

Wine Talk: September 2012

The newsletter of Living Wines: Edition 30

So many exciting new wines! We have the delicate, lingering Cuvée Reserve Brut Champagne from our friend Roland Piollet, made from Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier as well as his **Millésime** which is a richer Champagne that has been matured in wooden casks. A shipment has also arrived from Henri Milan in Provence bringing relief to everyone, including us, who have been hanging out for more of the delicious Le Grand Blanc – it is the new 2009 vintage. We also have stocks of his 2007 red called Le Vallon which is very competitively priced.

We have also received a stock replenishment from Hervé Villemade which includes supplies of the intriguing Cour-Cheverny white made from Romorantin which matches well with a wide range of foods (see our story about a meal we had at a Chinese restaurant in Sydney recently). And for lovers of the moorish wines of Thierry Michon, both the white Les Clous and the red Reflets are back in stock. These are from the 2011 vintage and are the first to be labelled as AOC Fiefs Vendéens following the area's promotion from VDQS to full AOC status last year.

This month we have a number of special packs for you. The first is called Champagne and friends and includes two bottles of Roland's lovely Champagnes and then some of the amazing Crémants and other sparkling wines that we have from regions outside Champagne. We also have an interesting Jura pack for those who want to explore a selection of some of the hottest wines around, a Domaine St Nicolas pack, a pack of three whites and three reds from Henri Milan from Provence and a six pack of gorgeous Burgundy wines.

Remember that the special packs attract a 15% discount instead of a 10% discount, so if you order a special pack you really are getting a special deal (not that a 10% discount for most wines and free freight on your own selection isn't a good arrangement too)!

There is a link to our order form for these packs and any other wines at the end of this newsletter. But there's no need to use the order form. Just send us an email listing the wines and/or packs you would like to order if that suits you better. We'll confirm the price by return email before processing your order.

News from Living Wines

Natural wines are certainly getting a lot of publicity recently. We have noticed that the more publicity whether good or bad, the more people want to try these wines. We are constantly being contacted by lots of restaurants and wine bars who are eager to offer natural wines to their customers.

One of the most interesting aspects of what is happening is that the movement is being driven by the customers not the wine writers and wine judges as has been the case in the past. It is the customers who are asking for these wines and helping wine bars owners and restaurant staff to make the decision to offer these wines.

We believe that this is linked closely to other trends we are seeing where customers are demanding to know a lot more about their food. They want to know how it was reared, what it was fed, whether sprays have been used and much more.

We can see a huge shift away from processed, additive-laden bread to naturally-fermented sourdough bread. Consumers are demanding that their beef is reared on organic pastures with no hormones added to their diet. Even the humble mussel now is being sold with organic certification. So it is not a surprise that consumers are asking similar questions about wine and other drinks.

We have received a lot of wine from France over the past month or so. It has been so good to be able to again ship the delightful, lively, gulpable Gamay Sans Tra La La from the Loire Valley. This is a perennial favourite and the current vintage is a real winner.

We have also received new supplies of the Domaine Saint Nicolas Reflets (Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc and Gamay) and Les Clous (Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay and Grolleau). These wines represent excellent value for money and are great food wines.

The 2011 vintage of Causse Marines Les Grielles from Gaillac in France's South West is also selling well and seems to be very popular due to its affinity to many foods. We have already ordered a second shipment.

We are also delighted to welcome back Henri Milan's Le Grand Blanc – that complex beauty from Provence that has been reviewed so favourably over the years. And we have a special treat for followers of his wines. We have a shipment of his five year old Le Vallon red wine (made from five different grape varieties) at a very, very competitive price (\$28) due to a deal with his United States importer falling over. You can try these two wines in one of the special packs this month.

We have also been delighted with the response to the trade tastings we have been involved with over the past six weeks. All of the tastings were particularly well-attended – a special thank you to those who took the time to come along. We love to have the opportunity to show our wines to interested members of the public and the trade.

Pack 1: Champagne and friends six pack



We particularly love Roland Piollet's organic wine from the Cotes du Bar in the southern part of the region near the city of Troyes. His wife is Dominique Moreau who is responsible for the Marie Courtin Champagne – they work on their wines together and both have a commitment to excellence and purity. We have also included some sparkling wines made outside the Champagne region – some of these will surprise you with their elegance.

Champagne Piollet Cotes du Bar Cuvée de Réserve Brut NV (2 bottles) – This is Roland's entry-level Champagne made from Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier. When we first tasted this elegant Champagne we remarked on its beautiful light golden colour, the citrus aromas and the silky freshness on the palate and very good length.

Champagne Piollet Cotes du Bar Millésime 2007 – This cuvée is only produced in exceptional vintages and Roland prefers to use Chardonnay only for this one. In the glass it has a pale golden colour and a fine bead. The taste is quite complex with dried figs, plums and quinces showing through a delightful yeastiness. Great value and has the complexity and finesse of wines that are twice the price.

Domaine Belluard Vin de Savoie Ayse Mont-Blanc Méthode Traditionnelle Brut-Zéro 2008 – A lovely sparkling wine made from 100% Gringet, a traditional grape of the Savoie region. It displays both finesse and minerality and can be drunk as an aperitif or throughout a meal and even with dessert.

Philippe Bornard Crémant du Jura NV – The Bornard Crémant is a sparkling wine made from 100% Chardonnay. It is full of stone-fruit aromas and has an appealing minerality and savouriness on the palate. The baked apple aromas and dry finish of this delicious and affordable alternative to Champagne make it a perfect aperitif.

Terres Dorées Crémant de Bourgogne Charme Blanc de Blancs 2009 – This is a particularly fine example of the genre being made from Chardonnay. The Crémant has a fine bead, yeasty aromas and a long, dry savoury finish.

The RRP for this selection is \$287 but the pack price is only \$243.95 which includes freight (corrected price from initial version of newsletter).

Pack 2: Henri Milan Provence 6 Pack



This six pack comprises two new wines from master wine maker Henri Milan who tends his vineyards which sit within the historic town of St Remy de Provence. Even though his vineyard falls within the boundaries of the Les Baux de Provence appellation, Henri doesn't accept the strictures placed on him by the rules of that appellation so chooses to issue them as Vin de France.

Henri Milan Vin de France Le Grand Blanc 2009 – This is a serious, complex and compelling white wine made from Grenache Blanc, Rolle (the local name for Vermentino), Roussanne, Chardonnay and Muscat Petit Grains. Definitely for food, not quaffing.

Henri Milan Vin de France Le Vallon Rouge 2007 – Henri likes to mature his wines before he releases them and this wine has had 5 years to settle down. The grape varieties are Grenache, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cinsault and Mourvedre. Just like the white there are five grape varieties because Henri likes the 'layering' effect that he gets by combining many varieties into one wine. This is very easy to drink.



The lush vineyards of Henri Milan with the Alpylles behind

The RRP for this selection is \$210 but the pack price is only **\$178.50** which includes freight.

Pack 3: Burgundy 6 pack



This six pack contains delicious Burgundy wines from two very talented producers, Fanny Sabre and Dominique Derain. We have put together a white Bourgogne from each so that you can see the different styles from two producers using grapes from different areas of the region (even though they are only about 8 kilometres apart).

Fanny Sabre Bourgogne Blanc 2010 – The Fanny Sabre Bourgogne Blanc is always a hot favourite. It is made from 100% Chardonnay sourced from her vineyards around the city of Beaune. It is a savoury, elegant, flavour-packed wine which has seen no new oak. It lingers on the palate and matches beautifully with a range of foods.

Fanny Sabre Beaune Blanc 2009 – This beautiful white is made from 100% Chardonnay using grapes sourced from her vineyards around the city of Beaune. This Chardonnay is fresh, lively, creamy, vibrant and a beautiful expression of the Beaune terroir.

Catherine & Dominique Derain Bourgogne La Combe Blanc 2009 – The yield is only 35 hectolitres per hectare and this means the fruit is packed with flavour and the wine reflects this. La Combe is a tiny plot being less than one third of a hectare.

Catherine & Dominique Derain St-Aubin Le Ban Rouge 2009 – The 2009 reflects the vintage which was one of the best in recent memory. The vines here thrive on an east facing slope covered in limestone derived clay and gravel. This is a lovely wine with an appealing cherry and strawberry fruit flavour, a core of acidity, great freshness, an underlying spiciness and perfect balance.

Catherine & Dominique Derain Mercurey La Plante Chassey Rouge 2009 – La Plante Chassey is a south-east slope with clay soil. The grapes for this wine are harvested by hand and the wine is fermented in wooden vats before being transferred to old wooden barrels for 18 months. You will notice the length of the finish. This wine has a lovely silkiness and earthiness about it that we find very appealing.

Catherine & Dominique Derain Pommard Les Petits Noizons Rouge 2009 – There is lots of limestone here as it is close to Pommard, one of our favourite villages in Burgundy! This village is renowned for producing red wines with lots of structure and power. This doesn't disappoint. Lovely, strong, structured deep-red wine!

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles is \$346 but the pack price is \$294.10 including freight.

Pack 4: Jura selection 6 pack



Michel Gahier Arbois Trousseau Les Grands Vergers 2010 – Les Grands Vergers is a perfect expression of the Trousseau grape. The gnarled vines are over 80 years old and are behind Michel's house in the village of Montigny-les-Arsures, which is regarded as having the best terroir for this grape.

Michel Gahier Arbois Chardonnay Les Follasses 2010 – Les Follasses is an interesting Chardonnay which has some oxidative qualities but has been topped up in the barrel. It is a lively wine that teams beautifully with almost any food.

Michel Gahier Arbois Vin Jaune 2004 – This Vin Jaune is Michel's most recent release having spent the required 6 years and 3 months 'under the veil' of yeast in barrels that were not topped up. It makes for a powerful, concentrated and utterly delicious wine which must be made from the Savagnin grape. Team it with Comté cheese for the ultimate treat. By law it is bottled in clavelins of 620mls.

Philippe Bornard Arbois Pupillin Ploussard La Chamade 2009 – La Chamade is a light in body but fully flavoured Ploussard made by the master from grapes grown on the slopes near the village of Pupillin which is regarded as the best terroir for the Ploussard grape.

Philippe Bornard Côte de Jura Savagnin Les Marnes 2006 – Les Marnes is treated in exactly the same way as a Vin Jaune except it is bottled after 4 or 5 years rather than the required 6 years and 3 months. This is a stunning wine that also teams beautifully with Comté.

Philippe Bornard Pétillant Naturel Le Tant Mieux (Ploussard) – Oh how we love this wine! This wine has been fermented in the bottle without disgorgement so there are some lees in the bottle. It is pink, bubbly and great for an aperitif, or, as many of our friends have discovered, a perfect pick-me-up at the end of a heavy night!

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles is \$288 but the pack price is \$244.80 including freight.

Pack 5: Domaine St Nicolas 6 pack



Domaine St Nicolas is a great favourite of ours. Those who were lucky enough to attend the lunch and dinners with owner Thierry Michon in Australia last year will know that he is a talented, passionate believer in biodynamics who makes truly great wines that grace the lists of many of the top restaurants of France.

His vineyard extends over 35 hectares of decayed schist soils that he farms biodynamically using cows from his paddocks to create the biodynamic preparations required. This pack contains two of each of his entry level wines.

Thierry is also planning a trip to Australia in November this year and we are planning some events with him in Sydney and Melbourne.

Domaine St Nicolas Fiefs Vendéens Gammes en May 2010 (2 bottles) – The Domaine Saint Nicolas Gammes en May is a light, refreshing and delicious pure Gamay red wine. This wine represents excellent value for money at this price. Because this wine is very natural you might find a bit of sediment in the bottle - but it doesn't matter, this wine is really, really fresh and delicious.

Domaine St Nicolas Fiefs Vendéens Les Clous Blanc 2011 (2 bottles) – Les Clous is made from Chenin Blanc (45%), Chardonnay (45%) and the rare Groslot Gris (10%). It is slightly saline (the vineyards are very close to the sea), quite savoury, very fresh and quite low in alcohol at only 12%. This wine goes perfectly with any seafood dish and any vegetable dish or pasta dish.

Domaine St Nicolas Fiefs Vendéens Reflets Rouge 2011 (2 bottles) – The Reflets red was the very first wine we tried from Thierry's selection. We immediately fell in love with it and we have been importing his wines to Australia ever since. This wine is made from 70% of his beloved Pinot Noir, 20% of Cabernet Franc and 10% Gamay.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles is \$172 but the pack price is a very reasonable \$146.20 including freight (corrected price from initial version of newsletter).

What to drink with Chinese food?

It has long been gospel in Australia that you need an Alsace Riesling or Gewürztraminer to match to Chinese food.

There are two problems with this idea. The first is that it depends on what type of Chinese food you are eating and the second is that there are many other alternatives.

If you are eating the mild, elegant food from Canton with seafood and vegetarian dumplings or steamed seafood then a wine from Alsace is a pretty good match. However, once you venture north or west from that region and start to encounter chilli and spices then the game changes. Chilli can destroy a delicate Alsace white wine.

In August we had a meal in a Hunan restaurant called Chairman Mao in a Kensington, a suburb of Sydney, with a group of sommeliers and chefs. The food was fiery and there was lots of chilli and lots of spice.

We brought along some of our oxidative white wines from various regions to see how they would stand up to the food. The results were very interesting – even a mild oxidative touch to the wine was sufficient for the wine to pair nicely with the food.

We started with Hervé Villemade's delicious Cour-Cheverny which is made from the Romorantin grape. This has become a very popular wine for food matching and it certainly didn't let us down at Chairman Mao – in fact it was even better than with less challenging food. One of the guests also provided another delicious Cour-Cheverny made by Olivier Lemasson which also was perfect with the food.

But the real star was a Michel Gahier Savagnin from Arbois in the Jura. This wine has been 'under the veil' for over three years and has taken on many of the characteristics of a Vin Jaune. It has a delicious nutty flavour and sherry-like aromas. It cut through the food and the combined flavours soared. It was a revelation. If you want to try it, though, you'll need to make a reservation at momofuku seiōbo. The remainder of our stocks (apart from 2 bottles if you want to get in quickly) are now there. We're very happy for it to end up at seiōbo because it matches chef Ben Greeno's food perfectly. Last advice we had was it was being matched with a stunning dish of potato, quandong, mustard cress and grated mullet roe.

But the big lesson of our Chairman Mao meal was next time you go to a Hunan or Sichuan or Shanghai or Beijing restaurant take a bottle of oxidative wine with you and you will certainly have a satisfying dining experience.

Chardonnay grape variety

Chardonnay is a great grape variety that has a lot of good things done with it and also has a lot of really bad things done.

It is widely respected as the grape that the great whites of Burgundy are made with (although we won't hear a bad word about Aligoté, the other common white variety of Burgundy that is currently being rehabilitated by ardent fans).

In Burgundian terroirs such as Meursault and Corton-Charlemagne, Chardonnay reaches its ultimate expression. It also produces great wines in Chablis and Champagne to the north.

However it is also one of the most widely planted varieties being found on the West Coast of the United States, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Italy, Spain and the Middle East.

The grape is thought to be a cross of Pinot and Gouais Blanc – a grape variety introduced to France by the Romans.

It is a green skinned variety that is quite responsive to terroir and hence produces different styles of wine in areas that can be quite close to each other. For example the difference between the Chardonnays produced on the Cote d'Or and then in Vézelay to the north and then Chablis a bit further north again are quite pronounced.

Chardonnay also takes on wood flavours quite strongly. It has therefore become de-rigueur among many winemakers to age Chardonnay in new oak and to encourage malolactic fermentation. This produces a sweet, creamy, buttery wine that became very fashionable in the eighties and nineties, but the inevitable swing of the pendulum has occurred and consumers are looking for wines that express the grape differently.

Many of our winemakers prefer leaner, livelier expressions where no new oak is used but rather barrels which are from three to ten years old. This allows the wine to breath but does not impart the dominant vanilla flavours of new oak. Some prefer to use concrete tanks to help the breathing and the influx of small amounts of oxygen.

Some of the most interesting Chardonnay we drink is from the Jura. Here the vines have developed red stems and the grape is smaller than it is in nearby Burgundy. Some producers, such as Philippe Bornard, believe that some Chardonnay vines have undergone genetic transformation to a new variety which they call Melon (not to be confused with Melon de Bourgogne). Philippe produces a wine where he clearly identifies the grape as Melon and the name of the cuvée as le Rouge-Queue referring to the red stem.

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Here is a photo of the vine leaf:

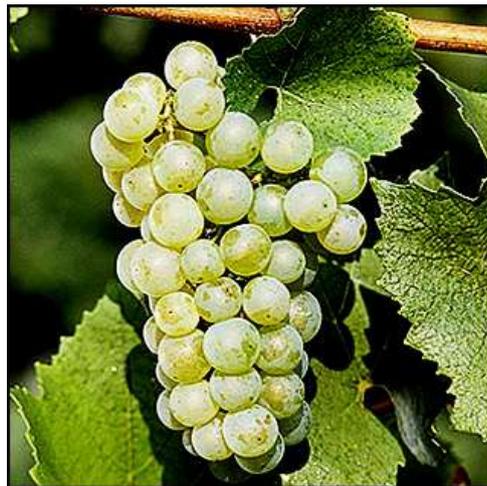


Photo courtesy of Vitis International Variety Catalogue

In the six packs this month we have both a six pack of Burgundy wines that includes some lovely Chardonnays and a Jura pack that includes a Chardonnay from that region.

Appellation: Beaune

Beaune is a wine appellation in the Cote de Beaune area of the Burgundy region of France producing elegant red wines from the Pinot Noir grape and lovely white wines from Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc. Rosé wines are not permitted in this appellation. The appellation was first promulgated in September 1936.

Many of the vineyards within the Beaune appellation are rated as Premier Cru including Les Boucherottes, Les Chouacheux, Les Sceaux and Les Bressandes among others. Wine can only be made from grapes grown in the commune of Beaune.

White wines are made from Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc with small amounts (less than 10%) of Pinot Gris being permitted. Red wines are made from Pinot Noir with small amounts of the white grapes Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris being allowed in the red wines.

And it is in this appellation that Fanny Sabre makes some of her delightful wines. The label below shows a Beaune appellation white wine from the 2009 vintage. For this

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wine she gathers grapes from a number of plots throughout the commune of Beaune.



The next label, shown below, is from her wine made from grapes that are from a plot within the Les Chouacheux 'lieu dit' or parcel of land. Wines made from grapes picked in this parcel are allowed to be labelled Premier Cru as the terroir here is considered to be of a superior quality to other sites in Beaune.



'-age' words in French winemaking

Débourbage

Each newsletter we introduce you to a French winemaking terms ending with 'age'. This month we will talk about 'débourbage' which, roughly translated means the process of allowing sediment to 'settle' to the bottom of the tank or barrel before the wine is siphoned off into another container.

For natural wine this process can take time because no additions are made to the wine to speed up the settling process. In conventional winemaking all sorts of tricks are used including cooling the wine to low temperatures to assist in precipitation or even, as is now legal in Australia, adding sodium carboxymethyl cellulose to initiate colloidal precipitation.

We have spoken with Olivier de Moor about how he gets his wines to be so clear and pure and he points to the debourbage period as being crucial. He leaves his wines to settle for as long as it takes and then uses gravity to siphon the wine off into a tank in a lower part of the winery. He does this very carefully and leaves the last few centimetres of wine in the tank to ensure that no lees are transferred.

Living Wines Order Form

You can simply send us an email to order wines, but if you would like to use the form to check prices or availability, click on the link below.

http://www.livingwines.com.au/Catalogue/Order_Form_Current_2012.pdf