

BURGUNDY WINE SCHOOL

BURGUNDY: CAUSE OF, AND SOLUTION TO, ALL OF LIFE'S PROBLEMS

WHY SO SPECIAL?

On **5th of January of this year year**, raiders broke into French luxury hotel Domaine de Rymaska and made their way to the wine cellar. Their target? Grand Cru Burgundy: €425,000 worth of it. The alarm was raised and the raiders sped away, with the ballsy owner giving chase, frantically calling the police who joined in the high octane pursuit. In an effort to shake them, the raiders began throwing bottles from the moving car. Who needs guns! The raiders crashed through a toll booth and escaped on foot. The police and owners retreated to recover what Grand Cru bottles had not smashed. Priorities. The suspects remain at large.

In **2018** a bottle of Domaine de la Romanee Conti Grand Cru 1945 sold at auction in Sotheby's for a new record. The price for this 750ml of Pinot Noir? 558,000 US Dollars. 1945 is a famed vintage for this famed house from this famed region, and more crucially, the vineyards were re-planted in 1946, making this a true piece of vinous history.

In **November 2020** Rudy Kurniawan, an Indonesian national was released from a federal prison in El Paso. In 2013, 'Dr. Conti' as he was known though out fine wine buying circles, was convicted of selling millions of dollars worth of counterfeit wine to investors. It is estimated that he sold 550m US Dollars worth, including several cases of the aforementioned DRC 1945. He was rumbled when a winemaker turned up at the auction and dramatically declared that the wine that was on the auction lot was a fake and had never been produced. Fine wine dealers and fine wine buyers are not fond of discussing it.

In **2005**, Bill Koch of the legendarily rich US conservative donor family realised that he had been duped into buying counterfeit wine, and afraid of being seen as a rich fool, spent 35m investigating and litigating the fake wine industry. As well as being one of the most wealthy men in the world, Koch actually was more or less a rich old fool. He had previously bankrolled and won the America's Cup in '92, of course being part of the winning crew (nice work if you can get it). He sued everyone to make up for being a rich old fool, even the auction house Christie's, but it was thrown out. He got Rudy convicted and shone a light on the industry. *Probably 'cause I had bigger brothers who were always beating up on me, faking me, cheating me a little bit. Maybe that's a part of it. And so I said, I gotta establish a reputation that if you cheat me, I'm gonna be tough.* Who said David & Charles Koch never did anything good?

In **1805** Napoleon Bonaparte triumphed in the Battle of the Three Emperors, defeating the much larger Russian and Austrian armies. It was his greatest victory. He celebrated with a bottle of his favourite wine, Gevrey-Chambertain Clos de Beze, yes you guessed it...Grand Cru Burgundy.

Burgundy has always been a big fucking deal.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

Welcome to the bigtime. Burgundy is tough, a lifetime of study should you choose to proceed. If you can make it in Burgundy you can make it anywhere.

The good news is that it starts simple: all Red Burgundy is Pinot Noir, and all white Burgundy (including Chablis) is Chardonnay. Knowing even that means that you know more than most and really it is the only certainty in Burgundy. You could turn back now.

Burgundian wines fetch the highest prices in the world according to its rarity. It is an incredibly complicated region to understand geographically according to the fact that the Napoleonic Code dictated that land inherited must be inherited equally by all siblings, leading to incredibly fragmented ownership. Take for instance the Clos de Vougeot vineyard: there are 80 different owners throughout the vineyard; dozens of growers can share the same row of vines.

Land in Burgundy is understandably expensive. Recently, Clos de Tart, a 7.53 hectare estate was sold for upwards of 280m euros - 37m per hectare. A hectare is approximately the size of a football pitch. Some expressed surprise that it was so 'underpriced'.

THAT DOES NOT ANSWER THE QUESTION! WHY IS BURGUNDY CONSIDERED SO SPECIAL?

The answer is **TERROIR**. In a world that is full of pretentious and over the top names that don't really mean that much (*minerality* anyone? what? the wine tastes like a stone?) **TERROIR** might be the best/worst of them.

Terroir is a hard concept to pin down, but broadly it refers to the site and regionally specific characteristics of the wine. The thrust is that a wine's terroir is so specific (its micro-climate, soil composition, topography and microbial content), that the character of a vineyard and the resulting wine varies literally from plant to plant.

TERROIR defines a wines **CHARACTER**, **WINEMAKING** defines a wines **QUALITY** and **WEATHER** defines a wines **PERSONALITY** (HUGH JOHNSON & JANCIS ROBINSON)

That it? No. Along with the fact that all Pinot Noir and Chardonnay will vary incredibly according to it's location, winemaking and weather, it also has an incredibly **complex system of vineyard classification**.

THE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

The labels are what complicates the picture further, but like much of Burgundy, the basics are simple and if you grasp them will know more than anyone in the room (particularly if it is the Koch Brothers living room). Different regions will have slightly different rules and takes, but broadly speaking all Burgundy can be split into 4: **REGIONAL, VILLAGE, PREMIER CRU, GRAND CRU**. Here is an example using the same producer:

1/ **REGIONAL** - Wine can come from from anywhere across the region. They may be blended from far flung areas or may not have the right to a superior designation. Will say '**Bourgogne Blanc**' or '**Bourgogne Rouge**' on label (VERY rarely the grape) accounts for 50% of total production. Pictured: **Hudelot Noellat Bourgogne Rouge**



2/ **VILLAGE** - from the specific Appellation/Village that it is labelled e.g. **POMMARD** or **CHAMBOLLE-MUSIGNY**, will also be specific methods of production concerning yields, cropping etc. - 32% of total production. Pictured: **Hudelot Noellat Chambolle-Musigny** (you could assume Chambolle-Musigny will be lighter, more perfumed).



3/ **PREMIER CRU** - from superior site within a village, label will state the Village, Premier Cru and even the specific Premier Cru vineyard or even the site WITHIN the Premier Cru vineyard, over 700 Premier Cru sites accounting for 17% of production. Pictured: **Hudelot Noellat 1er Cru Chambolle-Musigny Les Charmes** (Les Charmes being the specific premier cru vineyard - 1er Cru is shorthand for Premier Cru).



4/ **GRAND CRU** - Wine comes from one of 33 Grand cru vineyards which will be written on the label. Accounts for 1% of production. Pictured: **Hudelot-Noellat Clos de Vougeot Grand Cru** (Clos de Vougeot being the Grand Cru vineyard).



You can find value in Burgundy by finding wines made from 'de-classified' fruit. These wines will often be referred to (and STSWine are divils for this!) as, for example **Baby-Meursault** or **Baby-Gevrey** that is, fruit that was detined for a Village or Premier Cru wine but was made into a regional/Bourgogne wine.

CHABLIS: THE ULTIMATE TERROIR WINE

This fabulous area is known as a satellite region to Burgundy as it is 80 miles North of Burgundy proper, indeed; it is closer to Champagne and the Central vineyards of the Loire Valley and it has a similar soil type and climate.

Chablis is a familiar name for wine lovers and it is also easy to understand: Chablis is ALL chardonnay and is one of the most distinctive wines in the world.

The reason for this distinction is kimmeridgian soil - a soil which has an extraordinarily high content of fossilised seashells. The result is a very steely and sharp (in a good way) dry white wine - Chablis chardonnay begins its life with ancient crushed oysters in the soil - it should ideally end its life with fresh oysters on your palate.

This steely, dry white character means that it is an incredibly universal white wine that will keep everyone happy from New Zealand Sauv smashing party folk to incorrigably dull wine-geeks. It's zingy refreshing acidity and clean texture makes it palate-versatile, but its status as a great terroir wine will suit the more 'knowledgable' drinker.

Lots of self professed experts will say that they *don't like Chardonnay*. If you get the chance, offer them a Chablis.

Chablis is also quite easy to understand. The 'regional' wine is **PETIT CHABLIS**, which is an entry level wine produced (mostly) on the surrounding non-kimmeridgian, portlandia soil. These are typically great wines but lacking the authenticity and true Chablis feel of Chablis. Made in stainless steel, NO oak.

The 'Village' wine of the region is plain 'ole **CHABLIS** and it is the most plentiful. Made in stainless steel, NO oak.

Chablis goes up through the gears with 17 major **CHABLIS PREMIER CRU** vineyards. A couple of the most famous are Montee de Tonnerre and Fourchaume. These wines will be more intense and concentrated and may see a little bit of oak, some requiring bottle age to integrate and improve.

The one **CHABLIS GRAND CRU** vineyard Les Clos is split into 7 further geographical classifications and these wines will see oak ageing and absolutely require many years in the bottle before they approach their true potential. Chablis Grand Cru is the best value Grand Cru in all of Burgundy.

Chablis is evolving now thanks to producers like Patrick piuze, who (unlike the vast, vast majority of Chablis growers) picks everything by hand and makes much smaller lots of wine according to the terroir. He makes his Petit Chablis on kimmeridgian clay and will make several wines out of his Village fruit, with different names. This is completely opposed to most who will simply label everything Chablis unless it is a Premier or Grand Cru.

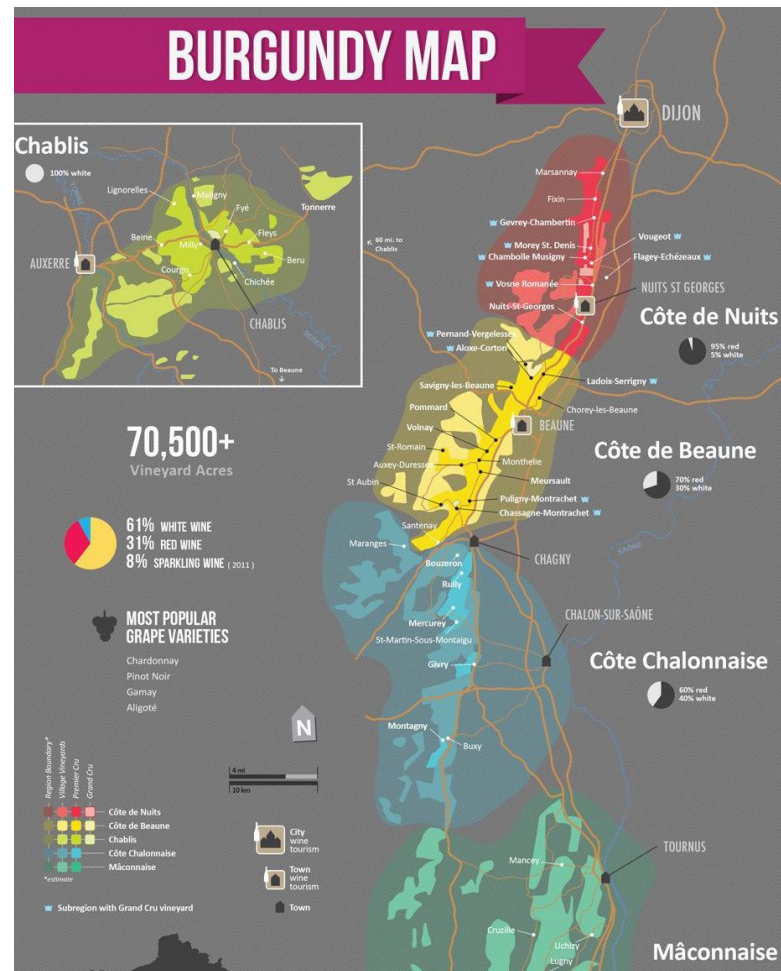
BURGUNDY PROPER: THE COTE

The Cote D'or or simply *The Cote* is the collective name for the **Cote de Nuits** and **Côte de Beaune**. These are the main areas for fine wine in Burgundy and they house the major appellations that are the sites of some of the rarest and most expensive wines in the world. The up and coming area is **Cote Chalonnaise** to the South.

(Maconnais or The Macon is part of Burgundy, and some even call Beaujolais a part of Burgundy but we have left them both off).

To restate the generalisation on Burgundy: all red wine is made from Pinot Noir, all white is made from Chardonnay, there are some minor exceptions you hardly hear about. Aligote is a white wine made in Burgundy from the Aligote grape that is gaining in popularity. It is lean and spritzy as opposed to the buttery and weighty Chardonnay.

A further generalisation is that the Cote de Nuits is for red wine and Cote de Beaune is for white. (True for the Nuits but falls apart when you get to the Cote de Beaune which produces huge amounts of red - suffice it to say Cote de Beaune is more famous for its whites). The up and coming region of Cote Chalonnaise makes both. At the moment it is a source of great value, but the market will eventually see to that.



DRINKING BURGUNDY

Burgundy, red or white, evolves in the glass. The first glass never tastes the same as the last and this is not because of inebriation - it really does completely change its character when it is exposed to air. Get this wine into a big glass and swirl, swirl, swirl. Burgundy's majesty, particularly red Burgundy is on the nose. Electrifyingly aromatic, Pinot is a haunting grape.

The big question is: decant or not decant? If you have the time to watch it change, then do so. If you need it out and proud immediately, then decant.

RED WINE: COTE DE NUITS

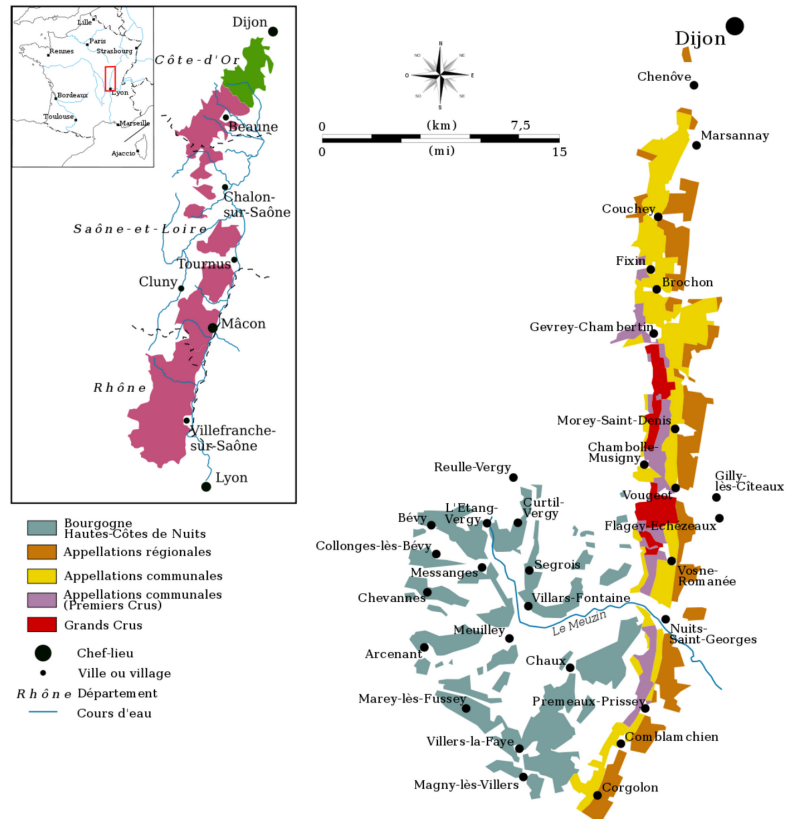
The Côte de Nuits stretches from the suburbs of Dijon in the north to the hamlet of Corgoloin in the south. This is ground zero for Pinot Noir and home to the grape's most celebrated interpretations. The major village appellations for red wine include (from north to south)

Marsannay, Fixin, Gevrey-Chambertain, Morey St. Denis, Chambolle-Musigny, Vougeot, Vosne-Romanee & Nuits St Georges.

Each of the major classic appellations has its own character. **Gevrey** has the power, **Chambolle** has the perfume, Morey is a mixture of the two, **Clos de Vougeot** is a walled vineyard with highly fragmented ownership, **Nuits St George's** wines are long lived and **Vosne-Romanee** contains the most celebrated vineyards and producers in the world.

Fixin & Marsannay are rare bastions of value (relatively speaking of course) and offer wines that are the equal and superior of many in the classical regions. The solitary reason for this is that they are less well known and it is certain to change.

Côte de Nuits



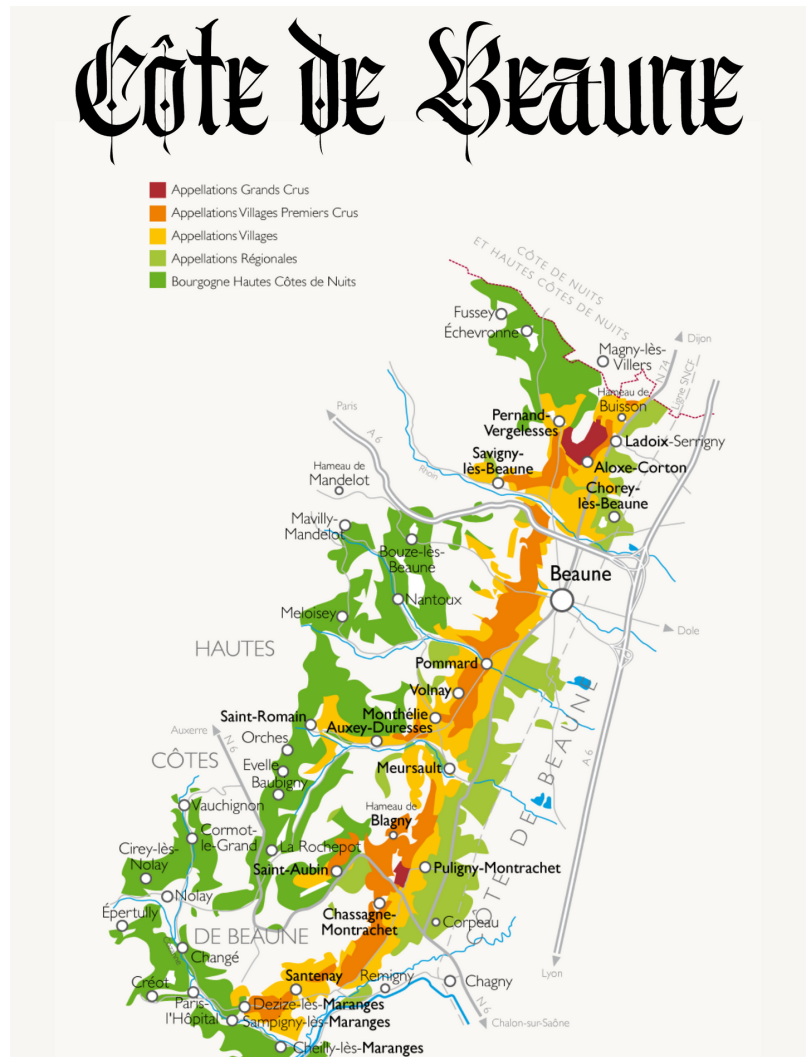
Anybody who drinks Burgundy cannot argue that the temperature of the planet is rising. Producers up and down the Cote routinely failed to ripen Pinot sufficiently in the 80's. Poor vintages were far more prevalent than good vintages. 2014 for example, remains known as a classic vintage. It had a great winter and a great start to the season, but conditions then got cool and difficult. Compared the the whopper 2015 vintage, the wines are much more elegant and subtle. How long will we have the opportunity to drink so called 'classic' vintages?

The growing seasons are getting volatile. Unfortunately cooler or unsettled vintages now bring frost and from Burgundy to Beanie, producers have lost 40% to 100% of their crops. So called classic vintages will more frequently become disasters. The less wine, the higher the prices. Growers need to survive, so their prices are increasingly by the projections of their next crop.

WHITE WINE: COTE DE BEAUNE

King Charlemagne was royalty in the 700's and also a wine enthusiast. He actually ordered the planting of many of the regions vines as he noticed favourable conditions such as snow melting early in certain warmer areas. At this time there was only red wine. As he grew older and red wine began to badly stain his white beard, his wife ordered him to plant some white vines. Beaune is now famous for having the greatest whites in the world.

There are several famous names in the whites. **Puligny-Montrachet** and **Chassagne-Montrachet** produce highly celebrated Chardonnay and share the Grand Cru vineyard of **Montrachet**. **Meursault** is a highly popular style for its rich and weighty feel, it does not produce Grand cru wine but like Puligny and Chassagne, has several Premier Cru vineyards. **Saint Aubin**, **Saint Romain** and **Auxey-Duresses** among others offer cooler, more streamlined whites from the windy and exposed mountainous areas. These areas are becoming increasingly known for their lighter, more elegant, almost raspy reds made from Pinot.



The Cote de Beaune actually makes a huge amount of red, and the vast majority is Village or Premier Cru level. **Pommard** and **Volnay** are the most famous of the red wine producing regions for their earthy and almost funky at times character. **Santenay** and **Maranges** are two appellations of increasing importance as they are providing robust Pinot as a great counter point and real source of value compared to the whoppers in the North.

Cote Chalonnaise is an exciting region to the South of Burgundy that offers actual value and not just Burgundian value (that will eventually change). Whites and reds made in **Rully**, **Montagny**, **Mercurey** and offer huge potential and a great alternative. **Givry** in particular makes Premier Cru wines at a fraction of the cost of the rest of The Cote.

WHAT NOW? FINALLY IT IS TIME TO DRINK!

As we have frequently mentioned, Burgundy is a web of intrigue. There are over 700 Premier Cru vineyards and dozens of producers within each one. Added to that, there are the changes in terroir and climate, the wine making style - there is simply too much. You could spend several lifetimes trying to get to grips with it and still not come close. Perhaps this is what makes it so special. Nobody will ever truly be able to master it. This is not Everest, there is no peak. This is space, there is no end. You would have more success trying to crack a 100 digit passcode.

The proliferation of good vintages, biodynamic winemaking and a more hands off approach to the process has led to a further depth in the styles and demographics of the countless terroirs the region has to offer. Old dogs are being taught new tricks, and younger wine makers are joining the fray. In our offer to accompany these notes, we have focused on more offbeat producers and appellations in the hopes of unearthing something new and finding something that is viable to drink semi regularly (much as we'd all like to drink Premier and Grand Cru all day, if that is an option, then having a live in sommelier probably is too!).

Like anything, the joy is in making progress and headway and figuring out what you like. Do you prefer the elegant perfumed reds of Chambolle-Musigny in the Cote du Nuits or the robust Maranges Pinot of the Cote de Beaune? Is it the weighty Chardonnay of Meursault or the focused and lean Puligny-Montrachet. Once you figure out your Burgundy basis you will most likely be hooked. You will start obsessing. You will spend increasing amounts of money and you will begin to slavishly match different elements of different dishes to wines. You will notice details on the wines that you never thought was possible. You will become obsessed. Or not! You might just really start liking Burgundian Chardonnay & Pinot and drink it a lot armed with little other than the basics.

However much you decide to immerse yourself, I hope that this introduction proves to be a point of no return, and presuming I am successful in this regard I should offer you one last time chance to turn back now!.....

.....or else step through the looking glass. And call me if you get lost.

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