

November 4, 2013

WINE News

Our direct import program brings you some of Burgundy's most exciting wines: It all begins with a visit to the vigneron's cellar.



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It's November and Our Thoughts Turn to Burgundy

By Keith Wollenberg

I try to spend one month a year in Burgundy, talking to growers, tasting wine and getting to know the up-and-comers, those who are not yet famous and not yet in demand across the world. These lesser-known *vignerons* (winegrowers), and their often less-famous vineyard sites, are an important part of a very real but quiet revolution that has taken place in Burgundy.

All of the younger *vignerons* are technically trained, and they talk and share ideas among themselves. They have a clear understanding of canopy management and how to grow better, healthier vines with fewer chemicals. When you combine this with the sorting table (now universal) and temperature-controlled fermentation, you get cleaner, fruitier and more user-friendly wines than in days of old, and also more

consistent quality. This applies to wines from *négociants* and more famous *domaines* as well. Since we only have four pages in this newsletter, we'll focus on some of the discoveries we have made—growers and *négociants* with whom we are working directly to bring to you the best values. Explore the food-friendly and delicious Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays from the 2010 and 2011 vintage at KLWines.com for your holiday drinking pleasure. We've even got a few from 2012, if you are just looking for a nice white to offer in your holiday party ice bucket. Try the **2012 Domaine Renaud Mâcon-Solutré** or **Charnay (both \$12.99)**. They are supple and charming, with floral notes on the nose and a terrific finish. The Charnay is richer and the Solutré more mineral, but both are amazing values in Chardonnay, crowd-pleasers that will not break the bank.

OLD BURGUNDY As Rare as Hen's Teeth

One of the hardest things to source is old Burgundy. We find a bottle here, or a case there, but seldom any quantity. We auction some, but those tend to be rarities, the handful of best-known *domaines*, selling at terrific premiums. So we went to Burgundy, talked with producers to see what we could find, and what we found is exciting: the **2005 Domaine Moillard Vosne-Romanée 1er Cru "Malconsorts"** (\$69.95).

Knowledgeable commentators will rank Malconsorts as one of the three best Premier Crus in all of Burgundy, along with Chambolle Les Amoureuses and Gevrey Clos St. Jacques.

The Thomas/Moillard family was once the largest landholder in this vineyard. But due to French inheritance law, their holdings were sold, and are now controlled by *Domaines Dujac* and *de Montille*. If you can lay hands on either, it will cost you hundreds of dollars per bottle. We found this in the cellars of Moillard and arranged to deliver it to our door in perfect condition. It arrives in early November.

The wine is lovely and complex on the palate, with substantial structure, a note of unsweetened cocoa and very pretty

bright red fruit. As it opens, it gets more mid-palate weight and richness, showing attractive sweet fruit robed in a more serious vein of youthful structure and tannin. As is often the case with Malconsorts at 5-10 years, this has a serious, mineral-driven side. Clearly a candidate for as long as you like in your cellar, but delicious tonight with a rack of lamb or better yet, a rack of venison, with truffle jus. It's from one of the best Burgundy vintages in memory, one of the best Premier Cru vineyards in the storied village of Vosne Romanée, with perfect provenance, and available at yesterday's pricing—if you snooze on this one, you will surely lose.



Cover: The vines and gate of Jacques Bavard in winter.

A TRULY EXCITING FIND *Jacques Bavard*

I was tasting wine with my friend Romain in Burgundy, when he pulled out a bottle I did not recognize and poured me a glass of Saint-Romain. He knew it was a favorite village, the first place where I rented a house in Burgundy years ago. But the real shock was the bright and delicious wine in the glass. I grabbed the bottle to see who made it. All it said was *Jacques Bavard*. “Who is this?” I asked, eagerly. He smiled enigmatically, wrote a phone number and an address on a scrap of paper and said, “I think it might be in your interest to contact him.” What an understatement.

Jacques Bavard is an engaging guy who ran a successful restaurant in Paris for years. But the long weeks and late nights, coupled with the cost of doing business in France, led Bavard and his wife Christine to leave Paris, move in to his grandfather’s stone house, and begin making wine. We cannot keep those wines on the shelf, as all of our staff is so excited to see them arrive. Fortunately, I talked him out of some of his reserve wine, including that first one I tasted and fell in love with. The **2009 Jacques Bavard Bourgogne Blanc (\$19.99)** comes entirely from the village of Puligny-Montrachet. The **2009 Jacques Bavard St-Romain Blanc (\$26.99)** is that wine I originally fell in love with and is not to be missed. It comes from Sous la Velle and Sous la Château, two of the best sites in Saint Romain, a village with a cool climate and

rocky soils. The result is a wine with attractive citrus notes, minerality and poise. Finally, I talked Jacques out of some **2010 Jacques Bavard Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru “Les Embrazées” (\$54.99)**. This has a lovely nose of white flowers, a creamy middle and energy and drive on the finish, with an attractive minerality. It comes from a vineyard that is part of the better-known Chassagne-Montrachet Morgeot 1er Cru.



Jacques and Christine Bavard’s dogs guard the domaine.

DON’T TREMBLE *Try a Tremblay*

There is no doubt that the 2011 vintage in Chablis has classic elements. The best wines show clean, high-toned fruit, classic minerality and lovely floral aromas. Although yields were high at some domaines, the best show their terroir clearly. This is exactly what the wines from Domaine Gerard Tremblay offer.

Gerard Tremblay is officially *en retrait*, although his retirement is like that of many growers in that he continues to work, both in the vineyards and the cellar. His son Vincent Tremblay has now taken over the reins. They farm an impressive 35 hectares (about 90 acres) of vines, in appellations from Petite Chablis to Grand Cru Vaudesirs. The wines are terrific and extremely well priced. Tremblay’s style is to press very carefully and slowly, to avoid extracting harsh or green tannins from



Gerard Tremblay.

the seeds. Then after a 24-hour settling, the wine is racked gently off the gross lees into temperature-controlled tanks for a slow fermentation.

The first wine we have is the **2011 Gerard Tremblay Chablis Vieilles Vignes (\$19.99)**, a cuvée made from their vines over 40 years old. Most of the vines, in fact, were planted by Gerard’s father in 1957. Compared to the regular Chablis, this has more concentration and is a bit more backwards and mineral-driven on the palate. This is terrific Chablis, with drive and energy, and it is worth putting down for a bit, or drinking now with a cracked crab (after all, Dungeness season is just around the corner).

We also have their **2011 Gerard Tremblay Chablis 1er Cru “Côte de Léchet” (\$24.99)**. This vineyard, located on the right bank of the river Serein almost directly across from Bougros, Grand Cru, is always a bit rounder on the palate, with an interesting apricot/peach pit note. This vintage shows salinity and spice as well. From 35 to 40-year-old vines.

Finally, we have the **2011 Gerard Tremblay Chablis 1er Cru Fourchaumes” Vieilles Vignes (\$27.99)**. From a plot planted in 1951, this is truly fabulous Fourchaumes. Capable of long aging in the cellar, this has that classic Chablis nose of oyster shells and the sea. At present it is extremely tightly wound and almost pulsing with energy. There is lots of weight on the palate and a lovely oyster-shell and lime finish. But it needs some time (or perhaps a boat trip across the water) to wake up fully. Wow! I have had this wine going back to 1988, and it is a terrific candidate for your cellar, if only you can keep from drinking it earlier (which I always struggle not to do).

The Biodynamic Wines of Domaine Champy

The very first négociant house established in Burgundy was Champy Père et Cie, in 1720. They were the first to recognize the importance of cleanliness in winemaking, working directly with Louis Pasteur, and they built a then state-of-the-art, three-story gravity winery in downtown Beaune. After 150 years, the family's interest in winemaking declined. After the last Champy died in 1985 the business was sold and the vineyard holdings stripped away. But Henri Meurgey and his son Pierre purchased the name and the old gravity winery, took over the reins and breathed fresh life into the company. They have also taken all of the vineyards that they own and control into both organic and biodynamic viticulture. Look for "Domaine Champy" on the label for wine from vineyards they own.

Under the aegis of Pierre Meurgey, and of Dimitri Bazas, their winemaker, the place has been restored, and the wines are balanced, with their 27 hectares (66 acres) of domaine vineyards all run biodynamically, and with wines that reflect that sense of place that the French call *terroir*. We have worked with them since the 1998 vintage, so this is our lucky 13th vintage! The wines have been getting better and better, with elegance and approachability, as well as ability to age.

We have an extraordinary range of the delicious 2011s—more than I can list here, in fact, so go to KLWines.com for the complete list. The **2011 Champy Bourgogne Chardonnay "Signature" (\$19.99)** has rich, toasty oak notes, combined with minerality from the fruit from Puligny and Meursault. From recently acquired vineyards, we have the **2011 Domaine Champy Pernand-Vergelesses 1er Cru "Caradeux" (\$38.99)**. This is a Corton-Charlemagne in many ways, coming from just across from the hill of Corton. Rich and open on entry, it shows a pretty limestone and salty minerality with some lime blossom notes. The **2011 Champy St. Aubin 1er Cru "Murgers Dent de Chien" (\$36.99)** offers Puligny character for a fraction of the cost, coming as it does from a site directly next to Puligny 1er Cru Champs Gains, which sells for more than twice the price. This is rich and concentrated,

with lovely texture. It's going into my personal cellar, for certain. We also have their **2011 Champy Puligny-Montrachet (\$52.99)** with round and pretty fruit and classic Puligny minerality on the back palate.

For reds, there is even more to offer, as we have three terrific ones, each with individual character, for less than \$30. The **2011 Domaine Champy Pernand-Vergelesses "Clos de Bully" Rouge (\$29.95)** comes from a vineyard with a southeastern exposure, in an amphitheater that's been planted to Pinot Noir since the 12th century. It has fine and elegant texture, lovely fruit and thread of attractive minerality. Lovely! The **2011 Domaine Champy Chorey-lès-Beaune (\$29.95)** is rich, with pretty cherry fruit, a pretty mid-palate and lots of plush charm. If that is not the one, then try **2011 Champy Beaune "Vieilles Vignes" (\$29.95)**. This is off the charts, planted in 1947, with concentration and beautiful black fruit notes. It is from one vineyard, biodynamically



Clockwise from top: Domaine Champy vines in Pernand-Vergelesses; tasting with Pierre Meurgey and Dimitri Bazas; historic facade of Champy cellars.

farmed, just above the route de Pommard South of Beaune. Fine tannins, good acidity and a fine structure. You might be well advised to try the **2011 Domaine Champy Savigny-lès-Beaune "Aux Fourches" (\$31.99)** which is concentrated and focused, due to the low yields of 25 hectoliters per hectare (about 1.75 tons per acre), with ripe black fruit, a serious character and a very pretty depth of fruit. This has old vine concentration and is made from carefully and biodynamically tended grapes. We also have **2011 Domaine Champy Beaune 1er Cru "Aux Cras" (\$46.99)**. The Aux Cras is rich and ripe, with high-toned red fruits.

If you are feeling a bit more generous this holiday season, do not miss the **2011 Domaine Champy Volnay (\$29.95)** from four parcels in Volnay, both above and below the village. The combination of deeper clay soils on the lower slopes and soils as shallow as four inches on the upper slopes makes for an exciting wine, with lovely concentrated black fruit, vibrant energy and terrific quality. Or for an amazing experience try the **2011 Domaine Champy Volnay 1er Cru "Taillepieds" (\$69.95)** which is just over-the-top great Burgundy for your cellar. Period. We also have tiny quantities of **2011 Domaine Champy Corton "Rognets"** and the **2011 Domaine Champy Corton "Bresandes" (both \$99.95)**.

An Iconoclast in Morey

As you know, K&L scouts the corners of Burgundy for unknown growers making terrific wine. Our latest discovery, Gilles Ballorin, is an iconoclastic guy who grew up in Dijon and worked harvest in Corgoloin for years. He went to work for the cooperative in Igé, and then for Rodet. But then he got bored and wanted to work in the vines, so off he went to wine school. He and his wife Fabienne became winegrowers, starting with 0.2 hectare (half an acre!) in Chenove, north of Marsannay, while still in school, and a whopping 1.5 acres in his first vintage. Gradually he acquired more vineyards, scattered from north of Marsannay to south of the Clos de Maréchale in Comblanchien. He farms about six hectares and does much of his work by hand, since it takes him almost half a day to drive his tractor from his northernmost vines to his southernmost!

Ballorin's vineyards have been Demeter-certified biodynamic for years. He presses with an old-fashioned plate press, which he prefers over a modern pneumatic press and employs a cold soak with dry ice to retard the fermentation, always done by native yeasts. He refuses to pump his wine, but also minimizes the amount of punching down, to ensure gentle extraction. He does his *remontage* (usually translated as "pumping over") by hand, with a bucket. He manages to extract a clear sense of *terroir* from each wine. The aim is always to let careful vineyard work express itself in the finished wine. As he says: "My style is to not have a style." In 2011 he harvested later than many in order to get riper phenolics, as he felt acidity levels were good.

Wines reflect their winemaker—in this case expressed by boundless enthusiasm and a restlessness combined with a positively Pablo Neruda-like sensuality and intimate connection with the earth. Try Gilles's wines and you will see why we are excited. His **2011 Domaine Ballorin & F Bourgogne "Passetoutgrains" (\$18.99)** contains both Pinot Noir and Gamay, but is 90% Pinot Noir! The average vine age is 55 years. The grapes are grown in a vineyard known as "En Bollery" just across the RN74 from Clos de Vougeot, Grand Cru. The wine is open and bright with a very pretty, spicy character and nice Pinot Noir mouthfeel. His **2011 Domaine Ballorin & F Bourgogne Rouge "Le Bon" (\$24.99)** is named after Philip the Good, and it is indeed good, as



Gilles Ballorin: Have tractor, will travel

Gilles says with a wink. Lovely mid-palate richness. The **2011 Domaine Ballorin & F Côte de Nuits-Villages "Le Village" (\$29.95)** was planted in 1946. It is below the RN74, just a hop and a skip from Clos de Maréchale. On the palate it is medium-weight, with good charm. Behind the spine of concentration, the fruit is bright and pretty, with a bit of delicacy in character. When tasted in March, it was feminine and lovely. Tasted after arrival, it shows more structure and needs some cellar time, as you would expect from near Nuits-St-Georges. The **2011 Domaine Ballorin & F Marsannay "Les Echezots" (\$36.99)** is from a vineyard composed of fossilized oyster shells, resulting in more red fruit notes, interesting layering and a fruit profile that's both complex and pretty. His holding is relatively high in the small valley containing this vineyard, so it is a cooler site, resulting in a sensuous, earthy and very expressive, charming wine. We also have the **2011 Domaine Ballorin & F Marsannay "Clos du Roi" (\$36.99)**, called "my best site" by Gilles. It is composed of a sandy and gravelly mixture of decomposed limestone bedded on a slope, the same type of soil found in the lower portion of Charmes-Chambertin. This has extremely lovely fruit and is rich and expressive. This wine is what the French call *aérienne*, "of the air," rather than earthy in character. Do not miss his **2011 Domaine Ballorin & F Fixin "Les Chênevrières" (\$46.99)** grown in a mixture of soil and gravel, which can yield the harder character that Fixin has been known for. Highly aware of this, Gilles treats this cuvée particularly gently, as well as using canopy management and careful control of temperature at fermentation to ensure a gentler extraction. It is more structured than the Marsannays, with bright minerality following on the heels of the rich entry, and rounder fruit from the heavier clays in this soil. The profile of this wine is so pretty and seamless that I am confident a bit of time in the cellar will richly reward you. Finally, there may be a handful of bottles remaining of **2011 Domaine Ballorin & F Nuits-St-Georges "Les Damodes" (\$57.99)** from high on the hill near the Vosne-Romanée border. The shallow topsoil overlays a hard white limestone. The result is a much lower vigor for the vines here. In response, Gilles works them entirely by hand and with a horse, doing no hedging or cutting, merely training the shoots back onto the wire. This is an extremely lovely effort, with a Vosne-like mid-palate and very attractive floral notes. This is so gorgeous it is hard to believe it is village Nuits!



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