

Beaujolais

20 Aug 2008 by Jancis Robinson

In a nutshell: Fresh-fruited reds.

Main grape: Gamay (red).

Proper, red **Beaujolais** can be a delicious drink - quite unrelated to red burgundy made further north. The only indisputably successful wine made exclusively from Gamay grapes, it is often relatively light-bodied with lots of youthful fruit and refreshingly high acidity, although more and more ambitious producers are making a denser, more Rhône-like wine. Most Beaujolais should on no account be kept and is good when served lightly chilled. Unfortunately, it is too often over-produced so just too thin, or souped up and blurred by heavy handed [chaptalisation](#), or hurried through its fermentation and brutally stabilised to yield a **Beaujolais Nouveau** or **Beaujolais Primeur**. This lighter style of Beaujolais is notable for being made in sealed tanks under the influence of carbon dioxide, a method known as [carbonic maceration](#) which helps to extract fruit rather than tannin. **Beaujolais-Villages** is usually noticeably better than straight Beaujolais, being made from vineyards closer to the gently rolling, heart-breakingly pretty, granitic hills that form the core of the district.

From these hills comes the Beaujolais elite, wines made to lower yields from one of the **Beaujolais crus**, which manage to combine Beaujolais' appetising character with greater concentration of fruit and some life expectancy (I have tasted a lively one at 40 years old). These wines are very confusing because they rarely carry the B-word on the label. They are labelled simply with the name of the cru: **Brouilly, Chénas, Chiroubles, Côte de Brouilly, Fleurie, Juliéna, Moulin-à-Vent, Morgon, Regnié** or **St-Amour**. Styles vary greatly but there is a tendency to make an increasing proportion of these wines in much the same way as Côte d'Or red burgundy so that they improve in bottle. The most substantial examples from Moulin-à-Vent and Morgon can age up to 10 years and start to taste more like mature Pinot Noir.

A small amount of **Beaujolais Blanc**, a speciality of the far north of the Beaujolais district, is also produced from Chardonnay grapes (the inclusion of Aligoté is still allowed but is being phased out).

The **Coteaux du Lyonnais** is an appellation granted in 1984 to the Beaujolais-like wines made in the outer reaches of Lyons. Between St-Pourçain and Lyons are the gutsy Beaujolais-like wines of **Côtes du Forez** and **Côte Roannaise**, as well as the varied but rarely exported wines of the **Côtes d'Auvergne**.

The leading negociant of Beaujolais, bottling a wide range of reds and whites, some of them from individual estates, is Georges Duboeuf. Other good smaller enterprises are listed below but there are hundreds of small, extremely varied producers here.

Some favourite producers: Jean-Marc Aujoux, Aviron-Potel, Jean-Marc Burgaud, Château des Jacques, Laurent Daumas, Château de Pizay, Clos de la Roilette, Terres Dorées, Michel Tête, Château Thivin and Domaine du Vissoux.