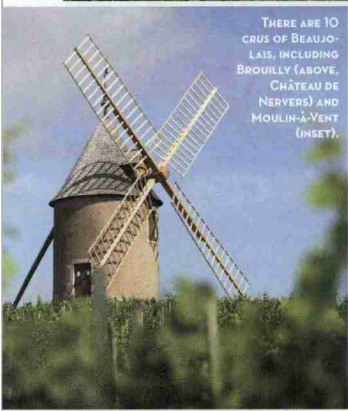
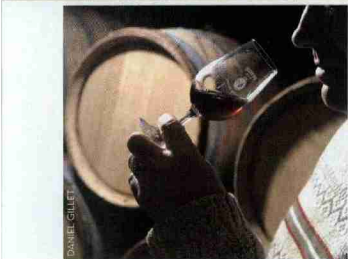


TASTE



THERE ARE 10 CRUS OF BEAUJOLAIS, INCLUDING BROUILLY (ABOVE, CHATEAU DE NERVERS) AND MOULIN-A-VENT (INSET).

DANIEL GILLET



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OFF THE VINE

Better BEAUJOLAIS

Our Wine & Spirits Editor breaks down Beaujolais' history, characteristics, makers, and appellations

By Mark Spivak

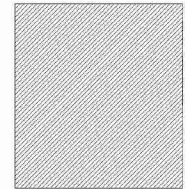
In many of Europe's wine regions, it was customary for vintners to throw together a makeshift wine for vineyard workers to consume during harvest. The concoction was crude, vibrant, low in alcohol, and always cheap to produce. Over time, many of them spilled over into local cafés and became a popular seasonal quaff for other low-wage laborers.

Fast-forward to the late 1970s, a moment when French wine, which had dominated the American market for generations, was in trouble. A series of scandals and bad vintages had eroded quality. Even worse, consumers were suddenly enthralled with California wine, which had proven itself equal to its French counterpart in the famed Paris tasting of 1976.

Faced with diminishing market share and falling

profits, French vintners were panicking—that is until a few of them, spearheaded by large *négociants* such as Georges Duboeuf, seized on Beaujolais Nouveau as a marketing ploy. For several decades, the competition to serve and drink the first Beaujolais of the year had been a minor distraction in both Paris and New York. Duboeuf and his compatriots used advertising and public relations to build Nouveau into a global phenomenon. It succeeded brilliantly, at least at first.

Eventually, it became obvious that they had simply made a bad situation worse. Americans associated all Beaujolais with Beaujolais Nouveau, only drank it in the fall, and never wanted to pay more than \$10 for it. In their effort to survive, the Beaujolais *négociants* had destroyed the category.



In many ways, it was a shame. Gamay, the grape from which Beaujolais is made, had prospered in the region since the fourteenth century; in fact, it was grown in Burgundy before Pinot Noir became popular. The 10 *crus* of Beaujolais (Saint-Amour, Juliéna, Chénas, Moulin-à-Vent, Fleurie, Chiroubles, Morgon, Régnié, Brouilly, and Cote de Brouilly) are some of the greatest wines in the world, and they're also capable of aging. When visiting the region, I was served bottles more than 20 years old that were mature but also fresh and nuanced.

Just as in Burgundy, small producers are often the most rewarding. Look for the "Gang of Four," who almost single-handedly rescued Beaujolais from its Nouveau mediocrity: Marcel Lapiere, Jean Foillard, Guy Breton, and Jean-Paul Thévenet. All hail from Morgon, and all are represented by famed importer Kermit Lynch. When buying wines from Morgon, seek out those that come from the Côte du Py, an area regarded for structure and ageability.

J.J. Vincent, a Burgundian vintner best known for his benchmark Pouilly-Fuissé, makes an excellent

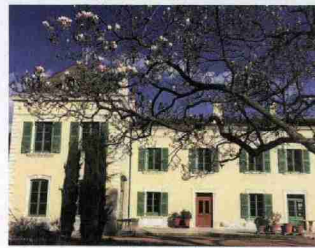
Cru Beaujolais from Juliéna. In Fleurie, there are two vintners to watch. Alain Coudert farms a 22-acre estate at Clos de la Roilette. Lucien Lardy makes three single-vineyard wines from plots inherited from his father, and also produces wine in Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent. Lardy is one of the founders of Terroirs Originels, a coalition of winemakers dedicated to preserving the traditions of the Mâconnais and Beaujolais regions.

This doesn't mean you should ignore the large *négociants*. In superior vintages, producers such as Duboeuf and Mommessin (owned by Boisset) turn out wines that are both satisfying and good values. The wines of Château des Jacques, Jadot's estate in the region, are rich, complex, and well worth investigating.

Nor does it mean that you shouldn't enjoy the youthful exuberance of Nouveau—just don't confuse it with the glorious fruit, depth, and charm of real Beaujolais. <<



CHRIS HAN-CHAUZE



MAKERS LIKE GEORGES DUBOEUF (TOP) POPULARIZED BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU. CHATEAU DES JACQUES OFFERS A GOOD INTRODUCTION TO BEAUJOLAIS.