



## **Burgundy Club!** **Spring 2015**

Welcome to the latest edition of the **Caveau Burgundy Club** – a twice-yearly tutored tasting and exploration of the great wines and terroirs of Burgundy.

This club functions just like our **Champagne Club** (*and if you're not already a member, call us at 503-679-6233*). The wines in each 6-bottle shipment have been specifically selected to help educate and illustrate – each shipment is essentially a Burgundy seminar-in-a-box. You can use all of this to stage your own tasting seminar at home, or of course you can just drink the wines and enjoy them. Whichever path you choose – there's lots of good Burgundy in your future!

### **A tale of two grapes**

If it's a **white** wine from Burgundy, it's made from the **Chardonnay** grape (except for *Bourgogne Aligoté*, which is rarely exported these days.) American wine consumers have an idea of what "Chardonnay" is – though that idea may have been formed by exposure to a lot of over-oaked, over-ripe and slightly sweet Chardonnay from California. When tasting white Burgundies, it's common to hear exclamations of "I don't like Chardonnay, but I love this!" Yes, there's more to Chardonnay than what the Napa Valley has to offer. In this package we'll explore what makes the Chardonnay in Burgundy so different and special – from Chablis in the north to the Mâconnais in the south and Meursault in the middle.

If it's a **red** wine from Burgundy, it is of course made from the **Pinot Noir** grape. Pinot Noir, perhaps more than any other grape variety, expresses the unique characteristics of the place it was grown. The great Grand Cru and better Premier Cru vineyard sites in Burgundy are world famous for their distinctive and captivating expressions of Pinot Noir. But what about the "generic" regional wines, labeled as "*Bourgogne*", or the *Village* wines – which together make up

some 88% of all the wine produced in the region? They don't get the press or the high ticket prices, but in the hands of meticulous vigneronns they can be complex and compelling wines indeed. We'll take a look at three examples of delicious reds from the "lower" end of the Burgundian hierarchy and see how good they really can be.

If you're new to the club, or would just like to brush up a bit, we'll start off with some good general Burgundy information to help you understand the lay of the land. Otherwise, please feel free to skip ahead for the details and info on the wines in this shipment.

## Burgundy Basics

The Burgundy region of France has been producing what are widely considered to be the world's finest Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays for nearly a thousand years. Burgundy is a relatively small area (only about 13,500 acres of vines in Burgundy's Côte d'Or, as opposed to Bordeaux's 235,000 acres or California's 515,000.) Oregon is nearly identical in size to Burgundy with about 13,700 vineyard acres planted.

As in Oregon, most of the winegrowers and producers in Burgundy are small, family operations. The average estate size is about 15 acres, enough to produce about 3,500 cases of wine each year. Those 15 acres are often split into 10 or more tiny parcels of vineyards scattered around several different vineyards and villages — so production of each wine is often only a few hundred cases or less. While it can seem quite complicated, even perplexing at times, in reality Burgundy is fairly simple to decipher.

**Red = Pinot Noir.** If it's a red wine from Burgundy, it is made from the Pinot Noir grape. (Beaujolais, while technically part of the Burgundy region, is truly a different world altogether. Beaujolais reds are made from the Gamay Noir grape.)

**White = Chardonnay.** If it's a white wine from Burgundy, it's a Chardonnay. (Again, there are minor exceptions you'll rarely see — there's a white grape known as Aligoté that produces some very inexpensive, lower-level wines — but it will not come into play in anything we're discussing here.)

Unlike America, France has legal classifications for their wines. In Burgundy, the actual vineyards themselves, rather than the producer or wines, are given a level of classification. There are four levels:

**Grand Cru** — The best of the best. There are 32 Grand Cru vineyards in Burgundy, accounting for less than 2% of all Burgundy wine production. Grand Cru wines mention on the label only the producer and name of the vineyard — as in “Montrachet” or “Musigny” — the name of the village is not deemed necessary in the case of these great vineyards.

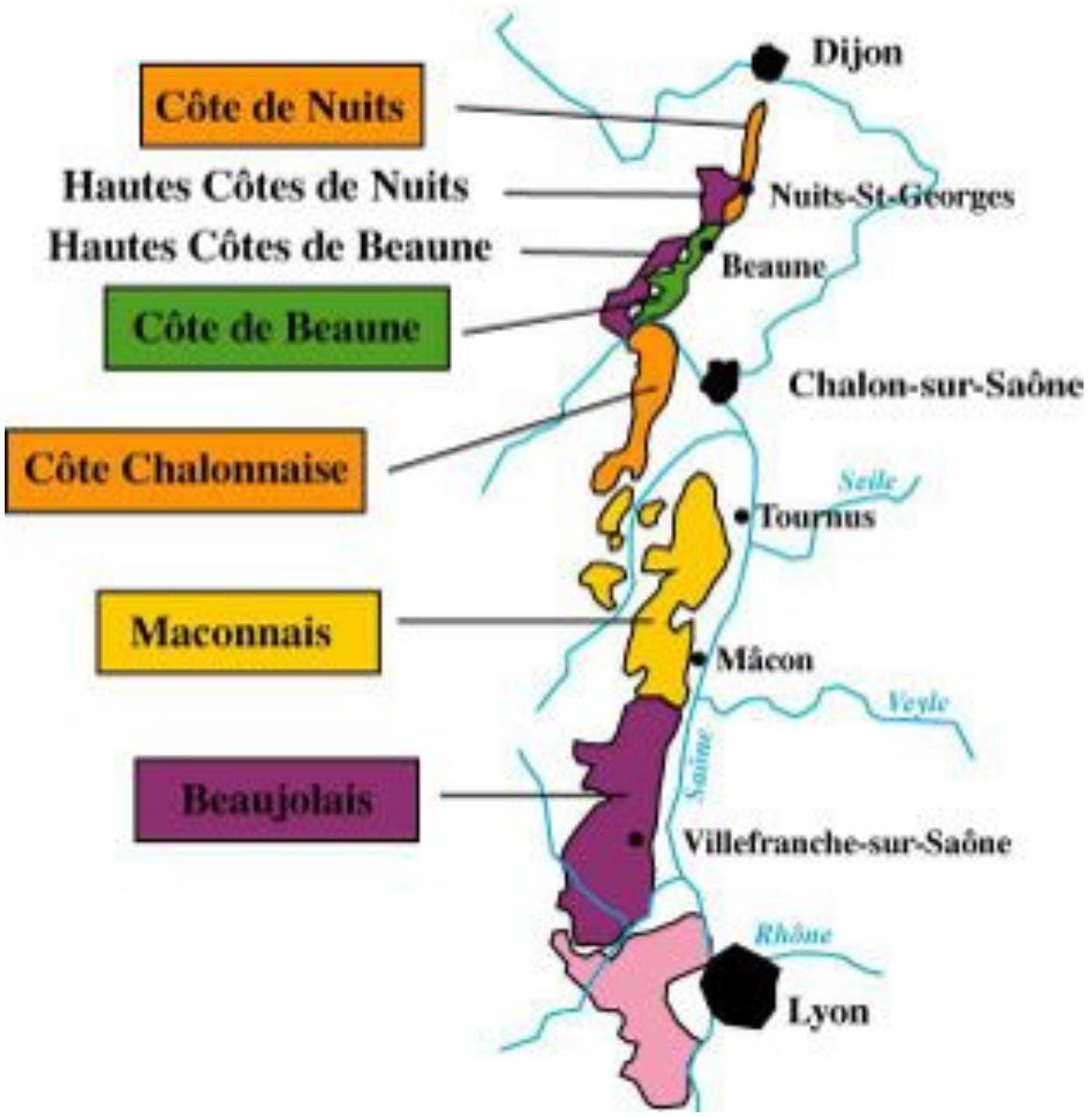
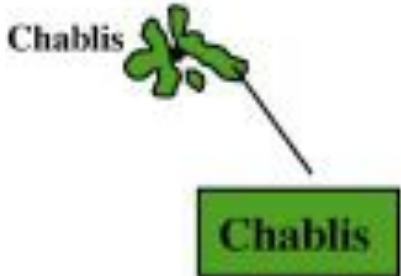
**Premier Cru** — (Also written as 1er Cru) One notch below the Grand Crus — there are hundreds at this level, and the quality varies widely. The best Premiers rival the Grand Crus, the lesser ones seem barely deserving of the ranking. These makeup about 10% of total production. A Premier Cru wine will mention the name of the village and possibly an individual vineyard on the label, as in “Pommard-Rugiens” or “Vosne-Romanée — Les Suchots” – if it indeed comes from a singly vineyard. It will always bear the mark “Premier Cru” or “1er Cru”. If the wine is a blend of more than one 1er Cru vineyard within a given village, it will simply bear the designation “1er Cru” without any vineyard designation.

**Village** — Grapes for a village wine come from one or many vineyards surrounding a specific Burgundian village, for example Vosne-Romanée or Puligny-Montrachet. These are classified below the 1er Cru level, but can often be lovely wines and great values. Village wines are about 43% of the total pie. The label will simply state the name of the village (although in some cases the name of a specific vineyard will also be mentioned, even though it is not of Premier Cru status.)

**Regional (Bourgogne)** — A bit less than half of all Burgundy vineyards (45%) are classified at the regional level. In the hands of dedicated and talented producers these can be lovely wines. In the hands of others they can be thin, weedy, and rather unpleasant. These wines are labeled as Bourgogne Rouge or Bourgogne Blanc, or Bourgogne Pinot Noir or Bourgogne Chardonnay.

Most of the vineyards in Burgundy are owned by multiple owners — as many as 70 or 80 in some cases. (In the rare cases that a single producer owns the entirety of a specific vineyard, this is designated as a “**Monopole.**”) *This means that each winery may own only a few rows of the vineyard, and will make only a few barrels of that specific wine each year (but they are likely to own small pieces of several other vineyards as well.)* So, not all wines from the same vineyard are created equal. The quality can vary widely from producer to producer. In Burgundy, the most important consideration is in fact **the producer**. Get to know the styles of different producers, and zero in on the ones you like best. They will likely give you the most enjoyment year in and year out regardless of the classification level.

# BURGUNDY



# Isn't it all just Chardonnay?

The Burgundians rarely talk about the grape variety they're growing and making wine with. In their minds they are making **Chablis**, or **Meursault**, or **Pouilly-Fuissé** or **Puligny-Montrachet** – individual *places* where Chardonnay does wonderful and very different things. They view the grape as a vehicle for the expression of the place. Yes, it's all "Chardonnay", technically, but the wines are as different as *le jour et la nuit* (day & night!)

In this package you have three excellent examples of just how different Chardonnay can be, based mostly on where it is grown. Pinot Noir may be the most transparent grape in terms of revealing the terroir from whence it came, but Chardonnay is right up there in its ability to express its unique origins.

Chardonnay is grown just about everywhere in Burgundy, but it reaches its highest peaks in three different regions:

- **Chablis** – the extreme northern reaches of Burgundy, world-famous for its unique and intensely mineral-driven expression of Chardonnay
- **Côte de Beaune** – home to Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet – three contiguous villages that produce what many consider to be the finest examples of Chardonnay on the planet
- **The Mâconnais** – the southernmost part of Burgundy, where the Chardonnay can't reach the heights of the best of the Côte de Beaune, but can come pretty close for a fraction of the price

## Chablis

About a 90-minute drive north and west of Beaune, Chablis is a world unto itself, though technically still a part of greater Burgundy. It has little in common with the rest of Burgundy, other than that Chardonnay is the grape grown there for the whites. (There is a little bit of *Auxerois* and *Sauvignon Blanc* in the greater Chablis area, but those grapes are not permitted in the Chablis appellation.)

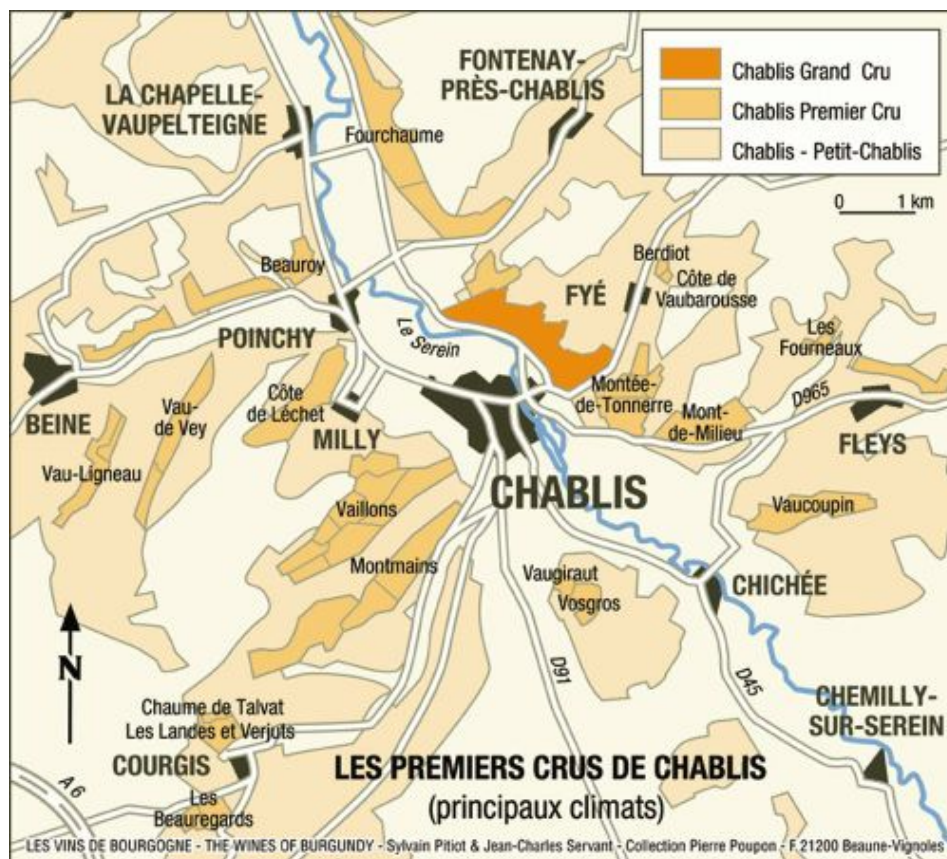
Chablis is one of the northernmost grape-growing regions in our hemisphere, and lies at the absolute limit of getting enough sunlight and warmth over the growing season to get grapes ripe enough to make wine. (Champagne is further north, and it's too cold there to make good still wine, which is why they make sparkling.)

If the cool weather is a disadvantage, Chablis' unique advantage is the *Kimmeridgian* soil that runs under all of the vineyards – an ancient limestone that imparts to the wines their intense and distinct minerality. No other wine in the world smells or tastes like Chablis – it is one of the easiest wines to identify in a blind tasting.

Chablis is a large appellation with over 9,000 acres planted. In addition there are another 4,400 acres entitled to the **Petit Chablis** appellation – a designation for vineyards that are not on the Kimmeridgian soils, but on *Portlandian* limestone, which is generally considered inferior.) Within Chablis there are three levels of vineyard classification – **Grand Cru** (247 acres), **Premier Cru** (1,853 acres), and basic **Chablis** (7,067 acres).

Traditionally the wines of Chablis have not been barrel-fermented or barrel-aged, with the view to preserving the pristine purity and freshness of the wines without the influence of oak. Some producers dabble in a small amount of oak-ageing these days, but they are a very small minority. Most Chablis is vinified and aged in temperature-controlled stainless-steel tanks, which replaced the cement or epoxy-lined tanks that were prevalent prior to the availability of stainless.

The cool weather, the Kimmeridgian limestone, and the lack of an oak influence combine to produce what is surely the most distinctive expression of Chardonnay anywhere on the planet. It is the polar opposite of the rich, buttery, oaky California wines that many in the US think of as “Chardonnay”. Chablis is a very different animal.



*If you're so inclined, I highly recommend getting a group together and tasting these next three wines side-by-side, for a great illustration of the different terroirs and characteristics of White Burgundy.*

1. 2013 Chablis – **Frédéric & Céline Gueguen**      \$23.50 **CLUB PRICE \$20**

If you've been a club member for more than a couple years, you'll probably remember the name. We started importing wines from Frédéric Gueguen (gay-gan) and his wife Céline back in 2006. Céline is the daughter of one of Chablis' largest producers – Jean-Marc Brocard. Her husband Frédéric was the vineyard manager for the Brocard estate, and with the help of Jean-Marc they purchased their own domaine in 2003. They made excellent wines from their own estate while Fred continued running the vineyards and co-managing the Brocard operation, until a family rupture tore everything apart in 2012.

When the dust settled, Fred and Céline were no longer involved with the Brocard operation in any way, and they set off on their own once again. They were able to purchase a number of excellent vineyard parcels, including some very nice pieces of well-situated Chablis and two Chablis 1er Crus, and the new incarnation of Domaine Gueguen was born in 2013. We are thrilled to have the Gueguen wines back – they've been some of our most popular selections over the years, and personal favorites as well.

They have 54 acres all told, with holdings primarily in the Chablis villages of Préhly (where they live), Chichée, and La Chapelle Vaupelteigne (where Fred's family is from.) Chardonnay from these three sites combine to make an excellent example of what Chablis is all about – crisp, bright fruit, laser-pure acidity, notes of iodine and crushed rock, and a whiff of salty sea air on the nose.

This is a great wine to enjoy with oysters – one of the all-time classic pairings. **Ready to drink now, and you can enjoy it over the next 3-5+ years.**



*Chablis vineyards in the village of Préhly*

## **Meursault**

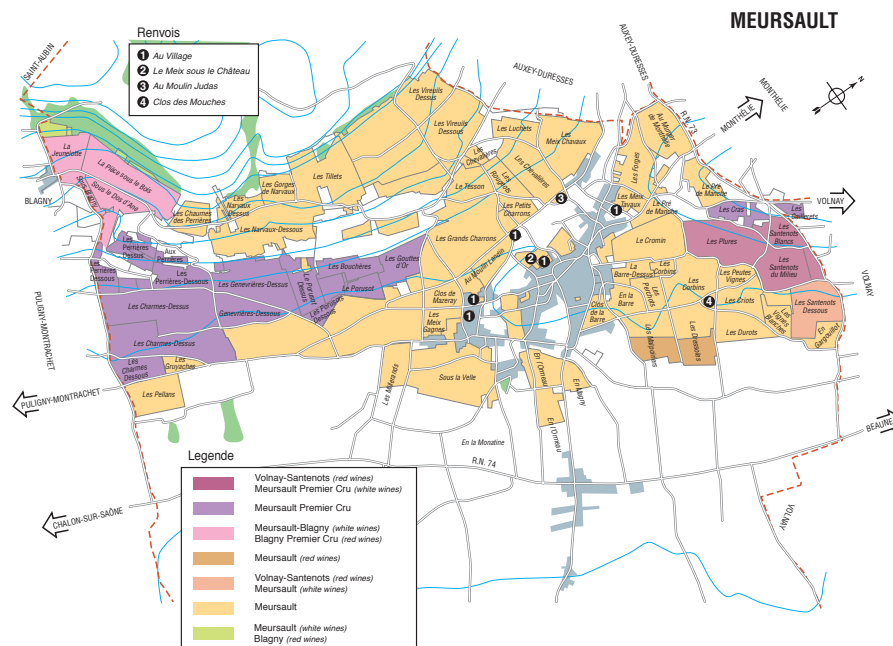
At the other end of the spectrum we find Meursault, home to the richest and fattest expression of Chardonnay in Burgundy (but still a far cry from anything resembling a typical California Chard.)

The Côte de Beaune is generally thought of as the home of the greatest Chardonnay on earth, and probably deservedly so. The highest heights are reached by the legendary Côte de Beaune Grand Crus, most notably Montrachet and Chevaliers Montrachet. From the top of Meursault in the north to the bottom of Chassagne-Montrachet in the south is only about five miles, but within that five miles there are dozens and dozens of distinctly different terroirs.

Meursault is one of Burgundy’s largest villages, with some 973 acres of vineyards and about 1,500 residents – virtually all of whom make their living from wine. Like all of Burgundy, the Meursault vineyards lie on limestone-based soils, but here there is a higher percentage of clay in the mix. Whenever there’s an elevated level of clay in the soils, the wines tend to be bigger, more powerful, more muscular. Thus, in Meursault we tend to see the boldest Chardonnays in all of Burgundy – though still with the limestone-infused infrastructure that could only come from Burgundy.

There are no Grand Crus in Meursault, though a number of the better 1er Crus have world-class reputations. Meursault Perrières 1er Cru is often mentioned as deserving Grand Cru designation – though only part of that vineyard is potentially deserving of the exalted status, so it’s not likely ever to see an upgrade.

If Chablis is all minerals, acidity, and rocks – Meursault is hazelnuts, ripe peaches and rich textures. Yes, please!





## 2. 2012 Meursault, La Pièce Sous le Bois 1er – **Huber-Verdereau**

**\$85 CLUB PRICE \$72**

One of the leaders of Burgundy's Biodynamic movement, **Thiébault Huber** has grown his estate from just 7 acres in 1994 to nearly 27 acres today, and this lovely piece of Meursault is his newest wine. The vineyard is technically in the hamlet of **Blagny**, much of which is entitled to the Meursault appellation, with the better part of that being classified as 1er Cru. It sits high up the slope above the upper part of Meursault Perrières. This is the most mineral-driven part of Meursault, as there is less clay, and thinner soil in general, up near the top of the hill.

Only two barrels, or 600 bottles of this wine were produced. Thiébault very graciously gave us a full half of his production so we could feature this in the club. It is a Meursault of both power and refinement, with great richness and precision combining in one flat-out delicious package.

This was barrel-fermented and aged, but no new oak was harmed in the making of this wine. The limestone-ness from the cooler, higher elevation site is well in evidence, but there's no denying that this is Meursault – the weight on the palate and the rich flavors give it away. **Enjoy now and over the next 2-4 years** – it totally rocks with grilled shrimp or just a nice chunk of Comté or Gruyère.

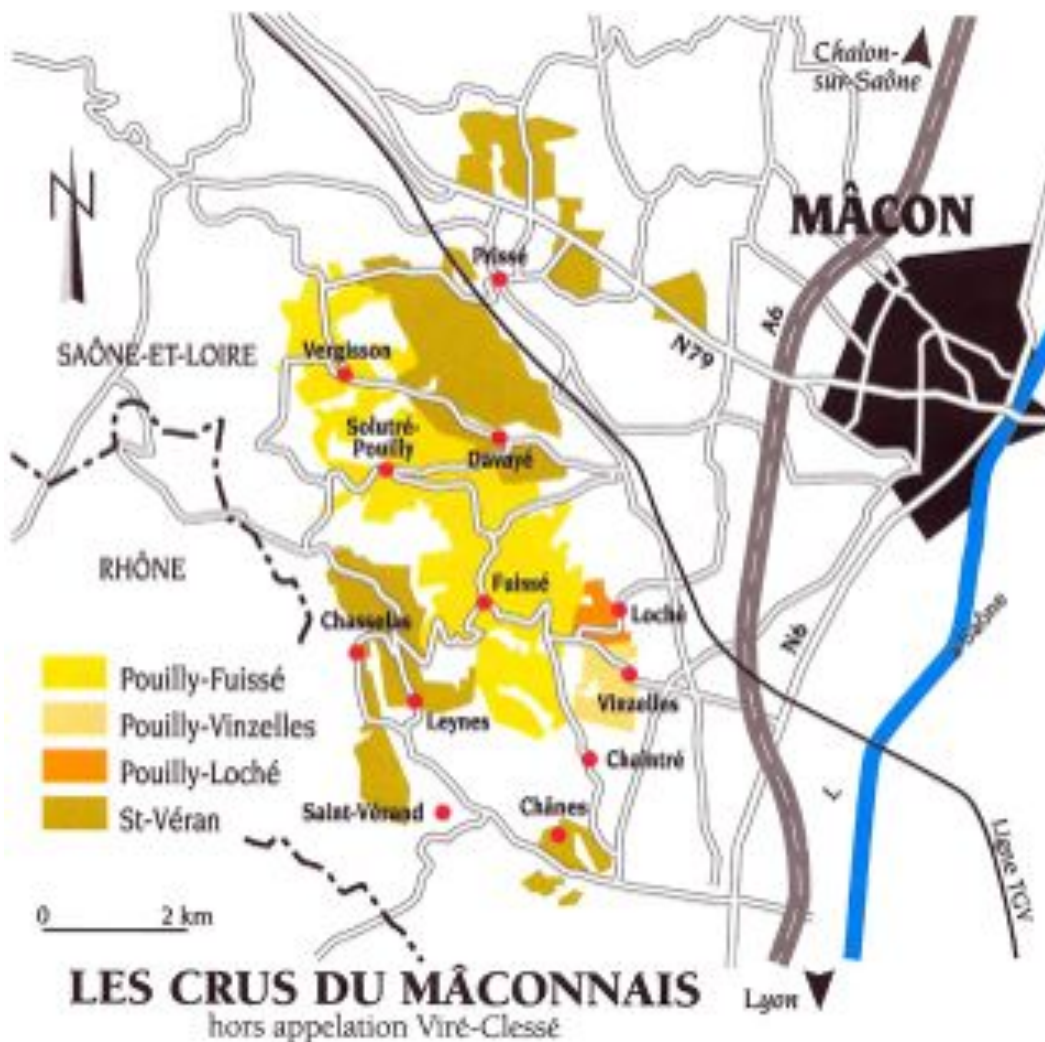


***Thiébault Huber in Volnay***

## Pouilly-Fuissé

Pronounced “pwee-yeé fwee-say” – Pouilly-Fuissé is one of the best known Burgundian appellations, though perhaps for all the wrong reasons. It became wildly popular in the US in the 70s and 80s, and was virtually synonymous with “French White Wine” during that era. Unfortunately, most of what was being sold and consumed back then was industrially-produced from over-cropped grapes, and was in fact fairly insipid. If you haven’t had any Pouilly-Fuissé in some time, it’s time to get re-acquainted – it just might blow your mind.

Pouilly-Fuissé is the most important appellation in the Mâconnais region, the southern sector of Burgundy that runs between the Côte Chalonnaise and the Beaujolais. The appellation includes vineyards from four adjacent villages – **Fuissé, Solutré-Pouilly, Vergisson, and Chaintré**. While everything in the Mâconnais is currently classified at the Village level, a good portion of Pouilly-Fuissé is under consideration for an upgrade to 1er Cru, perhaps within the next 5-10 years.



P-F is the most geologically diverse appellation in Burgundy, with over 75 distinct different soil types running through the vineyards. There are nearly 1,900 acres of vines in the appellation, producing over 5,000,000 bottles of wine every year. Like everywhere else in Burgundy, only the top 5-10% of that is exceptional, but the best of it can rival the best of the Côte de Beaune, at a fraction of the price. The world-wide demand for the top Côte de Beaune whites has pushed prices up exponentially. While nothing from Pouilly-Fuissé is in the same league as a top Meursault or Puligny, they can come damn close at a price that us mortals can afford to drink on a regular basis.

In broad terms, Pouilly-Fuissé wines show both the richness of a slightly warmer climate (it's about an hour's drive south of Beaune) and the freshness and bright limestone notes from the soils that run throughout Burgundy. This is the end of the line for the limestone soils, however – as the bedrock changes to granite just across the road from here as one crosses into the Beaujolais appellation.



*Aerial view of Chateau des Rontets*

### 3. 2012 Pouilly-Fuissé, Clos Varambon – **Chateau des Rontets**

**\$34.50 Club Price \$29**

In the 90s, Fabio and Claire Gazeau-Montrasi were working as architects in Milan (he's Italian, she's French.) Claire had spent her childhood summers on the family's wine estate in Fuissé, though had never considered a life in the vines. When she inherited the estate, Claire and Fabio decided to dive in head-first. They moved with their two young children to the manor house among the vines, gave up their careers, went to winemaking and viticulture school, and never looked back. From what was once a run-down and undistinguished property they are now producing some of the most widely-heralded wines in the Mâconnais. (In my next life, I want to live at the Chateau des Rontets – one of the most picturesque and dramatically beautiful spots in all of Burgundy.)

The 15 acres of vines are in one walled-in parcel – the Clos Varambon (Claire's family name) at the very top of the hill, facing north and overlooking the town of Fuissé below. Fabio and Claire farm the estate themselves, organically and with meticulous care. The hilltop site gets a lot of sun, but also a lot of wind, so it is a cooler site than most in the appellation. The oldest blocks were planted in 1910-1920, and the "young" vines were planted in the 1960s.

From these mature vines and this exquisite site we see Pouilly-Fuissé of superb precision and finesse. There's a clear and precise minerality present, but of a less prominent nature than you would see in Chablis. There's also good fruit richness, but not as pronounced as in Meursault. Perhaps this is the best of both worlds?

Fermented and aged in large, neutral wooden tanks, there is no trace of oak influence to get in the way of the beautiful expression of Chardonnay. The Clos Varambon is one of the sites slated for an upgrade to 1er Cru, and deservedly so! **Drink now or over the next 2-3 years.**



***Fabio & Claire***

## Overlooked Burgundian Pinot Noir?

The famous red Grand Crus and top red 1er Crus are sought-after the world over. They represent only 12% of the wine produced in Burgundy, and the demand seems to keep growing non-stop. With demand far outstripping supply, there's been nowhere for the prices to go but up.

With the world chasing the cherries at the top of the Burgundian cake, a lot of folks are probably overlooking the cake itself – the regional “Bourgogne” bottlings and Village wines that make up 88% of Burgundy. While none of them would come under the heading of “cheap” – they are certainly infinitely more affordable. If well-chosen, they can deliver big satisfaction for the buck. Of course there are a lot of mediocre or less than satisfying wines at this level, but I urge you not to skip over them on your way to Grand Cru glory.

As I preach at every Burgundy seminar I've ever taught, the three most important things to consider when selecting a Burgundy are Producer, Producer, and Producer. Top quality producers make quality wines regardless of the appellation or level of classification. A Grand Cru designation doesn't mean it's a great wine, only that it came from a potentially great piece of vineyard land. It's up to the producer to realize that potential. “Simple” Village wines from the better producers can often deliver more pleasure and satisfaction than a Grand Cru from a less talented vigneron. Zero-in on producers that you like, who consistently make wines that please you, and you're more likely to have more hits than misses. Here are three examples from less-exalted appellations in the hands of excellent producers – enjoy!



*Caroline Parent*



5. 2012 Pommard – **Thierry Violot-Guillemard**

**\$61 CLUB PRICE \$51**

One of the great characters in all of Burgundy, Thierry Violot-Guillemard and his walrus mustache are behind some of the most elegant, lovely wines in the Côte de Beaune. His small estate typically produces around 3,000 cases per year, but he lost nearly 80% of his crop to hail three years in a row - 2012, 2013 & 2014. He produced a scant 700-800 cases in each of those years. How we were able to get an entire barrel's worth of his 2012 Pommard I don't really know, but I am hugely grateful.

Thierry farms organically, keeps his yields reasonable, and doesn't monkey with the wines in the winery. So often Pommard can be overworked and heavy and dreadfully tannic, but it doesn't have to be that way. Left to its own devices, Pommard can have a gentler side to go along with the richness and power, and that's what Thierry strives to capture in all of his wines.

There is more clay in the soils of Pommard than any other red-wine village in the Côte de Beaune, hence the inherent power and structure of the wines. Too often I find that that many producers try to accentuate that aspect of the wine while ignoring the underlying finesse. While this wine will never have the multi-faceted complexity and nuances of the top Pommard 1er Crus, this is a Village wine that has a lot to say. It is also likely to please much sooner than its more well-bred brethren – **drink it now and over the next 3-5 years.**



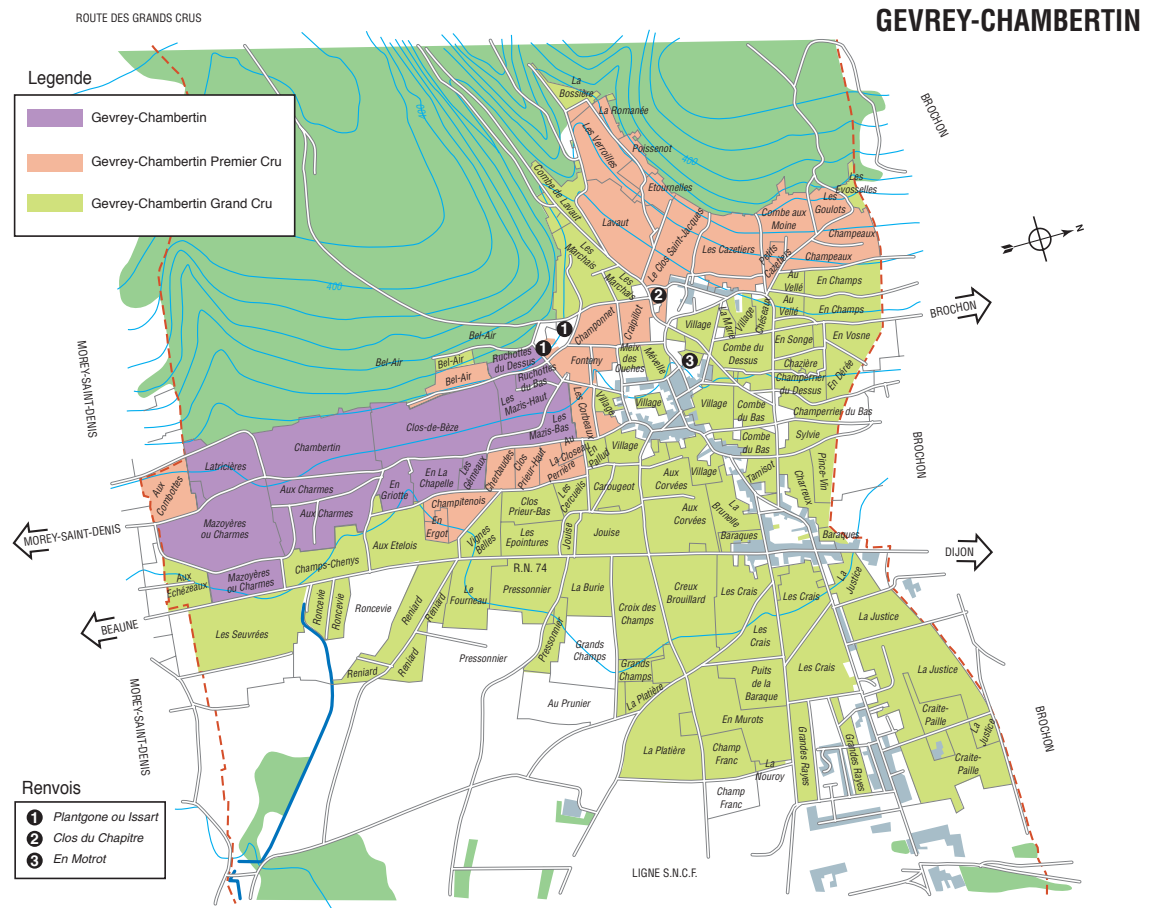
*In the cellar with Thierry Violot-Guillemard in Pommard*

## 6. 2013 Gevrey-Chambertin, Vieilles Vignes – Marc Roy

\$78.50 CLUB PRICE \$65

But wait – Gevrey-Chambertin is famous, it's not overlooked, you say! Yes, there are a whopping 9 Grand Crus and 26 1er Crus within the village of Gevrey-Chambertin, and yes, all of those are deservedly well-known if not outright world-famous. At the Village level, however, there are some 1,000 acres of highly variable quality, and basic Village Gevrey-Chambertin can run the gamut from the ridiculous to downright divine.

In the hands of mademoiselle **Alexandrine Roy**, we see just how good a Village wine can be. Her tiny 10-acre estate is comprised entirely of Village-level holdings – they do not have any of the exalted Grand or 1er Crus. Nonetheless, she puts more care and attention into her Village wines than a lot of folks do for their Grand Crus. The proof is in the bottle.





Alexandrine took over winemaking from her father Marc in 2005, and her mom and dad still work alongside her in the vineyards. The low-ceilinged winery is in the basement under her grandmother's house - the vineyards are all walking distance from there. Alex's attention to detail in the cellar and her meticulous vineyard work have won her international acclaim as one of the true rising stars in all of Burgundy. We've featured her wines often in the club, and are thrilled to have another one for you here.

The ***Vielles Vignes*** bottling ("old vines") is from five different parcels Alexandrine farms in the village, with an average vine age now over 65 years. The parcels are each in different sectors of the village, bringing the full spectrum of Gevrey-Chambertin together in one lovely package. Loaded with ripe black fruits, there's a silkiness and supple texture here that makes the wine very inviting. Year-in, year-out this is a great example of how good Village level Burgundy can be, and what a difference a great producer really makes. **Enjoy it for its lovely primary fruit now now, or catch it at its best in 2016-2109!**



## Next shipment in the Fall...

Thanks for joining us on our exploration of the great wines of Burgundy! Watch your email for information on our next Caveau Burgundy Club shipment coming in the fall, and for pre-arrival offerings on all the yummy Bubbliies headed your way throughout the year. All the latest information is always available on our website: [www.caveauselections.com](http://www.caveauselections.com)