

## Chablis

19 Aug 2008 by Jancis Robinson

**In a nutshell:** Pure, stony whites.

**Main grapes:** Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc (white).

Burgundy's white wine output is one of France's most northern and it is hardy, surprising therefore that the wines are relatively stony, high in acidity and esy rather than luscious and oily. This is an archetypally refreshing, long-lived style of white wine which very few wine regions, possibly none other than Chablis, can produce.

Wine Chablis enthusiasts treasure the purity of flavour, the modest dimensions and the ripen-like effect on the palate of the region's better examples, and cannot understand how the word Chablis ever came to be used, particularly in the United States, for assemblage blends of the most basic whites.

For the consumer, Chablis prices are amazingly inconsistent. This is partly because the volume of Chablis produced can vary considerably from year to year thanks to spring frosts, which annually threaten to freeze off a sizeable proportion of the year's crop. Being so far from the equator, and growing almost exclusively the early-ripening Chardonnay vine, Chablis has become famous for its acid frost resistance. Small acres in the vineyard have largely given way to sprinklers that surround the vines with a protective coating of ice. It is also because Chablis is so well known that it tends to be traded as a commodity and is therefore all too subject to pressures quite unrelated to the wine itself.

Chablis comes in four very distinct quality levels. **Premier Chablis** is the principal, often rigid, product of the plantings on the outskirts of Chablis proper undertaken when the Chablis growers found they were unable to keep up with international demand. Most wine produced around the pretty little village of Chablis qualifies for the straightforward Chablis appellation, which can vary considerably in quality (because of Chablis' isolation outside the region) but should usually be drunk young. Some particularly well-sited vineyards, comprising about a quarter of total Chablis production, are designated **Chablis Premier Cru** and represent some of the district's most reliable buys. The very best vineyards are on the west-facing hill immediately above the village and qualify as **Chablis Grand Cru**. There are five vineyards, particularly Les Clos, that have made Chablis' reputation as offering a remarkable combination of refinement and longevity. Other Grand Cru include Blanchot, Bougros, Grenouille, Preuses, Vauxur and Vaillons. Some of the best-known Premier Cru are Fourchaume, Montmains, Montmains, Valmore, and Montmains de Torvaive, which in some particularly successful vintages can develop an opportunity as a Grand Cru Chablis.

Grand Cru and some of the best Premier Cru Chablis can improve in bottle for more than a decade. Indeed its extra acid can make top-quality Chablis a better candidate for ageing than many [other whites](#).

But such wines can sometimes smell almost dry in youth, or if not dry then at least reticent of wet wood or dips. Wet stones is what I like to smell from young Chablis. There has been, perhaps inevitably, a trend towards trying to make Chablis in a more luscious, obviously oaky style. This seems a shame to me, but may well be a sign that (and not the Chablis producers are beginning to lose

**De Brie** is regarded approximately as part of greater Chablis but the more stony style of the Sauvignon Blanc is more [Lado](#)

in taste.

**Some favourite producers**

• Bernard, La Chablisienne (co-operative's top bottlings), Domp, Dauvaine, Debat, Drou, Louis Michel, Moreau-Naudet, Rasseman.