

■ THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

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THE **SOMM** JOURNAL

ADVENTURES
DOWN THE
ROAD AT

KENWOOD

THE STORIED SONOMA
COUNTY WINERY
CONTINUES TO BLAZE
NEW TRAILS

Kenwood Chief
Winemaker
Pat Henderson in
the vineyards.



PHOTO: ALEXANDER HUBER

SPECIAL REPORT

A Formidable Forum

AT THIS YEAR'S INTERNATIONAL CHARDONNAY SYMPOSIUM, **FRANCE'S EXQUISITE VERSIONS** OF THE VARIETY TOOK CENTER STAGE

by Bob Bath, MS / photos by Jeremy Ball



Left to right are Bernard Retornaz, President of Maison Louis Latour; Bruno Laclotte of importer/distributor Regency Wines; Seminar Moderator Bob Bath, MS; Guillaume Suss, Export Manager for Chartron et Trebuchet; Lisa Brown of Boisset Collection, representing Domaine de la Vougeraie; and Geoffroy de la Besnardière of Gonzalez Byass, representing Languedoc's Domaine de l'Arjolle.



The tiny, walled, two acre Clos du Prieuré vineyard of Domaine de la Vougeraie lies literally next door to the famous Grand Cru vineyard Clos de Vougeot. The wine is from the Boisset Collection.

WHEN IT COMES to Chardonnay, France has no peer. Not only is there more Chardonnay planted in France than anywhere else in the world, no other country has been able to fully replicate the personality or reach the heights that French Chardonnay can achieve.

France has a long history with Chardonnay. Celebrated Chardonnay vineyards like Corton Charlemagne in Bourgogne* were famous as early as the 8th century. Although the vineyard at that time was probably a mix of indigenous varieties, it's fair to assume that Chardonnay was one of those varieties. In 1685 "Chardonnay" (as it was known then) was identified as the grape that made the best wines in Saone et Loire.

The rich history and diverse styles of French Chardonnay were on display at the 2016 International Chardonnay Symposium. Entitled "French Forum: Exploring the Wonders of French Chardonnay," this sold-out seminar demonstrated why French Chardonnay is the

standard by which all other Chardonnays in the world are judged. From regions like Languedoc Roussillon, where Chardonnay is a relative newcomer, to Bourgogne, a region synonymous with the grape, each wine made a definitive statement regarding price, style and quality.



Louis Latour 2010 Corton-Charlemagne was just one of the special pairings at the lunch portion of the French Forum.



The tasting began in dramatic fashion with the **Piper Heidsieck 2002 Champagne Rare**. Founded in 1785, this venerable producer utilizes 15 different Grand Cru sites in creating this exceptional, youthful-tasting Champagne that still has many wonderful years ahead of it. The 2002 is a blend of 70% Chardonnay and 30% Pinot Noir and was an important reminder that Chardonnay is a key component in high-quality sparkling wines as much as it is in still wine.

Family-owned Domaine L'Arjolle was founded in 1974 in the Hérault region of Languedoc Roussillon, a region historically famous for its red wines. The **Domaine L'Arjolle 2015 Chardonnay, Côtes de Longue IGP** was produced from 30-year-old vines and showcased a freshness, subdued oak and depth of flavor that is rare for wines in its price range.

The next three wines all came from the Côte de Beaune in Bourgogne and each showed in its own way why the terroir of this illustrious region and the Chardonnay grape are such a perfect match. The first came from negociants Chartron et Trebuchet. Louis Trebuchet and Jean-René Chartron created Chartron et Trebuchet in 1984 and have access to some of the best vineyards in Burgundy. The **Chartron et Trebuchet 2013 Meursault** showed distinct minerality, balance and focus from an appellation that continually stands tall next to its more heralded neighbor appellations.

From Meursault in the Côte de Beaune, the tasting moved to the Côte de Nuits, where Chardonnay is quite rare. The tiny, walled two-acre Clos du Prieuré vineyard of Domaine de la Vougeraie lies literally next door to the famous Grand Cru vineyard Clos de Vougeot. Clos du Prieuré is an east-facing vineyard with predominantly calcareous soils and traces its history back 700 years, when it was first planted and tended by the monks of Cîteaux. The **Domaine de la Vougeraie 2011 Clos du Prieuré** was a revelation, displaying a true purity of fruit and structure in a vintage that challenged many of the top producers in Burgundy.

When it comes to the finest Chardonnays produced in Burgundy, Grand Cru vineyards represent the Holy Grail. Restricted to just 32 vineyards and 1,400 acres, these vineyards have been acknowl-

edged for centuries as the finest expression of the Chardonnay grape. Ironically, one of the few places in Burgundy where you find both red and white Grand Cru wines is the dramatic hill of Corton. The white Grand Cru of Corton, Corton Charlemagne, is located near the top of the hill, where the clay and limestone soils that Chardonnay so dearly loves dominate.



Kyle Kaplan of Terlato Wines brought 2002 Piper Heidsieck Champagne Rare to share with the attendees.

The finale of this tasting was the **Louis Latour 2010 Corton Charlemagne**. Founded in 1797 and now run by the 11th generation of the family, Maison Louis Latour is now farming its 26-acre portion of Corton Charlemagne with a mixture of sustainable and organic methods that reflect their desire to preserve the character and quality of this historic vineyard. Tasting Corton Charlemagne in its youth can be a challenge for many; it is a white wine that often behaves like a red wine, with a firm structure and reticent character. The

Louis Latour 2010 Corton Charlemagne, however, was everything expected: powerful yet youthful, balanced yet intense, overwhelming yet inspiring.

France's long history and success with Chardonnay has made it the benchmark for winemakers throughout the world. Despite its popularity and presence around the globe, its true home and ultimate place of expression will always be France.

**The Burgundy Wine Board prefers to refer to the region and its wines as Bourgogne, not Burgundy.*