



**ALEX GAMBAL**  
A BEAUNE – CÔTE D'OR

**REVUE DE PRESSE**  
The World of Fine wine – Hiver 2011

**Alex Gambal**

**Meursault Premier Cru Genevrières**

**NB:** This boutique négociant now meets 25-30% of its own fruit requirements, and where it does buy in fruit, as here, from Meursault's grandest premier cru, it is normally from one conscientious grower. There are only two barrels this year (only one of which is new), but happily the quality matches the scarcity. Pale lemongold. Attractive, elegant, and fine on the nose, with well-integrated wood no overt lees influence (any *bâtonnage* is done before rather than after the malolactic fermentation). Medium-full bodied, generous and harmonious, rich and smooth, with enough freshness and purity of fruit, probably preserved by the policy of racking only once before bottling, which had still to take place when this barrel sample was taken. A gentle glow on the finish is the only obvious trace of the warmth of the vintage, and an acceptable signature of the year. **16.5**

**Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru**

**NB:** Some of the best, most complete and complex wines from this distinctive grand cru are blends from different parcels, and the altitude and exposure of these on the great Hill of Corton have a considerable influence on the quality and style of the wine. Of the four barrels here, one came from the eastern slopes, which have better exposure and are generally warmer, contributing power and richness, while the other three came from the western slopes nearer Pernand-Vergelesses, which are generally cooler, lending a more mineral edge. Especially in a warm vintage such as this, the balance seems a happy one. White gold. Harmonious and pure on the nose, if still quite restrained. Dense, rich, and soft on the palate, with a floating texture. There is neither the marked acidity nor the striking minerality of some vintages, but enough of both to give elegance and freshness, with again only a slight telltale warmth on the finish. **17.5**

# 2009 BURGUNDY

## THE SMILING FACE OF A WELCOME AND WELCOMING VINTAGE

Although it has unfairly overshadowed 2008, there is no doubt that 2009 offers a winning combination of quality and quantity—for whites as well as for reds, urges Michael Edwards. Additional notes from recent tastings by Neil Beckett and Margaret Rand

Like several vintages in Burgundy ending with the number 9, this one put smiles on the growers' faces. The usual Burgundian caveat of tight selection notwithstanding, across the board, in both colors, the finest wines smile back: They offer fresh, opulent pleasures that come from perfect ripeness and hedonistic aromas not seen so vividly since 1999.

The winter had been cold, with regular snowfalls. But a rainy, mild spring came early, with budbreak beginning on April 7. The only problems then were brief attacks of mildew and oidium, which were swiftly solved. In the Côte d'Or, flowering was early and quick for Pinot Noir, longer for Chardonnay. High summer was hot, with the common intervention of rainstorms, which came at the right moments to advance bounteous growth and ripening of the grapes. Intense sun in August was relieved by interludes of gentle rain, which sped up the maturation of the fruit, thus avoiding the heat stress seen in 2003. Under warm autumnal sun, the harvest began on September 7—an ideal early date for optimal luminosity in the vineyards. Ripeness was already looking exceptional,



with no need to chaptalize. The most alert and gifted growers chose to harvest rapidly in order to preserve freshness and tension in their wine; in the cellar, there was less lees-stirring than usual.

Some critics have already declared this a supremely red-wine vintage, with the whites being not in the same class, lacking a little acidity. This seems wide of the mark. The best riposte comes from Gilles de Courcel, the master behind the renaissance of the venerable house of Chanson and its exceptional estate in the Côte de Beaune. De Courcel explains that since the flowering of Chardonnays had been quite heterogenous, chemical analysis could not give an accurate picture of the results. "It was only by tasting the heart of the cuvée, produced by the gentle pressing of the fruit, that we were able to clarify the exceptional quality of the must," he said. "First tastings from the cask have led us to believe that 2009 is an absolutely exceptional vintage [for whites], in terms of both balance and delicacy." In perfectionist hands like de Courcel's, acidity is normal, satisfactorily supporting the ripeness.

### White lightning

The 2009 reminds me of 1992, a ripe white Burgundy year; in the best examples, the 2009s are just as sublime. The 2009 reds are deeply colored and release sensuous black-fruit aromas, often accompanied by exotic notes of mocha coffee. The best have good tannic structure, enhanced and strengthened by a moderate amount of new oak (about 30 percent). In this way, they should develop finesse quickly but with a durable core enabling them to live longer than most people currently believe possible. Of course, there is some inconsistency to be found in the reds, particularly from producers who waited vainly to pick in the hope of even greater richness and strong tannins. Some of these Johnny-come-latelies, even from famous estates, frankly taste funky—at least just now.

Delving into the detail, there are exciting wines in the Mâconnais from growers who knew how to match the opulence of the vintage with incisive minerality. For, as I

### Better red than dead

As to the reds, there is an embarrassment of riches on both Côtes. Volnay takes the palm, with a stunning array of styles from the top estates of De Montille, d'Angerville, and Lafarge. This year they are joined by a magical Volnay Taillepièdes from Maison Champy, both flying scents and rich depths precisely realized. Interestingly, other négociant winemakers with vineyards in Beaune premiers crus—Jadot, Chanson, Bouchard Père—have distinguished themselves with exceptional reds in Grèves, Bressandes, and Vignes Franches. As always, these are good value for money. In the Côte de Nuits, Drouhin-Laroze steers the right, unerring path between richness and elegance; Ghislaine Barthod's Chambolles gain an extra dimension of finesse appropriate to the vintage; and for lightly hued ethereal magnificence, Hudelot-Noëllat in Vosne stands at the top of the tree—from a simple Bourgogne Rouge, to the heights of Romanée St-Vivant. In the same village, I was

Thanks to good yields, the grands crus apart,  
prices for reds are reasonable compared to Bordeaux.  
But with a short 2010 vintage and much interest from Chinese  
and Korean buyers, that could change rapidly

learned the other day from a brilliant young winemaker and Burgundy lover in Champagne's Côte des Blancs, minerality best expresses itself when the grape is truly ripe, rather than as an extension of acidity. Daniel Barraud in Vergisson is in stunning form, as much for his simple Mâcon as for his chiseled, surgingly rich Pouilly-Fuissés, which shame many a Côte d'Or wine in these straitened, price-conscious times. Talking of value, 2009 is a great vintage in Beaujolais, especially from the best slopes of Morgon and Fleurie, as at Château de Beauregard and Villa Ponciago, les Hauts Muriers. For the best quality:price ratio, the Côte Châlonnaise, as usual, excels—in both red and white. Paul Jacqueson's Rully Blanc Premier Cru La Pucelle is a fragrant, poised delight; the red Mercureys show an exciting contrast of styles—from Faiveley's aptly named La Framboisière, to the creamy finesse and complexity of Aubert de Villaine's Les Montots.

The Côte de Beaune whites provide some exquisite bottles. Meursault is a star this year. "The quality and consistency across the appellation hierarchy is better than in 2008," writes the perceptive Sarah Marsh MW, editor of respected newsletter *The Burgundy Briefing*. Along the Côte, the usual culprits stand out—especially Henri Germaine and Rémi Jobard in Meursault, and Etienne Sauzet and Domaine Chanson in Puligny. Pernand-Vergelesses Blanc and Corton-Charlemagne are often friendlier for their fruit expression, without any loss of freshness and terroir focus. In Beaune, Jacques Lardièrre's Jadot Beaune Grèves Blanc is perhaps the best he has made since 1990.

also greatly taken by the richness and propelling energy of Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg.

Thanks to good yields, the grands crus apart, prices for reds are reasonable compared to Bordeaux. But with a short 2010 vintage and much interest from Chinese and Korean buyers, that could change rapidly.

### And what of Chablis?

Chablis is perhaps the dark horse of the vintage—unusually voluptuous and often lacking the linear definition and perhaps the longevity of the outstanding 2008s. Yet the very best producers have sprung some delightful surprises. Both Billaud-Simon and, especially, Droin have caught delicacy, purity, and minerality in their wines. The more calcareous premiers crus—Côte de Léchet, Vaillons—are especially elegant. Among the grands crus, the fragrance and fleetness of foot of Les Preuses from William Fèvre and Domaine Chanson are remarkable. Of the more powerful grands crus, Valmur shows consistently better than Les Clos, which is often loose-limbed. The exception is Laroche's imperious yet sinfully ripe Les Clos, from vines planted in 1964.

In the upper vineyards, on Portlandian soils, there are lovely lace-like Petits Chablis from the always reliable La Chablisienne and the rising Domaine Pommier going for a song. Something to enjoy as a small relief from cuts and economic turbulence...