

## Domaine Gérard Boulay, Les Monts Damnés 2006 Sancerre

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This week's wine is as much news story as recommendation. American wine lovers have been enjoying Gérard and Thibault Boulays' dense Sancerres for some time. Purple pager David Schildknecht, now of *The Wine Advocate*, and Josh Reynolds in Stephen Tanzer's *International Wine Cellar* have been singing the praises of this exceptional domaine and the wines are also available in Germany and Norway. But as far as I know they have never been available in the UK - until two weeks ago when the enterprising Nick Brookes of Vine Trail in Bristol imported his first shipment - and has had to re-order already.

Brookes is one of the most fastidious of Britain's many specialist importers of French wines. He was the first to import the fine champagnes of **Larmandier-Bernier**, for example, and has been working hard to supplement his list of superior grower champagnes recently. He has the very fine Alsace wines of **Frédéric Mochel**, Cornas from **Eric et Joel Durand** and a delicious selection from Jura and Savoie, both regions largely ignored in Britain (although Les Caves de Pyrène near Guildford is a noble exception). The Loire is another of Vine Trail's specialist areas and I am thrilled that we Brits may now enjoy the intense, age-worthy wines of this growing domaine, which has been in the Boulay family since 1380 apparently.

It's not often that news of a wine spreads like wildfire but last Friday I saw Nigel Platts-Martin, owner of such restaurants as The Square, Chez Bruce and The Ledbury, and he was singing the praises of this Sancerre. We had a family celebration that evening at [Le Café Anglais](#), where I was greeted with the remains of a bottle of **Domaine Gérard Boulay, Les Monts Damnés 2006 Sancerre**, which chef Rowley Leigh urged me to taste. Thank you, Rowley. (And for a great dinner, although why I order anything other than those parmesan custards with anchovy toast, I do not know.)

Back to the wine. It's very much in the firm, strongly mineral, nuanced and extremely concentrated style of Sancerre made by their neighbours the Cotats - a world away from the regular refreshing but forgettable norm. This is a wine that demands your attention and, although much more expensive than most Sancerres (and, as usual, much more expensive in the UK than the US), it should really be compared with a white burgundy in terms of its rewards and complexity. Schildknecht reports that "Boulay's wines - while delicious in youth - can be riveting after 7-12 years".

The 35 to 40 year-old Sauvignon Blanc vines were grown on the middle of the south-facing slope of Kimmeridgian marl that is Monts Damnés in Chavignol. They were picked by hand and fermented using ambient yeasts, both distinguishing marks in Sancerre today. Half of the fruit was fermented in stainless steel (at 18 deg C) and half in three and four year old barrels bought from the likes of Bourgeois and Mellot. The smoothing effect of barrel maturation is evident in the super-caressing texture of the wine. Malolactic fermentation was suppressed; the wine is still tightly furled and crisp. Although alcohol levels here in the Upper Loire have traditionally been boosted by chaptalisation, the common practice of adding sugar during fermentation to make the wines stronger, the Boulays chaptalised neither the 2006s nor the 2005s apparently. (I suspect but don't know that they will have added some sugar in 2007.)

I urge you to take a look at [www.vinetrail.co.uk](http://www.vinetrail.co.uk) with which, needless to say, I have absolutely no connection other than the fact that whenever I have tasted their wines I have been intrigued and always found something worth recommending. This Sancerre is not yet on their website but can already be ordered. You can drink this wine now but you might also like to stash some away to see whether you, like Schildknecht, will be riveted in 2016.

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