

Burgundy's Golden Age

by John Gilman

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Wine is a lot like art. There are periods in the history of specific regions when a synthesis of great winemaking and outstanding vintages results in a priceless collection. For Bordeaux, the glory days were from 1945 to 1961, and from 1982 to 1990. In California, the wines made between 1968 and 1978 have never been equaled. For Burgundy, the red wines from the late 1940s marked the region's apogee during the first half of the twentieth century. Such consistent quality was not achieved again until 1985, when the current run began. The good news is that Burgundy continues to produce great red wines today. The top white Burgundies, from the villages of Puligny-Montrachet, Chassagne-Montrachet, and Meursault, for a variety of reasons, have not realized quite the same success over this period.

The picturesque Burgundian landscape in eastern France has never had such a wealth of great winemakers as it does today. The region's flirtation in the 1960s and 1970s with modern winemaking philosophies proved unsuccessful, and now the young *vignerons* have enthusiastically embraced the winemaking styles of their grandfathers. The last fifteen years have presented vintage after vintage with profound potential, and such stars as Christophe Roumier, Marie-Christine and Marie-Andrée Mugneret, Jean-Marie Fourier, Ghislaine Barthod, Denis Bachelet, and Jean-Nicolas Méo, among dozens of others, have made the most of the opportunity. The result is that the wine world is currently awash with more great red Burgundy than has ever been the case in its

illustrious history. Look for recent vintages such as 1993, 1996, 1999, and 2001 for long-term cellaring, and 1991, 1998, 2000, and 2002 for current or near-term drinking.

There is also more mature red Burgundy available through the auction markets today than ever before.

When buying 1940s vintages, one needs to recall that the *négociant* houses were dominant in this era, and that many of the best examples from the late 1940s vintages will be *négo-*

ciant bottlings. *Négociants* purchase grapes and/or wine from small growers and blend them to produce their own house style, which they market themselves. During the 1940s, the vast majority of producers sold their

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Investing in Wine

With Winter pruning finished, the Château de La Tour awaits the arrival of Spring in Clos Vougeot. Photography by Dr. Markus Strobel.



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wine to *négociants* because most growers had few or no contacts in the commercial world and depended on *négociant* houses to sell their wines around the globe. The most consistently excellent of the early *négociant* wines were from Joseph Drouhin, Maison Leroy, and Faiveley. Today, grower-bottled Burgundy from the best producers is considered significantly better than *négociant*-bottled wine. To differentiate between growers and *négociants*, check the fine print on the label. The terms "*propriétaire-récoltant*" or "*viticulteur*" refer to growers, while *négociants* will be identified as "*négociant-éleveur*."

Non-*négociants* who were at the top of their game in the 1940s include the domaines of Comte de Vogüé, Armand Rousseau, Georges Roumier, and Burgundy's most illustrious producer, Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. Prices for Burgundy from the glorious vintages of 1945, 1947, and 1949 have never been higher than they are today, so expect to pay between \$1,000 and \$7,000 per bottle for a well-stored treasure.

Remembering a few simple points will help you make the most of this Burgundian renaissance. First, learn who the best winemakers

Today's Best Red Burgundy Producers by Village

Gevrey-Chambertin: Domaine Denis Bachelet, Domaine Alain Burguet, Domaine Fourrier.

Morey St. Denis: Thierry Bruin (Domaine des Lambrays), Hubert and Kellen Lignier (Domaine Hubert Lignier), Jacques Seysses (Domaine Dujac), Jacky Truchot (Domaine Truchot-Martin)

Chambolle-Musigny: Domaine Ghislaine Barthod, Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier (Château de Chambolle-Musigny), Christophe Roumier (Domaine Georges Roumier)

Vosne-Romanée: Bruno Clavelier (Domaine Clavelier-Brosson), Etienne Grivot (Domaine Jean Grivot), Jean-Nicolas Méo (Domaine Méo-Camuzet), Marie-Christine

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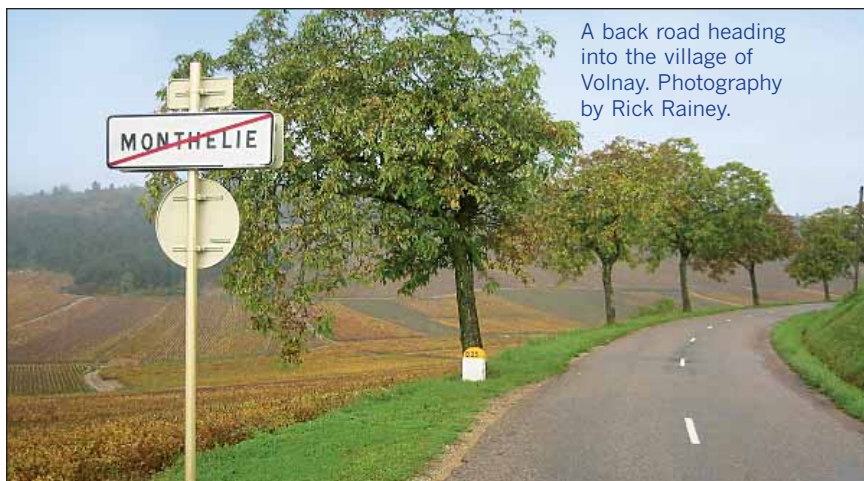


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Investing in Wine



A back road heading
into the village of
Volnay. Photography
by Rick Rainey.

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are in Burgundy and select wines from these producers. Our list includes the very top growers (and one outstanding *négociant*) who consistently make the best wines. Burgundy is different from most regions in that the vineyards are typically shared by a number of proprietors, so each domaine will produce a range of wines from exalted Grand Crus and Premier Crus down to basic Burgundies. The domaines on our list make excellent wine at every level of this hierarchy. The second thing to keep in mind when buying Burgundy is that since the best producers make good wine in virtually every vintage, your strategy can be tailored to your needs. When buying for investment purposes, take our list of producers and focus on their Grand Crus in top vintages for greatest return. But for your own pleasure, remember a great producer in an average vintage will always make better Burgundy than a mediocre producer in a "great" vintage; the former can offer stunning savings. @

John Gilman has twenty-five years experience in the wine trade as a merchant, sommelier, importer, broker, consultant, and writer, and is regarded as one of the world's foremost experts on the wines of Burgundy. He is author of the bimonthly newsletter View from the Cellar, available through his website www.bentleywine.com.

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and Marie-Andrée Mugneret (Domaine Georges Mugneret-Gibourg); Bernard Noblet (Domaine de la Romanée-Conti); Domaine Cécile Trembley

Nuits St. Georges: Bertrand & Denis Chevillon (Domaine Robert Chevillon), Christian Gouges (Domaine Henri Gouges)

Savigny-les-Beaune: Patrick Bize (Domaine Simon-Bize et Fils); Claude Drouhin (Domaine Chandon de Briailles), Jean-Marc & Hugues Pavelot (Domaine Jean-Marc Pavelot)

Beaune: Laurence Jobard (for *négociant* Domaine Joseph Drouhin)

Pommard: Madame Gaunoux (Domaine Michel Gaunoux)

Volnay: Reyneaud de Villette (Domaine Marquis d'Angerville), Michel & Frédéric Lafarge (Domaine Michel Lafarge)