

## **A Late 1996 Wine Tour to Beaune**

### **A Visit Of Domaine Pierre André and an almost botched dinner.**

Upon arrival at the Château de Corton-André, *Jean-Noël Lejeune* proved to be an extremely forthcoming and knowledgeable host. The business was taken over from Pierre André by his son-in-law *Gabriel Liogier d'Ardhuy*. The cellars of the château date back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the castle itself was built in the 1800s and displays on the roof the same beautiful pattern and handmade tiles as the famous Hospice de Beaune.

The outer cellar contains a small museum displaying traditional wine making tools. We were particularly impressed by an old traveling wine press on wheels. The press traveled to the vintners rather than the vintner to the press. Benefit: the grapes were disturbed less.

Out of the cold cellar we hustled back into the château, where the ancient huge kitchen has been converted into a cozy tasting room. The large table in the center of the room had a pull-out section of drawers which turned out to be – – – a spittoon, trough-shaped and cleverly flushed by a permanent fountain fed through copper pipes hidden in one of the wooden table legs! Spitting has never been so elegant! The ladies were more adroit than the men, and spat nonchalantly - from a distance!

Between wines, all our glasses were rinsed casually with a spare glass from the next wine. A good idea, that saves having many glasses at hand.

The last wine of the tasting surely was the crown: *Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru 1987*. I have previously enjoyed quite a number of Corton-Charlemagnes from different producers, Drouhin, Jadot, Faiveley, Bonneau de Martray and some lesser known. Of these the Louis Latour is my favourite, followed by Drouhin and Jadot. The difference in these wines, all from the same vineyard is remarkable and demonstrates the different approaches and skills brought to the same grape by different producers. It is hard to fault any of them, they simply express different philosophies of vinification.

On to dinner!

A good nose is paramount in wine tasting. Gourmets also develop a good nose for seeking out hitherto untried restaurants. Sometimes a glimpse at the menu is enough. Sometimes, but rarely, one has to make up one's mind to leave after being welcomed and seated. This happened to me only two or three times. But it also happened that evening.

We had been told to go the *Auberge St. Vincent* in the center of Beaune. After being seated in a completely empty but otherwise nicely decorated restaurant, we were offered only *one* prix-fixe menu including beef and lobster. No other choice. We can have beef in Canada and lobster in the south of France. This is not Burgundian fare! The cheap wine glasses on our table, befitting an Italian trattoria rather than a fancy French restaurant, increased our alarm further. When an attempt was made to heap a plate crammed with cheese puffs between us, we got up from our chairs in apprehension, ready to retreat. The first response of the hostess was to grab an eraser and rub our names out in her book, only then we were handed back our coats. The waiter had an unpleasant stench. We fled.

Back at the hotel I called my favourite place, *Le Vieux Moulin* in Bouilland, 5 km behind Savigny-les-Beaune. We managed to get the last table for four and had an utterly delightful and inspired Menu de Dégustation ending with Filet de Chevreuil and an incomparable *Richebourg 1988* by *Méo-Camuzet*, one of the best small and completely sold out vintners in the Côte de Nuits. A good sleep was assured.

## **An Early Glimpse: A Freezing Morning Tasting of the new 1996 Jadot Wines**

On the morning of the Grand *Chateau de Vougeot* dinner, we managed to sneak in with an exclusive crowd of people – all wine dealers – invited to attend a preview tasting of some of their young 1996 wines. These were, in fact, not really to be called “wines” as of yet, since they were just passing through a stage called “tempête” (or “storm”) to borrow a name from their Austrian counterparts. In Austria, the impatient imbibers, enjoy “Sturm” in November as a perfectly acceptable beverage with lunch or an afternoon “casse-croûte”.

For their recent production, Jadot had been enlarging their cellars at the edge of Beaune. We were welcomed by *André Gagey* and his son *Pierre-Henry Gagey* (in charge of the company), *Jacques Lardière*, the wine-maker and his assistant *Christine Botton*, as well as the marketing team of Jadot, headed by *Frédéric Burrier*.

Jacques Lardière spoke at length about his philosophy of vinification, which consists mainly of adding nothing (or as little as possible) and resisting any fancy methods to achieve special effects. He was obviously referring to Louis Latour who – horror of horrors – pasteurises his red wines, albeit only to 72 degrees and only for 3 tiny seconds.

Even though many agree that it takes three years to understand and judge a great wine year, much can be guessed from the weather patterns during the life span of the grape, and the general first impressions gained during the wine-making process and the first tastings, such as ours.

The 1996 crop experienced no early frosts, some rain during the month of May (when rain is not considered detrimental), excellent dry and warm months of June and July, causing the buds to open up within only two to three days of flowering time. August and September provided cooler but long sunny days, preparing excellent conditions for vendange. Jadot’s philosophy of wine-making excludes fining and filtering as much as possible. Grapes are hand-sorted, and stems removed virtually 100% before they reach the wine press.

Already now we know that 1996 seems to be a perfect white Burgundy year. Both, whites and reds, enjoyed a great yield together with a good level of maturation. At the tasting I found acidity and sugar in good balance. Jacques Lardière, Jadot’s wine-maker thinks the wines will be “pretty” very early on, and will need less aging than traditionally thought common.

The tasting started with 6 white wines, followed by 8 red wines, a perfectly acceptable number for a two-hour love affair with the young “puppies” of some highly prized vineyard names. Most, but not all the samples were from vineyards owned by Jadot or the Jadot family.

*Santenay Clos de Malte* (white), from the Domaine Jadot, while naturally cloudy, was extremely pleasant, still full of sugar and a very light finish. The second white, a *Puligny Montrachet*, already clearer in appearance, had more acidity and concentration, yet still also balance, and a longer finish than the first. This was followed by a *Meursault 1er cru “Les Perrières”*, again still showing plenty of early sugar, and more concentration yet and more fruit than the preceding. The fourth white sampled was a *Chassagne Montrachet 1er cru “Morgeot” Clos de la Chapelle*, from the *Domaine Duc de Magenta*. Samples 2, 3 and 4 were, in effect, not directly from Domaine Jadot (or the Jadot Estate) vineyards.

Needless to say, the wines became more important and more prominent in taste as the tasting proceeded. Except for the beautiful name, I remember little of the last wine mentioned. Maybe because further down the list I had already discovered a *Corton-Charlemagne, Grand Cru*, and a *Chevalier-Montrachet Les Demoiselles, Grand Cru*, both from the *Domaine des Héritiers Louis Jadot* (the Jadot Estate vineyards). These two names are, of course, legend.

The Charlemagne vineyard of Jadot is high up on the hill of Corton and right next to the Charlemagne vineyard of Louis Latour, the latter over the years has been considered the most prestigious of all Corton Charlemagnes. The Charlemagne displayed robustness and masculinity, whereas the Chevalier Montrachet Les Demoiselles was imbued with elegance and femininity. The latter is generally higher ranked - if price was a measure of appreciation and quality. I preferred the Charlemagne, but this, of course, may derive from my own bias and love affair with this particularly herbaceous wine.

I must admit I was much more at a loss to assess the young red wines offered. They were - in the same order - *Côte de Nuits Villages "Les Vaucrains"* (Jadot), *Volnay 1er Cru "Clos de Barre"* (Monopole), *Beaune 1er Cru "Clos des Ursules"* (Monopole, Estate Of Jadot), *Chambolle Musigny 1er Cru "Les Fuees"* (Jadot), *Corton "Grèves" Grand Cru* (Jadot), *Gevrey Chambertin 1er Cru "Clos St. Jacques"* (Jadot), *Clos Vougeot, Grand Cru* (Jadot) and *Chambertin Clos de Bèze Grand Cru* (Jadot), the latter surely staying in my memory most.

The ink of my tasting notes was washed away by red wine splattering about from my careless spitting. What an excuse! The fact is that I was really at a loss to access these young red wines intelligently, except noticing more tannin here or there and less sugar somewhere else, and signs of oak etc., the usual lingo, for whose reader's benefit?

The fact is that a description of a wine in words is like writing down what the music of Schubert sounds like. Important was that I fell in love with the whites, and that was that. The reward would come soon by way of bidding for a barrel at the Hospices de Beaune auction, and later by reserving early – the whites of Louis Jadot.

### **The Trois Glorieuses Evening at the Château de Vougeot.**

The *Confrérie des Tastevins* owns the *Chateau de Vougeot*. The *Fête des Trois Glorieuses* on the eve of the Hospices de Beaune wine auction, can be considered the highlight of annual Burgundian festivities. Our party was lucky to get really good seats next to the central table which was presided by His Imperial and Royal Highness, Archduke *Otto von Habsburg*, who was accompanied by his son Archduke Karl. The other guest of honor was France's first woman astronaut, *Claudie André-Deshays*, a highly intelligent, well spoken and very attractive young lady, who quickly become the darling of the crowds throughout Beaune's wine festival weekend.

To serve superb food and excellent wines (the latter poured freely and frequently) is something only Burgundians can master, because WINE and FOOD is spelled with capital letters in their mind. Should I mention the wines to make the reader jealous? Of course. *Bourgogne Aligoté 1994*, *Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru Les Chalumeaux 1990* (Tasteviné), *Chassagne-Montrachet 1993* (rouge, Tasteviné), *Chambolle-Musigny 1991 1er Cru Les Charmes* (Tasteviné), and *Latricières-Chambertin 1989 Grand Cru*.

Speeches were all in French, with numerous puns: *Shakespeare* was a French guy, of course, called *Jacques-Pierre*, who had moved to England. We, the guests are *monogam* and *polyglott*, whereas Burgundians are *polygam* and *monoglott*. . . witticism after witticism, interrupted by lots of singing (la la la, la la la, la la la. . .) twisty hand-waiving and clapping. Meeting of wonderful people, or at least, they all became wonderful after the third wine serving.

### **A rare lunch at Maison Jadot**

An old convent in the center of Beaune houses the old cellars of Jadot, certainly some of the most precious in town. Entering these sacred vaults via what must previously have been a coal chute, but now sports a steep steel stair (watch your head!) you truly enter an under-ground empire stretching in endless mazes below other neighbouring blocks of houses, 1.2 million bottles in all, the oldest of which are Cortons and Musignys dating back to 1845! Unbelievable. These wines may be no longer drinkable?!? Not at all, says Frédéric Burrier. Only a few years ago 78 bottles, all dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were picked for a supreme wine tasting (wish I was there!). Only 6 out of 78 had to be discarded.

Back above ground, in the adjoining annex, a simple but precious lunch was set out. In Burgundian vintners' homes, the menu's course listings consist primarily of the wine served (the food appears in brackets underneath - as accompaniment).

### **Déjeuner Servi Au Couvent Des Jacobins**

Taittinger Brut

*Meursault, Cuvée "Jean Humblot" 1971, Hospices de Beaune*  
(Jambon Persillé, Pâté en Croûte)

*Beaune Cuvée "Clos des Avaux" 1970, Hospices de Beaune*  
(Tartes au Fromage, salades, Mont d'Or)

The wines were superb, the red at its peak, the white still going strong. The fan of scents and flavours hitting nose and palate were extremely varied and intense. The food was in fact a servant to the wine. This proves the point that one has to have the patience to wait for certain wines for 20 or 30 years - or pay up!

### **The 1996 Hospice de Beaune Wine Sale**

Thanks to the Maison Louis Jadot, managed to sneak into the Hospice de Beaune auction hall on the main square. The hall was packed full, and outside a crowd gathered to watch the event on CCTV.

The auctioning of some of the best vineyard harvests by the Hospice de Beaune for charitable reasons is as custom which is now over 100 years old. The first auction took place on 1859. The Hospice de Beaune owns a total of 61 hectares of vineyards, all of them highly reputable, since the Hospice customarily sold off donated vineyards of a quality thought not worthy of its reputation.

All vineyards lie in the Côte de Beaune: Aloxe-Corton, Pernand-Vergelesses, Savigny-les-Beaune, Beaune, Volnay, Pommard, Monthélie, Auxey-Duresses, Meursault and Puligny-Montrachet. The auction lots originally carried the name of their vintners, but are now named after their benefactors.

The auction is marked by the curious means of imposing a time limit on the last highest bid: each time a high bid is reached, a tiny candle is lit and the public is encouraged to raise the bid, but only as long as the little flame is still alive. Thereafter, the lot is adjudicated with the traditional auction hammer.

The highest bids for reds were for the *Corton - Docteur Peste* (31,000 FF a barrel) bought by a truly international clientele including the Enoteca Pincciori (Florence's most prestigious restaurant), the Wine Warehouse in California, Asahi Tokyo and private investors in Paris, Germany as well as a photographer from Strasbourg.

As in 1995, where the white wine offering was small but excellent, the white 1996 burgundies demanded the highest bids. As mentioned earlier, the 1996 whites are considered distinctly superior to the 1995s with the benefit of a larger, but excellent harvest.

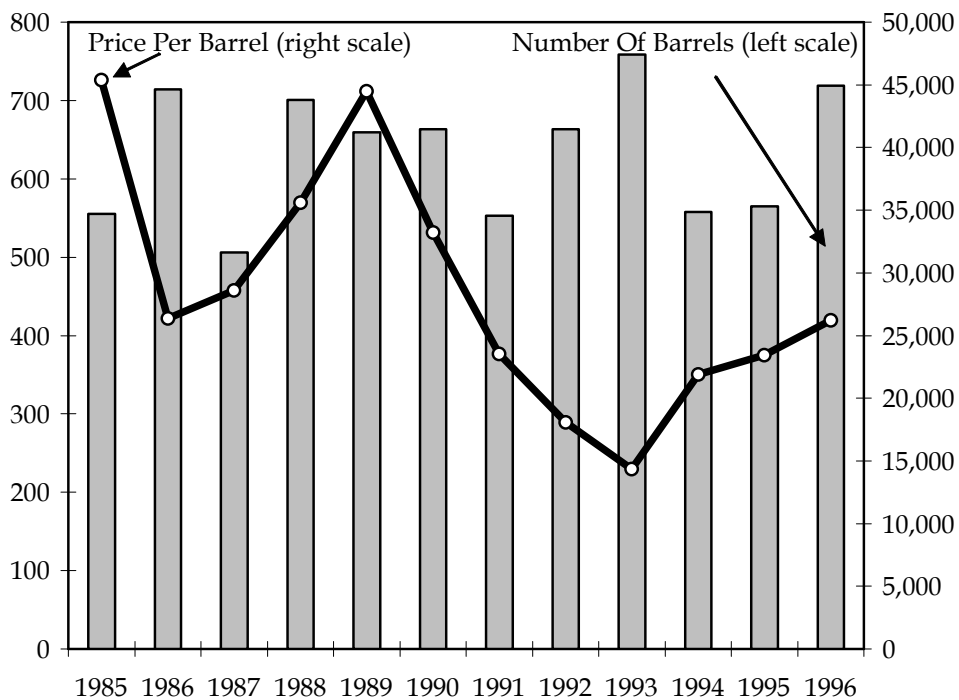
The highest prices were paid for *Corton-Charlemagne* (62,000 FF by an American individual under the bidding – and producing wings – of Louis Jadot); and for *Bâtard-Montrachet Dames-de-Flandres* (83,000 FF paid exclusively by highly reputable burgundy éleveurs: Chartron et Trébuchet, Moillard-Grivot, Léo Gros (Paris), Louis Latour Beaune and Louis Latour (London))

Our group was lucky to have Louis Jadot agree to bid for a barrel of excellent reputation: **we acquired one barrel of *Meursault-Genevrières Philippe-Le-Bon* at 44,000 FF.**

The other 6 barrels of this offering went to Maison Paul Reitz in Corgoloin, the Casino in St.Etienne, the Culinary School Hattori in Japan, and M. Milstein in New York. *Philippe-Le-Bon*, founder of the Order Of The Golden Fleece and co-founder of the Hospices de Beaune, was born in 1396. To buy his wine on his 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is a special centennial treat for us!

In all there were 607 barrels of red and 112 barrels of white for sale. This and the superior quality of the whites explains the big price gap between whites and reds. The lesson is, of course, to scan your local wine stores for any white burgundies still available at reasonable prices!

**Below is a chart that I compiled, depicting the last 12 years' auction result:**



The market, of course, never lies. The 1996 Hospice de Beaune auction results as expressed in FF/barrel have indicated that we are dealing with the best vintage since 1990. The whites, particularly, are continuing to rise. The vintners are happy, since they are experiencing a rise in price as well as a rise in quantity for sale. It is indeed a rare occasion to see both price and quantity rise in tandem. Yet, there was certainly no bidding race between Japanese and American buyers as experienced in 1989.

**1996 promises great burgundies, the best of which should turn out magnificent.**