



Article Archive Vintage Profile

France: Burgundy 2014 - Nuits-Saint-Georges

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—Neal Martin

Nuits-Saint-Georges is pining for its own Grand Cru. I must confess it is slightly bizarre and ridiculous that it does not boast a single one to its name and I do hope that the INAO will eventually bestow either Les Saint Georges or Vaucrains what they rightly deserve. And in some ways, the more I taste the wines from this appellation, the more I am beginning to really appreciate their qualities vis-à-vis Vosne-Romanée or Gevrey-Chambertin. It seems that too many cognoscenti give Nuits-Saint-Georges short shrift because at the end of the day, those Grands Crus shroud an appellation in some kind of magical aura. However, the likes of the Denis and Bertrand Chevillon at Domaine Robert Chevillon and Gregory Gouges at Domaine Henri Gouges, are really crafting some exquisite expressions of Pinot Noir (and occasionally of course, Pinot Blanc!). You know what...this appellation might offer the best value come the time of release. The 2014s from Chevillon were amongst the best that I have ever tasted from barrel: refined and elegant, poised and yet packed pull of flavor, each expressive of its respective vineyard.

Do check the Nuits-Saint-Georges 2014s from growers that are not based in the village but in neighboring Vosne-Romanée. I often think that those great vineyards in the northern flank of the appellation are almost exactly like Vosne-Romanée, but without the same postcode on the label, and often represent better value. There is more to uncover here and I will be back down next year to investigate further.

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Domaine de la Vougeraie

I remember my introduction to Domaine de la Vougeraie well. It was London, a rather salubrious tasting that served as an introduction of this new name to the Burgundy firmament to wine journalists and the odd nerd writing on a new-fangled medium called the Internet. I tasted the wines and whilst the array of premier and grand cru vineyards was impressive, the wines were less so. They were too oaky. As a consequence, they felt a little humdrum, a bit predictable, too earnest and desperate to please. A couple of journalists waxed lyrical, but they left me cold.

Come their crop of 2014s and Domaine de la Vougeraie has almost discretely become a major player in top quality, occasionally profound Burgundy wine. With winemaker Pierre Vincent, there was a significant turnaround in style and quality - the wines discovering *terroir* expression, nuance and elegance, poise and complexity. I've lost count the number of times their wines have triumphed in blind tastings and yet still, I don't think this domaine receives the credit that is due. Not artisan enough maybe? As part of Jean-Claude Boisset's portfolio, that's him on the official website attired in a dashing velvet navy tuxedo, it is almost dichotomous to the romantic notion of a *vigneron* with clay under his fingernails, permanently dressed in a tatty old cardigan handed down from his great grandfather. However, it should be what is in the glass that counts. Pierre Vincent is an über-talented winemaker who now has one of the most comprehensive and enviable ranges of white and red Burgundy wines to "play" with. In fact, each year there are one or two more purchases and 2014 is no different, as Pierre introduced a couple of new whites courtesy of acquisition from Vincent Girardin.

"The spring was perfect: good temperatures and sunny. The rain arrived in July and there was a lot of rain in August, the temperature around 20 to 25 degrees Celsius but with a lot of humidity. September was perfect. You just had a little problem with *suzukii* fruit fly, especially in the lower vineyards, especially in Gevrey-Chambertin around "La Justice" and in Beaune after the hailstorm. I used a lot of whole cluster, not so much in the Côte de Beaune, but more in Côte de Nuits, a minimum of 30% to 60% for the Grand Crus. For me, it makes the wine more complex and lends it more body. As we have worked with biodynamics for 15 years I have found the balance is good. We started the harvest on September 10 with whites and finished on September 20 with the reds, using a sorting table where 10% to 15% grapes were discarded."

"It was a good vintage more for the Côte de Nuits than the Côte de Beaune," he opined, though I might not agree when considering the surfeit of exceptional whites this year. "The yield for the Côte de Beaune appellations was very low at around ten hectoliters per hectare and there was up to 80% to 90% damaged vines, especially around Beaune Grèves. In Pommard it was less difficult, though we are still talking about a loss of between 50% to 60%. Elsewhere the quality was good and around Puligny, it was very good. We reached around 12 degrees natural alcohol with good pH levels, around 3.10 for the whites after alcoholic fermentation and a pH of 3.5 for the reds. We did just 0.3 [alcoholic] degrees chaptalization at the end of alcoholic fermentation to extend the maceration. The whites are aged in between 20% and 30% new French oak. Some wines were bottled the last week in July, the rest next year."

Overall, there is an enticing set of 2014s from Domaine de la Vougeraie, the whites bolstered by those new additions and no longer a "sideline" to the reds. The quality here peaks with the Grand Crus, in particular a wonderful Corton-Charlemagne en Charlemagne and a convincing Bâtard-Montrachet, although this address was one of the few where I felt the Chevalier-Montrachet did not quite fire on all cylinders, irrespective that this is their debut release. The reds are very fine, although I felt that the hail impacted around Beaune and denudes them of the fruit they might otherwise have had. There was just something a little...vacant...about one or two labels. My pick would be an excellent Nuits-Saint-Georges Clos de Thorey, probably the best value here, but if you can trade up, the Charmes-Chambertin will be utterly seductive once in bottle. Again, it was not a consistent run through exemplary wines and paradoxically I consider that as no bad thing. Whereas the domaine would have once tried to paper over deficiencies, I get the feeling that the wines are allowed, encouraged to reflect both the strong and weaker facets of the growing season. As a consequence, Domaine de la Vougeraie is becoming an ever-increasing "interesting" grower that pursues *terroir* expression rather than an in-house style. That should be applauded. I cannot wait to taste the 2015s next year because blessed with this panoply of premier and grand crus, it should have played straight into their hands.

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