



scott paul
wines

Burgundy Express

Spring 2014

Thanks for joining us for the latest package of goodies from the Burgundy Express Club – a twice-yearly tutored wine-tasting exploration of Burgundy, delivered to your door. The theme of this shipment is “**For Now, and Forever**”. *Stay tuned, there’s an iconic Grand Cru in this package that you can cellar for 25+ years!*

When Should I Drink This?

That is far and away the #1 question I get about a bottle of Burgundy. Any bottle of Burgundy. Drink a bottle too young and you could miss the full depth and pleasure the wine has to offer. Wait too long on another and you might have a faded flower on your hands. So how does one know? The simple answer is you don’t *know*, but you *can* make good educated guesses, based on some basic research and a little experience.

In this package we’re turning you on to a few wines that are meant to be drunk on the early side, and one that could possibly outlive you. We’ll explain why some wines are meant to age and others not, and turn you on to some tips and tricks to help figure out when to pop the corks on your bottles.



Some goodies waiting patiently in the cellar...

For now, or Forever?

Burgundy has a reputation for producing wines that need to age in the bottle for a number of years before you can enjoy them. While that's true in many cases, it may surprise you to know that most Burgundy is ready to drink within 5 years of the vintage date, and many are really ready upon release. It is truly only about 12-15% of the wines that need, and in fact deserve, time in the bottle to develop into the lovely beauties they were born to become. As we move through the vineyard classification hierarchy, we'll see that where the grapes were grown has a lot to do with ageability and the need for cellar time.

What makes up that 12-15% of bottles that need to be cellared longer-term? We're talking mostly about the **Grand Crus** (less than 2% of Burgundy) and the **Premier Crus** (about 10%), and certain **Village**-level appellations that generally require a little more time to unwind.

On the earlier side – we're talking about the **Bourgogne**-level wines (which make up about 45% of production) and most Village wines (about 43% of production) – most of these can be fully enjoyed relatively early.

Of course, as with all things Burgundy, it's not that simple. There are other factors that determine the ageability of a wine. In order of importance, I would say these factors are:

- **Terroir** – the specific vineyard has a lot to say in terms of the ageing curve.
- **Vintage** – the weather over the course of the growing season will have significant impact. Each year can be very different.
- **Producer** – the winemaking style and vinification practices can differ greatly from one domaine to another, and can certainly affect the ageing process.
- **Storage** – Where the wine has been, how it's been handled and stored, the temperatures it has been exposed to – all of these factors in as well.

Terroir. We know, from over a thousand years of history, that wines from certain pieces of land will generally need 10, 15, 20 years or more before they are ready to be fully enjoyed. Pretty much all of the Grand Crus (in Red Burgundy) fall into this category in most vintages.

The Grand Crus that notably need the longest time would be **Corton** and **Bonnes Mares** – both of which often need fully 20 years to show their best. Others need nearly as long, with **Musigny, Chambertin, Clos de Bèze, Romanée-Conti and La Romanée** needing 15+ years in most vintages to show what they're all about. The lesson here is simple – if you're tempted by a 2010 Bonnes Mares on a restaurant wine list – don't do it! You'd be paying hundreds of dollars for a wine that would be very disappointing, if not downright unpleasurable. **In general, it's a good rule of thumb to wait at least 10 years from the vintage date for any Grand Cru.**

I mentioned above that certain Village appellations tend to need a little more time than others. These would be the villages that tend to produce the more tannic, powerful and structured reds – specifically **Gevrey-Chambertin, Morey-St. Denis, Nuits-St. Georges, Aloxe-Corton, and Pommard**. In general, I would always want to give Village wines from these appellations a little more time than wines from their neighbors.

Vintage. Each growing season has its own peculiarities, which manifest in the resulting wines. Terroir determines the overall potential “character” of wine from a given site, but it is the nature of the season that determines how that character is presented, its “personality”. Some vintages will generally produce wines that are softer and more approachable in their youth, while others may give us wines that are very tightly wound and need more time than is typical. Knowing the nature of the vintage is very important. The best way to get a handle on a given vintage is to read the reports that are very carefully prepared by **Allen Meadows** on **Burghound.com**, **Stephen Tanzer** in **International Wine Cellar**, or **Neal Martin** in **The Wine Advocate**. These are currently the most reliable sources, and their reports are based on tasting literally thousands of samples each year.

Producer. Each vigneron has their own way of working, and many winemaking choices can affect a wine's ageing curve. If a producer uses a high percentage of whole-clusters, rather than de-stemming the grapes, their wines are likely going to take longer to evolve. Similarly, if they employ more frequent pump-overs and punch-downs in an effort to extract more tannin and build more structure into the wine, those wines will also be slower to mature. The percentage of new oak used in the ageing of the wine before bottling also plays into it – a lot of new oak during élevage may take much longer to integrate than a wine that was raised in used or neutral barrels. Again, it pays to read up on the producers and understand how they approach things, as it makes a difference as to when to drink the wines.

Storage. If you're certain that the wine has always been kept in temperature-controlled storage, was shipped in refrigerated containers, and has not moved around a lot over the course of its life – then you can pretty safely assume the wine is in good condition and you can plan to consume it at its “expected” normal time. If you have any reason to believe the wine has been exposed to extreme temperatures (hot or cold), traveled under less than ideal conditions, or have no idea where it's been most of its life, I would tend to want to drink that bottle earlier than I would otherwise. **If you see signs of seepage or leaking – drink that bottle sooner than later - it's not going to get any better, trust me!**

It is dangerous to generalize about anything regarding Burgundy, but as one who enjoys living dangerously I'll give you some basic “Rules of Thumb” that can serve as guidelines –

Bourgogne – Most are ready to drink upon release, and should improve a bit over the first 2-4 years. Rarely will they get much better after that.

Village – Many are ready to drink on release, most will need 3-5 years from the vintage date to start to show their best. Some can take much longer, depending on vintage and terroir as discussed above.

Premier (1er) Cru – Most will need 5-7 years from the vintage date, with the top 10% of 1ers often needing 10 or more years. These are pretty special wines – don't rush them!

Grand Cru – You will have probably wasted your money by opening most Grand Crus before their 10th birthday. For the truly great ones, 15 years is probably better. Some will still be young at 20 years. Some will live to see 100 years in great shape. The glory of these magnificent wines can only be seen after many years in the bottle, and trying to find it prematurely will more often than not result in disappointment.

Overall, I prefer to err on the side of waiting when it comes to 1er and Grand Crus. I am more often than not rewarded for my patience. I would rather catch a great wine at the start of its decline, than open it too early in its evolution.

White Burgundy

Everything discussed to this point refers exclusively to **RED** Burgundy. The story with the whites is an entirely different matter.

There are white Burgundies capable of ageing 25-50 years or more. Unfortunately, few if any of those are being produced today. Burgundy is home to some truly magical terroir, vineyard sites that can produce whites that have astonishingly long life spans. **Montrachet** at age 50+ can be one of the most sublime experiences you'll ever have. **Corton-Charlemagne** at age 20-25 can still be a baby. At least that's how it *used* to be...

Since 1994 the Burgundian whites have been experiencing an extraordinarily high rate of **premature oxidation** – known now as the *premox* phenomenon – in which wines that one would normally expect to need 10+ years to reach their peak are becoming oxidized, over the hill and just plain shot by the time they pass their 5th birthday. It's a very complex issue, massive research has been undertaken to find the cause or causes of the problem, but no definitive answers have yet to surface. It is frustrating beyond belief.

Given this unfortunate state of affairs, we can no longer rely on what were typically thought to be “normal” timelines for white Burgs. **I am recommending that all whites should be drunk up before their 5th birthday – otherwise you are running the risk of serious disappointment.** (Yes, you should probably hold your Grand Cru and 1er Cru whites longer than the Bourgogne and Village wines, but they should ALL be drunk up by age 5. There are just too many dead wines past that point.)

For Now

Just because a wine is not capable of long-term ageing doesn't mean it can't be a delicious and thrilling wine. There is lousy Bourgogne and great Bourgogne, and everything in between. As I try to teach all the time, it's all about Producer, Producer, Producer. The truly talented, quality-focused vigneron can make excellent wines at every step of the appellation ladder. And I for one am thankful that there are a bunch of yummy wines we don't have to wait to enjoy.

So we'll start this tasting with five wines that you can drink now and over the next 2-3 years with great pleasure. These babies offer a lot of pleasure for the \$, and are ready to rock!

Pouilly-Fuissé

We've featured wines from Pouilly-Fuissé in our club packages a number of times over the years, and with very good reason. The good ones are some of the best values in all of Burgundy, they drink deliciously young, and they blow away a lot of Puligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet at a mere fraction of the stratospheric prices for those Côte de Beaune whites.

It's a vast appellation that cuts across four villages in the southern Mâconnais, with dozens of different soil types that can produce wines that are stylistically very different from each other. Wine from a high-elevation north facing site on solid limestone is going to give you a different profile from one grown on a lower elevation slope with southern exposure on a deep mix of clay and limestone. What unites the entirety of the Pouilly-Fuissé appellation is a generally generous expression of ripe fruit, with an underlying sense of minerality that make it quite sure one would never mistake this for New World Chardonnay.

As we've discussed in previous club packages, the process is underway to upgrade certain parts of Pouilly-Fuissé to Premier Cru – which in my opinion is deserved and long overdue. One of the parcels that will likely be elevated to 1er Cru is the dramatically beautiful **Clos Varambon** – a monopole of **Chateau des Rontets**.



Aerial view of Clos Varambon & Chateau des Rontets

The **2011 Clos Varambon** – (**\$38, CLUB PRICE \$30.40**) is a crowd-pleasing example of how good, and how accessible, good Pouilly-Fuissé can be. 2011 gave us wines that are ready to drink, and while this one should continue to improve over the next 3-5 years, there's no reason to wait. Proprietor-winemaker Fabio Montrasi and his wife Claire work the 15-acre Clos by hand, and make the wine in the cellar underneath their 18th-century home.

Fabio's is one of my favorite cellars in Burgundy – immaculately clean and tidy, with a touch of personality as well...



The cellar goddess of Clos Varambon

My efforts to have Fabio & Claire adopt me have not met with much success to this point, but I'm a persistent guy! Truly, I'm happy to be able to visit them a couple times each year and enjoy a stroll in the vineyard, where it becomes clear that wine grapes really do like a beautiful place to grow.



In the Clos with Fabio...

Bourgogne

It is possible to have some delicious, very satisfying, even intriguing wines from the “lowly” Bourgogne appellation. It is also possible to have some very unpleasant wines at this level. It is not an appellation one should purchase blindly. (For that matter, there is not any appellation I would recommend purchasing blindly. Did I mention it’s all about producer, producer, producer?)

Grapes for wine labeled as Bourgogne (or Bourgogne **Pinot Noir** – the law now actually allows them to mention the grape variety on the label, at the Bourgogne level only) can come from anywhere in the region. Anywhere. From the worst sites on the wrong side of the road down in the flatlands, to well-situated Village or 1er Cru parcels (often younger vine fruit from these sites can be “declassified” down to the Bourgogne level.) The trick is knowing WHERE the grapes come from, and even more importantly WHO.

It comes as no surprise that the best examples of Bourgogne often come from producers with the best reputations – reputations that have been earned on the back of their lofty 1er Cru and Grand Cru holdings, for the most part. I’ve learned to not ignore the Bourgogne from the better producers – it can be flat-out delicious, and you can drink it up while you’re waiting for their big brothers to mature. Here are **three** excellent versions, all of them ready to enjoy right now.

2011 Bourgogne – Domaine Huber-Verdereau (\$28, CLUB PRICE \$22.40).

We try to put a wine from Thiébault Huber in our club packages as often as we can. He’s a dynamic young vigneron in Volnay who’s leading the way in the quality resurgence in the Côte de Beaune. His top 1er Crus are absolute gems, and can age for 25-50 years or more. His Bourgogne is just plain yummy, and you can suck it up right now. I pop this one often at home with great pleasure.

The fruit is all from a single 3.7-acre parcel just below Volnay. He uses some of these grapes to make his wildly popular sparkling *Crémant de Bourgogne*, and sets aside some of the fruit to make this delicious quaffer. Drink now and over the next 2-3 years.



Thiébault Huber, in his Bourgogne vineyard below Volnay

2012 Bourgogne – Domaine Thierry Violot-Guillemard (\$37.50, CLUB PRICE \$30)

You would never expect such graceful and elegant wines to come from a gruff, burly, manly guy like Thierry. But then you see the mischievous glint in his eye, and you know what he's up to. His vineyards are organically farmed, since way before it was fashionable. His wines show a deft touch in the cellar, even in his Bourgogne. Whereas most Bourgogne is often on the rustic side, Thierry's has a gentleness. It comes from the soul of a very passionate and dedicated man.



In the cellar in Pommard with Thierry Violot-Guillemard

Just across the border from the Pommard appellation, Thierry's Bourgogne fruit comes from the bottom of the hill below the village. The soil is rich with clay here, giving the rich, round and succulent fruit flavors that make this one so approachable and a joy to drink today. 2012 was one of the most difficult vintages ever in Burgundy in terms of storms and bad weather during the growing season. Much less (30-50%) wine was ultimately made than in an average year, but the quality ended up being superb. Drink up!



On the vineyard road, from Volnay into Pommard...

2011 Bourgogne – Domaine A-F Gros (\$39, CLUB PRICE \$31.20)

Anne-Françoise Gros produces Grand Cru **Richebourg** that sells for over \$500 per bottle. For a mere 6.24% of that you get the same wine-growing savvy and winemaking know-how in this delicious Bourgogne Rouge from one of Burgundy's legendary estates.

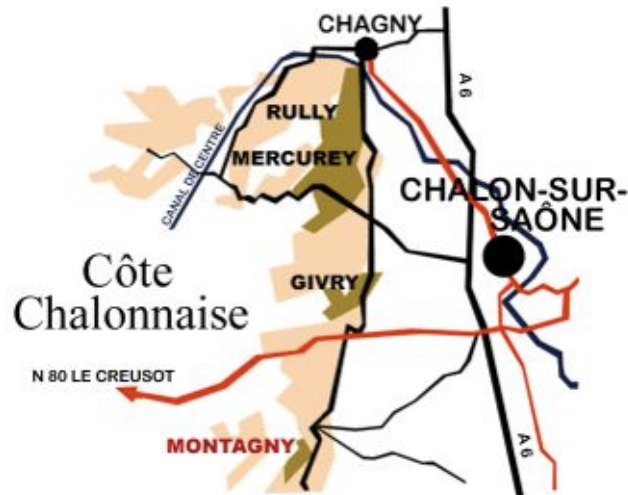
Of course the Bourgogne won't last for 50+ years in the cellar, but then that's the idea, right? Her Bourgogne parcels are also below the village of Pommard, in a spot that was at one time classified as Pommard village (I run through these vines most mornings when in Burgundy, btw.) She has two separate parcels, both planted in 1965. At nearly 50 years old, these vines are producing fruit with great concentration and depth of flavor. As with Thierry's wine above, this is a Bourgogne of roundness and richness. It's ready to be enjoyed right now, and you could easily hold it another year or two or three.



Anne-Françoise Gros and hubby François Parent

Mercrey – the secret weapon

The Côte Chalonnaise is the vineyard region just south of the Côte de Beaune. The most prominent viticultural villages there are **Rully**, **Givry**, **Montagny**, **Bouzeron**, and the star of the show – **Mercrey**.



The entire region is known for good value wines in both red and white. My favorites are the reds from Mercrey, which can have a lovely richness of fruit and a distinctive stoniness to them that I find very appealing. Sort of like Pommard meets Gevrey-Chambertin at a third of the price, in wines that generally drink well right out of the gate. While you can certainly hold them longer than you would the Burgognes above, there is no need to wait. You will find a current release Mercrey on my dinner table at home on a regular basis. They're wonderful with food, and offer a lot of bang for the buck.



The Chateau de Rully on the Côte Chalonnaise

2012 Mercurey Vieilles Vignes - Domaine Ninot (\$30 CLUB PRICE \$24).

Young Erell Ninot took over the estate from her father back in 2005, and quickly was singled out as one of the best young winemakers in all of Burgundy. This wine, her Village-level Mercurey, has been one of the most popular wines in our portfolio for years. When it comes to great value in Red Burgundy, in wines that you can reliably drink on release, this is my go-to bottle.



Erell Ninot, the rock star of Mercurey & Rully

I would expect an upside of another 3-5 years on this one, but again there's no need to wait. Put a nice grass-fed ribeye on the grill and pop that cork!

One for the Ages...

The above five wines are begging to be enjoyed right away. This next one insists that you leave it alone. For a long, long, long time.

2008 Clos Vougeot – **Chateau de la Tour** (\$165, CLUB PRICE \$132)

I mentioned earlier a number of things that could cause a wine to need time before it would be ready for its close-up. This wine has every single one of those attributes and then some.

Terroir - Clos Vougeot, one of Burgundy's oldest and most iconic Grand Crus, always needs 10-15 years minimum to show you what it's all about – and that's in the softer, early-drinking vintages!

Vintage – 2008 was a cooler year with lower alcohol and higher than average acidity, requiring that most '08s need lots of time in the cellar to come around.

Producer - Chateau de la Tour works in a style that is guaranteed to produce wines that not only need time, but are expressly built for the long haul. They always vinify with 100% whole clusters – the oldest of old-school Burgundian practices. Their old vines (some over 100 years old now) produce fruit that is dense and concentrated, which requires many years to unwind.

Chateau de la Tour is the largest owner of vines in Clos Vougeot, with just under 15 acres in several different parcels. They have owned these vines since 1890, but can trace their wine lineage back to the late 1400s. The famous **Chateau de Vougeot**, built by the Cistercian Monks in the middle ages, lies just a hundred meters or so uphill from the much smaller Chateau de la Tour, which the family built in the vineyard when they acquired the vines in 1890. **François Labet** has been in charge of the estate since 1994, and has done much to return the domaine to prominence and its rightful place in the Burgundian hierarchy.



The Chateau de la Tour, in the middle of the vines in Clos Vougeot



The Chateau de Vougeot

To say that the wines of Chateau de la Tour have a reputation for long-term ageing would be a massive understatement. They may be among the longest-lived wines in all of Burgundy. Leading Burgundy critic **Allen Meadows** just published notes on a vertical tasting of 50 vintages of the Chateau de la Tour Clos Vougeot, going back to 1885! (The **1885** got **97** points and was tied for the top-scoring wine in the tasting, btw.)

Here are Allen's notes on the 2008 –

*“This is **still exceptionally young** and primary with a restrained nose that includes a discreet but not invisible application of wood that sets off wonderfully cool and pure aromas of red currant, earth and an interesting game hint. There is impressive size and weight to the large-scaled flavors that are blessed with excellent concentration and outstanding dry extract levels that confer a textured mouth feel to the hugely long and classically austere finish. This is a stunner of a wine that should be capable of delivering greatness in 15 to 20 years. 94 pts. Suggested for drinking: **2023+**”*

I was thrilled to be able to get enough of this special wine to include in your club package, and to give you a great example of a wine built for the long haul. PLEASE don't open this wine too soon. This is one to save for your retirement party, your granddaughter's wedding, a 50th wedding anniversary – whatever big event is way down the line for you. Put in your cellar and just forget you have it for a while. For a long while. And let me know when you open it. Cheers!



Three young ones...

Next shipment in the Fall...

Thanks for joining us on our exploration of the great wines of Burgundy! Watch your email for information on our next Burgundy Express shipment coming in the fall, and for arrival and release information on all the yummy Burgs headed our way throughout the year. All the latest information is always available on our website:

www.scottpaul.com

Attention Champagne Fans and Oregon Pinot Fans! *If you have not done so already, check out our Champagne Club and the Scott Paul Club. Club membership is limited, and slots are filling up quickly. Contact Kelly Karr at 503-319-5827 or kellykarr@scottpaul.com to secure your membership asap.*