



BARGAIN HUNTING IN BOURGOGNE

DON'T LET POTENTIAL BURGUNDY LOVERS BE SCARED
OFF BY THE REGION'S PRICED REPUTATION

BY ROGER MORRIS

Burgundy winemakers and merchants, especially the negociants of Beaune, have a real and continuing fear that every time a new American wine lover hears about rare Burgundies being sold at auction or glimpses the price of La Tâche on the wine list, she or he will permanently perceive the Burgundy category as altogether too expensive.

A few years ago, Louis Fabrice Latour of Maison Louis Latour told a gathering of trade people at the Hospices de Beaune that Burgundy urgently needed to maintain a flow of entry-level Burgundies at the under-10 level—under €10, £10, \$10 and ¥10. While those benchmarks may be a bit low today, the mindset was clear: ensure access to—and visibility of—everyday Burgundy. As in every French wine region adhering to the AOC system, the most basic regionally labeled wine is the most plentiful and affordable. The challenge

is to ensure that decent quantities of that flag-bearing basic wine reach Americans.

Burgundy has largely responded positively to the challenge. There are loads of entry-level Burgundies available to consumers in wine shops and restaurants at affordable prices. Shop owners and beverage managers only need to know where to look and how to tell—and sell—the Burgundy story: Start with a simple “Bourgogne” and gradually move up the chain to an interesting regional wine, then to a village wine and finally graduate to a Premier Cru or Grand Cru vineyard. In Burgundy’s time-tested hierarchy, entry wines are among the region’s best buys.

Here are some thoughts and tips:

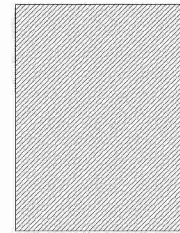
TRUST NEGOCIANTS. While on- and off-premise buyers may scramble to get allocations of the top crus from Latour, Louis Jadot or Joseph Drouhin, negociants also have an unparalleled opportunity to

BURGUNDY'S PYRAMID

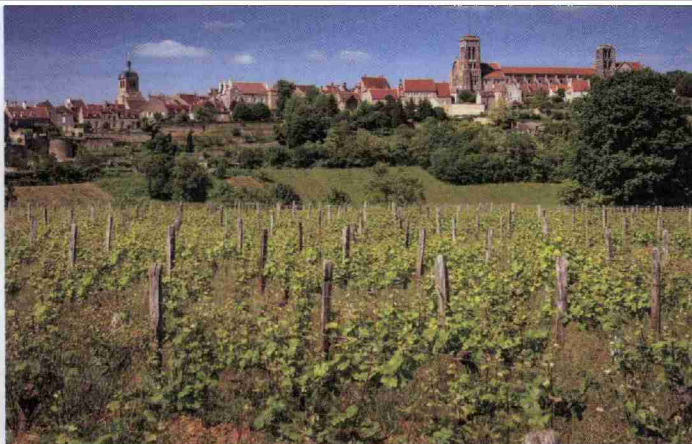
Like many French wine regions, Burgundy's appellations are regional but also hierarchal: the most plentiful appellation is the also the least expensive. Simple Bourgogne wine is the foundation of Burgundy; village-appellation wines and Cru wines are rarer and dearer. Pictured here: the town of Beaune.

buy grapes and raw wines across the broad expanse of Burgundy and offer wines at best prices through their basic Bourgogne categories. “We source our entry wines mostly from Côte Chalonnaise and Côte de Beaune areas,” says Jean-Christophe Rolland, North American export manager for Prosper Maufoux, “because we are based in Santenay and because we have old roots in Rully.”

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REGION TO WATCH



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Adds Angelo Martelli, Wine Director for Fairway Market, “Negociants are trying to do more than just gain market share. They know buyers will develop brand loyalty and graduate to their other wines as their palates develop.”

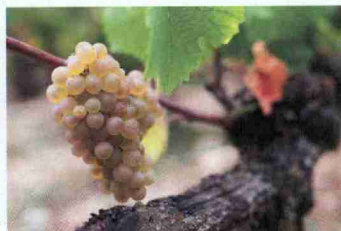
□ SIMILARLY, BUY FROM TRUSTED PRODUCERS. “My favorite thing to do with value Burgundy is to find my favorite producers and buy their most entry-level wines,” says Joe Campanale, co-owner and Beverage Director of Brooklyn’s Faus-t restaurant. “Traditionally that is Bour-gogne Blanc, Bourgogne Rouge, Bour-gogne Aligoté or Passetourgrains. I find that great producers will still use all their winemaking expertise on their entry-level wines; it will just come from less-revered sites. I really feel like this strategy is the best way to get value in this region.”

□ CHECK OUT THE REGIONS YOU’VE NEVER HEARD OF. Producers in lesser-known regions scattered between the Côte d’Or and Chablis are trying to up their games. Last year, for example, Vézelay, a white wine appellation 90 minutes northwest of Beaune, was upgraded to vil-lage status. “We have more clay than in Chablis, so our wines have more aromas,” says Quentin Gornouvel of Cave Henry de Vézelay, “but Chablis has more lime-stone and [thus] has more mineral tastes.” These out-of-the-way wines are often found in portfolios of smaller importers looking to get a foothold in Burgundy.

Above, left: production of Crémant de Bourgogne is based on the exact same grapes and methods as Champagne. // Above, right: the appellation of Vézelay was recently upgraded to village status, a sign that the region’s wines are likely overdelivering on quality for the price. // Below, Aligoté, Burgundy’s other white grape, features character similar to Chardonnay but at bargain pricing.

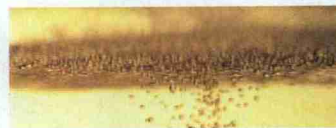
□ LOOK FOR VALUES IN THE BEST VINTAGES. “I try to start with a really good vintage,” says Brian Flanagan of New York City retailer Burgundy Wine Com-pany. “The really good producers will always declassify some of their top wines” to lower, less-expensive categories, even when it is a “short” harvest with fewer grapes available.

□ BRANCH OUT INTO BEAUJOLAIS AND ALIGOTÉ. The merchants of Beaune, who once ignored Beaujolais, have re-discovered it as a rich source of grapes. Not only can Beaujolais’s Gamay be used in between 15% and 30% of some Burgundy blends, many Beaune-based negociants are treating their Beaujolais as though it were a Bourgogne Pinot Noir. Says Jean-Charles Boisset, whose Boisset Collection includes negociants Mommessin and Bouchard



Âiné et Fils, “We concentrate on a longer fermentation with Gamay, giving it more earthiness and texture.”

Frédéric Barnier, Technical Direc-tor of Louis Jadot, adds, “At Jadot, we have always thought of Gamay and Pi-not Noir as brothers.” Similarly, Aligoté, produced either as Bouzeron or as Bour-gogne Aligoté, has improved to com-plete with, at least in structure, similarly priced Burgundy Chardonnays.



□ DON’T FORGET THE SPARKLERS. If Burgundy has a hidden gem, it’s Cré-mant de Bourgogne, which uses the same primary grapes and employs the same methodology as Champagne producers at a fraction of the price.

□ MAKE IT PERSONAL. In addition to availability and attractive prices, it’s also important to do basic education as well as old-fashioned hand-selling. “I have a Bourgogne Blanc from a well-regarded Meursault producer,” says Kim Milburn, Beverage Director for Orzi in Manhat-tan. “I tell people they’re still using the same oak. A lot of Americans are not as familiar with Burgundy as they are other regions. It’s my job to bring them over to the bargains, whether it’s bottles on the list or wine by the glass.” ■