H□ritiers du Comte Lafon 2011 M□cons

4 Jan 2013 by Jancis Robinson

From €9.50, $14.99, £14.95, 186 Norwegian krone, 2,986 yen

Find 2011 Mâcons from Héritiers du Comte Lafon

Leading Meursault producer Dominique Lafon was the first leading light of the Côte d'Or to take white Mâcon so seriously that he set up shop there - buying an existing domaine in the folds of the western hills in Milly-Lamartine way back in 1999. Four years later, more but different, earlier-ripening, vineyard land was added to the domaine so that today Héritiers du Comte Lafon are able to make substantial quantities of three wines, Mâcon, Mâcon-Villages and Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine, supplemented by five different single-vineyard bottlings, each with their own very distinct character. (Berrys publish some good background online, though it omits the latest vineyard acquisition.)

Every year when I go and taste in the enviably capacious, recently extended cellars of the Domaine des Comtes Lafon in Meursault I always try to taste as many of the Mâcons as possible and they just keep on getting better and better, yet these finely crafted Chardonnays are not expensive (particularly when one compares their prices with those of Lafon Meursaults!).

Dominique is clearly hugely proud of his Mâconnais operation and attributes the reliable and increasing quality of the wines to his chef de cave since 2006 Caroline Gon, wife of her counterpart at Olivier Merlin's Mâconnais operation. 'She's very intelligent. And was the only one who criticised our wines in the interviews', he told me with a wry smile. She is currently overseeing the transformation from organic to biodyamic of the total 21 ha of vineyards, including seven recently acquired from Château Clessé in the separate Viré- Clessé appellation which may not (yet?) be labelled Ch Clessé.

Dominique is upbeat about the 2011 vintage in the Mâconnais, and of course is pleased that yields there are so much higher than in Meursault at around 60 hl/ha. 'It [2011] has fruit and intensity with good acid. When you have all that it's very Mâconnais - great fruit without heaviness. Nor was there lots of alcohol in 2011. The wines are around 12.5 to 12.8%.'

Inconveniently, the harvest started at the beginning of September, almost exactly the same time as in Meursault, so he had to get up early and drive down each day. The wines, depending on the concentration of fruit, are aged in stainless steel, foudres or demi-muids, but never barrique. The smallest cask they see holds 500 litres. All the wines were bottled last summer and the basic Mâcon and Mâcon-Villages, which were bottled under screwcap - wildly unorthodox for Burgundy - last May, were already all sold out so I didn't manage to taste them.

But the **Héritiers du Comte Lafon 2011 Mâcon Milly-Lamartine**, of which 30,000 bottles were produced, is wonderfully fine and lively with some richness of fruit but none of the fatness that can sometimes dog Mâcon Blanc. This is a really sleek wine with what the late Len Evans would have called 'line' (I think this is what I call 'a beginning, middle and an end'). This is wonderfully well balanced for drinking over the next two or three years.

I was also very impressed by the **2011 Uchizy Lès Maranges**, which has less Muscat clone influence than it used to; the more restrained **2011 Bussières Le Monsard**; the **2011 Clos de la Crochette** bottling from clay limestone soils in the village of Chardonnay; the superb, long-term **2011 Clos du Four**, which Dominique describes as his Mâconnais equivalent of Meursault-Perrières; and the new **2011 Viré-Clessé** that is admirably complex and seems to split the difference between Mâconnais and Côte d'Or. Definitely one to watch. I'll be publishing my detailed tasting notes, along with hundreds of others, on Monday.

Tasting the last two wines above, I was impressed by what seemed to be potential longevity so I asked Dominique what these wines are like with some bottle age on them. He told me he'd never tried them old because he has his Meursaults to choose from. Poor boy.

As you may imagine from the quantities made of these wines, they are reasonably easy to find - especially in the US but also in France, the UK plus Austria, Norway and Japan. The prices cited at the top are for the basic Mâcon, which, as I say, I have not tasted but on the basis of the 2011s I have tasted, and earlier vintages of the basic Mâcon that I have tasted, I feel pretty confident in recommending.

The 2011 Milly-Lamartine is excellent value at £108 per dozen en primeur from Berry Bros. But I would also highly recommend **2010 Clos du Four**, which is now £264.40 a dozen duty paid but is very serious white burgundy by any standard.

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