



Written by
Jancis Robinson
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Clos d'Opleeuw Chardonnay 2001 Haspengouw



Find the Sylvaner

I wonder whether the name of this extraordinary wine gives you sufficient clues as to its origins? I suppose you might think I've gone completely potty and chosen yet another South African Chardonnay. But you'd be wrong. I have gone even pottier. This wine was grown in Belgium.

And I am not including **Clos d'Opleeuw Chardonnay 2001** simply for oddity value. I was served it blind last week with dinner at the exceedingly wine-minded three-star restaurant Hof Van Cleve in Belgium and, like the chef-patron Peter Goosens (a famously good blind taster), took it for a very sophisticated Puligny-Montrachet. I found it extremely difficult to believe that it was made so far off the beaten track.

The owner of Clos d'Opleeuw (pronounced "Oplayoh") is Peter Colemont, a thoroughly modest grower and teacher of oenology and tasting at in Hasselt. He has worked with several top domaines in the Côte d'Or, has learnt a great deal about viticulture from Bernard Dugat-Py and maintains a commercial relationship with Albert Grivault whose Meursaults he imports into Belgium.

He is blessed with a true Clos, a one-hectare walled vineyard on a south-facing slope which you can see on the domaine's excellent website [here](#). The vines were seven years old in 2001 and the yield was 27 hl/ha. Clos d'Opleeuw Chardonnay 2001 was aged for a year in half new, half

second-year casks made of French oak as well as one cask of Belgian(!) oak from Colemont's village Gors-Opleeuw. Truly this wine has some major selling points. Unfiltered and unfinned, it is very fine without being at all exaggerated in its expression of fruit with oak ageing and battonage. The alcohol level is a friendly 12%.

I tasted the **Clos d'Opleeuw Chardonnay 2003** (yield 35 hl/ha) blind alongside the 2001 and found it much blowsier and less delicate – very 2003-ish in fact. The alcohol level is 13.3% and two-thirds of the oak was new in this case. In fact I took it for a New World Chardonnay. Peter Colemont has experimented with yields here in Belgium and has worked out that 30 hl/ha is really the maximum for top quality in Belgium (it can be more in warmer places such as the Côte d'Or).

I realise this must be rather a frustrating choice of wine of the week as not only is the 2001 sold out but such is demand for this wine, of which only about 2,500 bottles have been made each year so far, that he sells via a waiting list. He is currently taking orders on info@clos--opleeuw.be for the 2006 vintage, of which he has produced a little more than before because some new plantings have come onstream. The price per bottle is a modest 22.51 euros.

May I offer as an alternative Bruno Sorg Sylvaner Vieilles Vignes 2005 Alsace? This is also a lovely wine, and much less expensive than the Belgian, while being grown in (very) vaguely the same part of the world - though much, much warmer and drier of course. Sorg's Sylvaner is packed with fruit and honeysuckle aroma which makes it one of the most delicious Sylvaners I have ever tasted. It is a mere £7.59 at Noel Young and not much more at Hedley Wright.

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