

(Practically) all about Clos de Vougeot

31 Jul 2010 by Jancis Robinson/ FT

See my tasting notes on [56 Clos de Vougeot 2008s](#):

31 Jul - My fellow Master of Wine Stephen Skelton adds: *'Just read your article on Clos Vougeot and your remark at the end about Drouhin's two plots reminded me of a tasting we had in their cellars where we tasted the two plots separately. The lower plot is planted with the slope – north- south – whereas the upper plot is planted east- west because the plot is very narrow in the north- south direction. Even though they are in all other aspects the same, this difference in row orientation accounts for the different style of the individual wines – an argument that the soil and the site (terroir?) is not perhaps as important as the viticulture!'*

The principal function of a fine- wine broker is presumably to broke fine wine, but it is much appreciated when they break out of the mould and do something a little more altruistic.

Bordeaux Index have begun holding annual retrospective open tastings in London's Hatton Garden of the most significant bordeaux made 10 years earlier. In Battersea, south London, Farr Vintners have held particularly useful blind tastings of key Bordeaux vintages for selected members of the trade and press. But earlier this month in the west London premises of Fine & Rare Wines was a blind tasting that was even more educational, revealing and unusual than any of these.

Fine & Rare's Simon Davies and Amanda Baxter managed to corral samples of the 2008 vintage from 56 producers of the famous grand cru Clos de Vougeot in Burgundy. This ancient walled vineyard is so extensive - 50 hectares, or 125 acres - that even this generous selection was not exhaustive. There are at least another six Clos de Vougeot producers whose wines for one reason or another were not included in the tasting: Olivier Bernstein, Champy, Eugénie, Haegelen- Jaye, Leroy, Sylvain Loichet, Perrot- Minot, Ponsot Vieilles Vignes, Tortochot and Varoilles. But I don't think I have ever had the chance to taste so many grand cru burgundies at the same time, even if Clos de Vougeot - or Clos Vougeot as it is often written (as in the sign of the gateway pictured here, courtesy of Mick Rock at Cephas) - is too big to be consistently one of the most thrilling grands crus.

The thrill of Clos de Vougeot is historical. Vines were first planted there in the 12th century by the austere monastic order based in nearby Citeaux, which they found too marshy for successful viticulture. The Cistercians accumulated land around their original holdings on the slope just south of the village of Vougeot so successfully that by 1336 the vineyard was essentially as it is today, Burgundy's largest walled vineyard, or *clos*, with a press house and cellar attached. It was in the hands of a single owner until the late 19th century, when wine from the hallowed Romanée- Conti vineyard was also aged there as it was managed by the same member of the Ouvrard family who owned it for most of the 19th century. Almost incredibly, it had had only two other effective owners in the previous six centuries: the Cistercians until Napoleon confiscated the vineyard in 1790 and then the Ravel family of Parisian bankers.

Today, by contrast, Clos de Vougeot is most famous for the number of owners with a plot inside its historic walls - more than 80, many of whom sell their grapes to merchants or other growers - and for being the headquarters of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, France's most famous vinous brotherhood. The Château du Clos de Vougeot is therefore the scene of much carefully orchestrated revelry and the world's most efficient meal service in the narrowest space, between long tables crammed into the main hall.

There was another delightful consequence of this huge blind tasting: discovering some producers little known in the UK, of whom some had made some very good wine indeed. The first five names in my list of top wines below are very well known and hardly surprising, but I was intrigued to discover that some of my favourite wines had been made by Leymarie- Ceci and Régis Forey.

Leymarie- Ceci is a small Vougeot domaine based on half a hectare at the top of the Clos de Vougeot bought on impulse in 1933 by a Belgian wine merchant who went on to acquire two properties in Pomerol, the Belgians' favourite Bordeaux appellation. The style of their Clos de Vougeot is a little bumptious and Pomerol- like admittedly, but there was no shortage of stuffing and pleasure in this wine.

The wines of the Domaine Régis Forey are a little easier to track down, especially in the US and... Belgium. According to one New York retailer, Chambers Street Wines, Régis Forey owes his particularly convincing, somehow sincere wine style to his belief in unusually long macerations of skins and juice.

Other less famous producers whose wines impressed me in this fascinating tasting were Domaine Laurent Roumier of Chambolle- Musigny and Domaine Henri Rebourseau of Gevrey- Chambertin, a favourite of New York retailer Sherry- Lehmann and a burgundy domaine that, most unusually, has an online direct sales operation for mature vintages (see www.rebourseau.com).

The 2008 vintage was chosen because the wines were not too dense and introvert and, because ripeness levels were not that high, it was hoped that the wines would be usefully transparent at two years old (as, say, 2005s would not have been). There was certainly no shortage of 2008 burgundy's relatively high acidity, but in the most successful cases, the fruit was really quite ripe enough to compensate for this. And, while there was no single style of wine (I could have taken one or two of these wines for non- European Pinots, so sweet and oaky were they), the overall quality was seriously impressive.

So often when tasting a single producer's range, their Clos de Vougeot can seem a rather weak link in a chain leading to, say, the various Chambertins, or Vosne- Romanées, but these wines en masse were firm, confident and mostly of grand cru quality - even if some were suffering more than others from unusually high serving temperatures on an unusually hot day in London.

Conventionally it is supposed that the best wines of Clos de Vougeot come from the best- drained upper third of the vineyard near such other grands crus as Le Musigny and Echezeaux, and the least successful Clos de Vougeots are assumed to come from the soggiest third right down by the main road. (Apart from a small slice of Mazoyères- Chambertin, this is the only Burgundy grand cru vineyard to descend so low down the Côte d'Or.)

An analysis of the location of the vines that were responsible for my favourite wines in this extensive line- up revealed that all came from vines grown in the top third of the vineyard except for Joseph Drouhin's vines, which are in two parcels in the middle and the bottom, Régis Forey's and Grivot's, which are at the bottom, and Clos Frantin's, which are in all three elevations in this vineyard which I will be taking much more seriously from now on.

Favourite Clos de Vougeot 2008s

Dom Anne Gros
Dom Michel Gros
Dom François Lamarche
Dom Joseph Drouhin
Dom Henri Boillot
Dom Leymarie Ceci
Dom du Clos Frantin
Dom Drouhin- Laroze
Dom Régis Forey
Dom Hudelot- Noëllat
Dom Jean Grivot

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