jhean's favorite wines is Villamont Chambolle-Musigny premier cru, a Côte de Nuits *climat* where the winery is the largest landholder. Another favorite is Savigny-lès-Beaune Le Village, a rare wine to carry "village" in its name. When guests arrive at *le manoir*, the manor house, he may pair the wine with wild boar *bourguignonne*.

Jack Farrell, owner of Haskell's wine stores in Minnesota's Twin Cities, is a member of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, a high honor bestowed on Burgundy specialists. Over several decades, Farrell has observed the transformation of Villamont from large production to quality at every level. "There are many Burgundy houses that aren't so careful with their wine. Villamont always treats their wine with great respect," he says. "You can find remarkable values, from their Bourgogne Pinot Noir Prestige to their premier cru Meursault and the grand cru Chambolle-Musigny."

Frank Johnson Selections in New York is known as an importer of fine Burgundy wines. After tasting with Jhean every year, owner Frank Johnson finds the range of wines consistently strong. "In particular, the clubs that I supply appreciate wines such as Villamont Savigny-lès-Beaune Clos des Guettes premier cru that carries a huge price differential from a Puligny Montrachet premier cru of the same vintage," says Johnson.



ABOVE LEFT: Henri de Villamont Bourgogne Prestige regional AOC wines.
ABOVE RIGHT: The underground cellar at Maison Louis Jadot, founded in 1859.



MAISON LOUIS JADOT

At Talavera at the Four Seasons Troon North in Scottsdale, Arizona, assistant manager Kelsey Jordan lists Louis Jadot as a go-to wine. "Jadot is a wine you can trust. They get good grapes and are careful in the cellar. If a table orders entrees from salmon to pork, I can recommend a half bottle of Louis Jadot Beaune Theurons premier cru at a reasonable price."

Jin Ahn, general manager at Noreetuh, a modern Hawaiian restaurant in New York, also lists Jadot. With a 200-bottle list featuring primarily French wines, he finds Jadot fits well with the food and shows quality at all price points. "I may pair the Jadot Beaune Blanc premier cru with mentaiko spaghetti with aonori seaweed, chili and smoked cod," says Ahn. "The Marsannay Rouge Clos du Roy by the glass pairs with our Spam agnolotti with black winter truffles. The rustic nature of this Burgundy plays well with the earthy black truffles."

Jadot is a historic Burgundy house dating from 1859. With an architecturally beautiful and operationally sensible underground cellar in Beaune, winemaker Guillaume Large appreciates the ability to vinify about 170 *climats* separately, as if the company was a small estate.

For the 2014 vintage, the U.S. received 130 different labels from grand cru Gevrey-Chambertin to 45 more reasonably priced wines with village or regional AOCs. Jadot is a leader in producing Côteaux Bourguignons, a new regional AOC that can include several grapes other than pinot noir and chardonnay in a lighter, fruitier style.

BOISSET, LA FAMILLE DES GRANDS VINS

At Jean-Claude Boisset, Patriat keeps winemaking simple. "We should be lazy when making these wines," he says. "We interfere as little as possible."

Boisset Family Estates produces wine in California, Canada, England and France. Patriat was trained as a viticulturist.

CRÉMANT DE BOURGOGNE



"Discover the Burgundy that bubbles" is the slogan that fifth-generation producer Grégory Geoger offers about Maison Parigot & Richard in Savigny-lès-Beaune. Geoger is proud that his great-great-grandfather traveled to Champagne to learn the methods to make sparkling wine in the Côte d'Or.

French sparkling wines made in the *méthode champenoise* are known as crémants, followed by the region. Though Crémant de Limoux was the first, Burgundy produced wine with a second fermentation in the bottle by the early 19th century. As still Burgundy wine gained traction, many sparkling wine producers switched sourcing grapes from expensive Côte d'Or vineyards to regions such as Côte Chalonnaise.

At Noretuh, a modern Hawaiian restaurant in New York, owner/wine director Jin Ahn cycles through three or four Crémant de Bourgogne wines on his list. "These wines offer great style and value. There are many quality crémants to select."

In 1975, Crémant de Bourgogne achieved regional AOC appellation status, and now comprises 10% of Burgundy's wine production. Chardonnay represents at least 30% of blanc de blancs and rosé, with aligoté and two other minor grapes allowed in the blends. Though pinot noir is the primary red grape for blanc de noirs and rosé styles, 20% can be gamay, grown mainly in Beaujolais.

As the only crémant region using primarily the same grapes as

Champagne for the bubbles, the reputation of Crémant de Bourgogne ranks high in quality and value. More wine directors are taking note of Crémant de Bourgogne. Several Burgundian wineries model the mix of modern and traditional aspects of this sparkling production.

LOUIS PICAMELOT

Frank Johnson sells wine to many New York clubs through Frank Johnson Selections. Of the many choices among Crémant de Bourgogne producers, he carries labels from Louis Picamelot of Rully in Côte Chalonnaise. His clients prefer Louis Picamelot blanc crémant. Though he also lists Picamelot rosé, he says, "Many American Champagne drinkers would judge the rosé to be sweet, but it is not."

Returning home after World War I, Louis Picamelot was among the first in Rully to make sparkling wines. Picamelot's grandson, Philippe Chautard, remembers his grandfather as a careful steward of the land. In that tradition, Chautard has purchased vineyards and makes half his wine from these grapes.

Yet Chautard is breaking Burgundian custom by listing dosage—the quantity of the sugar/wine mixture added before corking—on the back label. "People want to know what is in their wine. This information helps people know how dry or sweet the wine may be," he says.

Named for Philippe's father, Cuvée Jean-Baptiste Chautard is a complex expression of crémant. Aged for three years on the lees, or spent yeast, the wine yields more complexity and flavor elements. Chautard recommends a dish such as poulet de Bresse, a local organic chicken specialty often served in a white cream sauce.

Another special Picamelot Crémant de Bourgogne is Terroir de Chazot. This blanc de noir from pinot noir grapes is produced from a single vineyard parcel. The blue

label of Cuvée Jeanne Thomas evokes the sea, and Chautard recommends pairing with scallops St. Jacques.

MAISON PARIGOT & RICHARD

There are many differences with Champagne practices, says Geoger of Parigot. "Many growers in Champagne planted productive clones of chardonnay and pinot noir, which can reduce grape quality. Crémant grape yields are set lower. Though Champagne producers strive for a house style, my family stressed that the winemaker must follow what the harvest gives him—easier for us, because we grow 70% of our grapes.

"If my grandfather was alive, he would be at home in this cellar," adds Geoger. "We still use natural refrigeration with the vats they built into the cellar walls."

In the centuries-old tasting room, Geoger pours refreshing Parigot Blanc de Blancs, and suggests pairing with Japanese cuisine or seafood. The rosé is fruitier, but not sweet, a perfect match for barbecue, he adds.

Geoger's father tried making a sweeter style, but told him, "Sugar masks every detail of our winemaking."

LOUIS BOUILLOT

Yet sales representative Heather Bowen finds that customers at K&L Wine Merchants in Hollywood and Redwood City, California, and San Francisco prefer the off-dry, slightly sweet Louis Bouillot Perle d'Aurore Rosé over the Bouillot Perle d'Ivoire brut Blanc de Blancs. "We sell cava and prosecco sparkling wine, too, but people gravitate to French wine, especially if it is from Burgundy," says Bowen.

The Louis Bouillot Perle d'Ivoire is served in a traditional way at Le Carmin in Beaune, paired with Dover sole or pan-fried foie gras with apple and blackcurrant. The restaurant team informs guests that Louis Bouillot has produced sparkling wines since 1877.

Purchased by Boisset in 1992, Bouillot, a large producer in Nuits-Saint-Georges, buys grapes from 200 growers. To educate the public, Boisset opened the Imaginarium next to the winery with *La Magie des Bulles* (magic of bubbles) theme via interactive displays and video.

"The influence of the aging process along with the nice fruitiness of the grapes builds on our unique crémants," says Marcel Combes, director of sparkling wines for Boisset in France. The range includes Les Classiques, including the Perle line made with grapes in a fruitier style from the Côte d'Or. In describing the Millésimés range bottled in exceptional years, Combes says, "Wines such as the 2012 vintage are rich and 'biscuity' wines—similar in taste profile to Champagne."

Crémant de Bourgogne production has doubled in the last 10 years, and its future is bright. Two new higher-level classifications were established in 2016 to recognize higher standards for aging on lees and use of the highest-quality base wine. Eminent Crémant de Bourgogne stipulates aging on lees for at least 24 months; Grand Eminent requires 36 months.

In the village of Talant next to Dijon, Chautard of Louis Picamelot purchased additional vineyards and plans a new production facility and tasting room. The redevelopment for winery is a priority for the city of Dijon, named by the French government as a *Cité Internationale de la Gastronomie*.

Chautard designed the Picamelot label with a wavy, sloped band of color representing the many *côtes* (hills) in Burgundy. "If we had a fancy label that reminded people of Champagne, they would think we were 'small' Champagne," he says. "I want the wines to be known as Burgundy."

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: 1) & 2) Philippe Chaurtaud, owner of Louis Picamelot, and the entrance to the winery. 3) Parigot owner Grégory Geoger walks down to old cellar tasting room. 4) Top, *route des grand crus* Morey-St. Denis; bottom, Louis Picamelot crémant de Bourgogne.



“Experience is the best education. I’m never satisfied and continually blind-taste wines to improve,” he says.

Patriat is concerned that Burgundy admirers will be priced out of the market. “We don’t want only collectors to buy Burgundy, whether grand cru or a premier cru such as Meursault Les Charmes. It’s like collecting cars—they are meant to be driven.”

Another Boisset winery is Bouchard Aîné et Fils in Beaune. Founded in 1750 and purchased by Boisset in 1992, the winery produces a broad range of wines as a *négociant* that purchases grapes and wines from more than 40 growers. Vincent Bottreau is known as the “viticulturnist,” which highlights his deep knowledge of vineyard sourcing and attention to aging the wines.

DOMAINES ROUX PÈRE ET FILS

In Saint-Aubin, near the well-known Montrachet *climats* in Côte de Beaune, Roux Père et Fils is run by fifth-generation Matthieu Roux. The winery is ultramodern, but the tasting dates, in part, from the 17th century. With grapes from 123 *climats*, the winery produces a wide range of wines. Hidden gems such as the Rully in the Chalonaise are made with grapes grown only a mile from the Côte de Beaune. Roux Père

Rully Clos Mollepièrres premier cru offers excellent value with a rounded mouthfeel and minerality.

DOMAINE DE LA CHOUPETTE

La choupette means a “special friend,” and manager Perrine Parizot offers a warm welcome to guests and excellent wines at affordable prices from village to grand cru AOCs. Parizot’s husband J. C. Gutrin and his brother Philippe own the third-generation winery, and visitors to the tasting room in Santenay, at the southern tip of the Côte de Beaune, ring the bell—the family lives next door.

Now available in the U.S., Domaine de la Choupette wines such as premier cru wines Chassagne-Montrachet Morgeot and Santenay La Comme and village wine Santenay Comme Dessus are especially drinkable, with smooth tannins.

Devillard at Château de Chamirey echoes the Gutrin sentiments about family values in the Chalonaise region, where his father often comes to the tasting room. “This is not only a business, but part of our heritage. I’m dedicated to doing my part to maintain the estate, take care of the people who work here and make good wine at all levels.” ■

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: 1) Domaines Roux Père et Fils wines in the tasting room cave. 2) Gevrey-Chambertin Clos Saint-Jacques *climat* after harvest. 3) A visitor at Domaine de la Choupette rings the bell to summon a family member.

DEBORAH GROSSMAN IS A SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA JOURNALIST WHO WRITES ABOUT PEOPLE, PLACES AND PRODUCTS THAT IMPACT THE FOOD-AND-WINE WORLD.

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