

OFF-PISTE BURGUNDY: VALUE ALTERNATIVES

The two regional appellations of Coteaux Bourguignons and Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains and the white wine-only St-Bris take Burgundy beyond the pure Pinot Noir and Chardonnay classics for which it is famed. **Michael Apstein** explains what lies behind these under-the-radar styles – and why they could become the more reasonably priced face of Burgundy

Even serious fans of Burgundy may be unfamiliar with St-Bris, Coteaux Bourguignons and Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains. In a region famous for its rigid devotion to vineyard sites identified by Cistercian monks eight centuries ago, these three appellations – and the wide variety of grape varieties they allow – demonstrate Burgundy's ability to adapt to the subtleties wrought by the passage of time.

Although they may currently be harder to find than the wines from Burgundy's long roll call of better-known appellations, these three

styles offer distinctive wines at attractive prices. It's my belief that these wines will increasingly begin to appear on retailers' shelves, especially as the prices of 'regular' Burgundy continue to escalate – so their names should be in the lexicon of all Burgundy enthusiasts.

St-Bris

Taking its name from St-Bris-le-Vineux, a tiny village in the Auxerrois to the southeast of the town of Auxerre, St-Bris is doubly unique. First, it's the only place in Burgundy that

The tiny village of St-Bris-Le-Vineux in the Auxerrois

‘The wines from St-Bris have a unique minerality, some almost a lava-like quality’

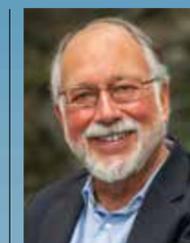
mandates Sauvignon Blanc – before 2003, when it was promoted to AC status, its wines were labelled as Sauvignon de St-Bris. Second, the wines do not taste like Sauvignon Blanc. They have neither the pungent nor tropical fruitiness characteristic of New World Sauvignon Blanc. They do not even bear much resemblance to Sancerre, which is also made exclusively from Sauvignon Blanc, lies only 128km west in the Loire Valley's central vineyards, and whose soil has a similar mix of Kimmeridgian limestone and clay.

The wines from St-Bris have a unique minerality, some almost a lava-like quality, with bright acidity and an attractive bite. They are similar to Muscadet, but with more body and density, especially in recent vintages as climate change has enhanced ripening. Although

meant to be drunk within a year or two of the vintage, they do show good development with a few additional years of bottle age.

Guilhem Goisot, one of the top producers in St-Bris, believes the origins of Sauvignon Blanc here can be explained by economics: plant what grows. He explains that, unlike in the Côte d'Or, where the vineyards basically face in one direction – east-southeast – the vineyards in the Auxerrois are planted on hillsides with varying exposures. The south-facing vineyards are warm enough for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The north side of the hills are too cool for those grapes but can support Sauvignon Blanc.

Why then does Chardonnay thrive on the north-facing slopes of Chablis, barely 16km away? Hervé Tucki, the experienced and knowledgeable director of La Chablisienne, the excellent cooperative in Chablis, thinks the difference may be attributable to the precise mixture of clay and limestone in the soils, or to a subtle temperature difference between the Yonne Valley of Auxerre and the Serein Valley of Chablis. Indeed, before phylloxera ravaged the area in the late 19th century, St-Bris grew Chardonnay and was eventually included within the Chablis appellation. Tucki offers, with a Gallic shrug: ‘The origin of Sauvignon Blanc in St-Bris is a ➤



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Photograph: BIVB St-Bris-Le-Vineux



**ST-BRIS:
THE FACTS**

Area 160ha
Primary grapes
 Sauvignon Blanc,
 Sauvignon Gris
Soil Portlandian
 and Kimmeridgian
 limestone
Wines White only
Average production
 Approximately 90,000
 12-bottle cases

**COTEAUX
BOURGUIGNONS:
THE FACTS**

Area 270ha
Primary grapes
White Chardonnay,
 Aligoté, Melon de
 Bourgogne, Pinot
 Blanc, Pinot Gris
Red Pinot Noir, Gamay,
 César (a rare variety
 planted in the
 Auxerrois)
Soil Diverse, covering
 all of Burgundy from
 the Auxerre in the north
 to Beaujolais
Wines Red, white or
 rosé (which can also be
 labelled Coteaux
 Bourguignons Clairet)
Average production
 Approximately 160,000
 12-bottle cases

**BOURGOGNE
PASSE-TOUT-
GRAINS:
THE FACTS**

Area 232ha
Primary grapes
 Pinot Noir (minimum
 one-third), Gamay –
 grapes mixed
 before vinification
Soil Mostly limestone/
 clay for Pinot Noir and
 granitic for Gamay
Wines Red, rarely rosé
Average production
 Approximately 130,000
 12-bottle cases

Source: BIVB – area figures as of
 2018; average production as five-
 year averages from 2014-2018

little mysterious.’ Whatever the reason, I
 predict we’ll see more of these riveting wines
 as climate change aids ripening in these
 northern climes.

Together, the 2017 and 2018 vintages of
 St-Bris provide something for everyone. The
 2017s are racier, while the 2018s are a little bit
 rounder but maintain an invigorating bite.

In addition to Goisot, other domaines I
 recommend include Clotilde Davenne, Félix,
 Philippe Defrance, PL & JF Bersan, Séverine &
 Lionel Jacquet, Verret and the cooperative
 Caves Bailly Lapiere. The notable Chablis
 producers, William Fèvre and Simonnet-
 Febvre, also make lovely St-Bris.

WINES TO TRY

① **Guilhem et Jean-Hugues Goisot,
 La Ronce, St-Bris 2017** 94
 £18.99 Domaine Direct

La Ronce vineyard sits on a hill that has both north
 and south exposures, hence both Sauvignon Blanc
 and Chardonnay grow there. The soil is a mixture of
 Kimmeridgian limestone and clay, yet there’s more
 power here than in Goisot’s other St-Bris. Purity
 and a touch of spice complement that power, while
 brilliant acidity keeps it fresh and lively. It’s a
 big-impact wine without a trace of heaviness.
 Biodynamic. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alcohol** 12.5%

Domaine Séverine & Lionel Jacquet, St-Bris 2018 93
 N/A UK www.domaine-jacquet.com
 Founded in 2002 with 2.8ha, based in the village of
 Chitry, near Chablis, and now expanded to 16ha. The
 Jacquets started producing St-Bris in 2011, and they
 are clearly fast learners, since this 2018 St-Bris won a
 gold medal at the 29th Concours des Vins du Grand



Guilhem Goisot



Auxerrois. Delicate floral notes grab your attention;
 good depth, impeccable balance and an alluring
 mineral bite hold onto it. A persistent finish, with
 an attractive subtle bitterness, makes it a perfect
 choice for shellfish. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 12.5%

② **Guilhem et Jean-Hugues Goisot, Corps de Garde,
 St-Bris 2017** 93

£23.49 Beckford Bottle Shop, Domaine Direct, Les Caves
 de Pyrene, Middle Lane Market, The Crouch End Cellars,
 Woodhead Shop

Goisot, a family-owned estate, makes fabulous wines
 across its range, and has farmed biodynamically for



two decades. The lower-yielding Sauvignon Gris
 used for the Corps de Garde is thought to provide
 more substance. The wine comes from a variety of
 vineyards composed of Kimmeridgian limestone
 mixed with clay. This fresh and pure 2017 vintage
 delivers lava-like nuances. Crisp and cutting, it has
 remarkable depth. At the same time, its refinement
 is apparent in its incredible finish. **Drink** 2020-2023
Alc 12.5%

③ **Bailly Lapiere, St-Bris 2018** 92

N/A UK www.bailly-lapiere.fr

This cooperative of about 430 growers is best known
 for its Crémant de Bourgogne, but it also makes a
 lovely St-Bris. The 2018 took a silver medal at the
 29th Concours des Vins du Grand Auxerrois.
 Exhibiting delicate nuances of white flowers, its
 allure is immediate, and it dazzles with its bright
 stony impact. Wonderful acidity, especially given
 the vintage, makes it a pleasure to drink now –
 particularly with sushi. **Drink** 2020 **Alc** 12.5%

④ **Domaine PL & JF Bersan, Cuvée Marianne,
 St-Bris 2018** 92

N/A UK www.domainebersan.com

This father-and-son team’s 2018 Cuvée Marianne is
 from 45-year-old vines planted on both Portlandian
 and Kimmeridgian limestone mixed with clay.
 Dense, but not heavy, it has aromas and flavours of
 wet stones. Invigorating acidity balances the
 ripeness of the vintage and amplifies a steely finish.
Drink 2020-2022 **Alc** 12.5%

Photographs: Romain Beaumont; Joseph Drouhin

**Coteaux
Bourguignons**

In 2011, Coteaux Bourguignons replaced
 Bourgogne Grand Ordinaire, a category of
 wine rarely exported to either the UK or the
 US (how something can be both grand and
 ordinary is beyond me). An all-encompassing
 appellation, it stretches from Auxerre in the
 north to Beaujolais in the south. Wines can be
 red, white or rosé and made from a single
 grape variety or a blend of approved grapes
 (see ‘The facts’, left). In short, the wines can be
 made from any grape traditionally grown in
 any part of Burgundy.

Part of the motivation for creating this new
 appellation was to help growers in economically
 distressed Beaujolais. Coteaux Bourguignons
 allows them to sell wines with ‘Bourgogne’ on
 the label. However, notes Axel Joubert, estate
 manager at Château de Raoussat in Chiroubles:
 ‘For the poorer producers, Coteaux Bourguignon
 is not a saviour.’ Others see unintended
 consequences. One well-respected producer
 in Morgon, who prefers to remain anonymous
 so as not to antagonise his neighbours,
 emphasises with dramatic gestures that make
 his opinion clear even to those who do not
 understand French: ‘It will kill Beaujolais.’

In contrast, Louis-Fabrice Latour, co-president
 of the BIVB (Bureau Interprofessionnel des >

Above: Joseph Drouhin
 vines producing fruit for
 Coteaux Bourguignons



Frédéric Barnier

Vins de Bourgogne) regional body, shows his enthusiasm for the appellation when he exclaims: 'It will give the consumer a chance to drink Burgundy at a reasonable price.' His venerable, Beaune-based, family-run company, Maison Louis Latour, is taking advantage of it: having planted Pinot Noir in the southern part of Beaujolais where there are limestone soils, Louis Latour is making a unique wine, Les Pierres Dorées (see right), exclusively from that grape and labelling it under the new appellation.

Although the name sounds as though it might be the lowest level of Burgundy appellation – and indeed some supermarkets in France sell Coteaux Bourguignons for only a few euros a bottle – not all the wines fall into that price or quality category. Coteaux Bourguignons from Maison Louis Jadot, another top Beaune-based négociant, sells for as much as 50% more than its Beaujolais-Villages. Winemaker Frédéric Barnier laments the difficulty of selling it in the US and other countries where customers prefer to see a grape name or a well-known or easier-to-pronounce place name on the label.

The plethora of grapes allowed for Coteaux Bourguignons and the enormous area from which they come make it impossible to generalise about the wine's style. That said, for red Coteaux Bourguignons, many producers use a blend of Gamay, which delivers fruitiness, and Pinot Noir, which adds needed structure. For the whites, the combination of Chardonnay and Aligoté makes the wine ideal for current drinking. The former provides richness, while the latter keeps the wine fresh and lively.

Winemakers are keen on these blends because they can even out the vagaries of a vintage by adjusting the proportion of the components.

Like their white counterparts, red Coteaux Bourguignons, with their fruity flavour profile and mild tannins, are meant to be drunk

young. For this broad category especially, I recommend following my time-honoured advice for selecting Burgundy: producer, producer, producer.

WINES TO TRY

Domaine Fargues, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017 88

N/A UK www.domaine-fargues.fr

Bénédicte and Bastien Fargues established their tiny 1.3ha estate in Bligny-lès-Beaune in 2005 and are already making notable wines. They limit yields by debudding and bottle without fining or filtering. This 2017 Chardonnay-Aligoté blend demonstrates the virtue of that marriage. A beam of citrus-like acidity supports its fruity and mineral aspects. The freshness on the finish amplifies the wine's charms. It would be a good choice for simply grilled fish or shellfish. **Drink 2020-2024 Alc 12.5%**

Maison Fatien Pere & Fils, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017 88

N/A UK www.maison-fatien.com

In a small vineyard in the commune of Meursault, but outside the Bourgogne Blanc appellation, Fatien Père et Fils has Chardonnay with, as Charles Fatien notes, 'a few rogue Aligoté vines thrown in'. Previously relegated to the Bourgogne Grand Ordinaire category, it is no ordinary wine. Those rogue Aligoté grapes add vivacity and amplify the richness and delicate minerality of the Chardonnay. This energetic white is a perfect choice for simply prepared seafood. **Drink 2020-2022 Alc 12.5%**

Domaine Jean & Gilles Lafouge, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017 88

POA **Domaine Direct**

This superb grower, based in Auxey-Duresses, used the flexible regulations of Coteaux Bourguignons to tweak its usual blend of consistently winsome Passe-tout-grains. The 2017 contains 70% Gamay and 30% Pinot Noir, both from slopes around the winery where the limestone-rich soil imparts even more acidity to the Gamay than the granitic soil of Beaujolais. The two varieties were vinified similarly: no cold soak, no carbonic maceration and little punchdown. The wine's structure frames and supports its fresh and fruity raspberry-like character beautifully. Its Beaujolais-like charm, without sweetness, makes it a good match for steak-frites. **Drink 2020-2022 Alc 12.5%**

④ Louis Jadot, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017 88

£12-£14 **Amersham Wines, Christopher Keiller, Fine Wines of Mayfield, Globe Wines**

Jadot combines Pinot Noir grown in Givry in the Côte Chalonnaise with Gamay from Beaujolais and releases it after an extended time in bottle, which is why 2017 is the current vintage. Blending 75% Gamay and 25% Pinot Noir in 2017, it shows the virtue of using these two grapes: the spine and savoury nuances provided by Pinot Noir act as a foil



Nicole Lamarche of Domaine Lamarche



for Gamay's red fruit-like profile in this beautifully balanced wine. Fine tannins allow for immediate enjoyment and make it easy to recommend for everyday enjoyment. **Drink 2020-2024 Alc 12.5%**

⑤ Louis Latour, Les Pierres Dorées, Coteaux Bourguignons 2018 88

£18.11-£20 **The Drink Shop, The Wine Centre, Wine Direct** The limestone in the soil of southern Beaujolais gives the name Pierres Dorées ('golden rocks') to the area. A company that knows a thing or two about Pinot Noir, Maison Latour has planted about 20ha of the grape there, and the wine it produces gets better with every vintage. The 2018, the best to date, displays a bright minerality. Ripe yet firm, it also paradoxically conveys a lovely austerity and even a welcome hint of bitterness in the finish. It's another excellent choice for steak and chips or similarly simple fare. **Drink 2020-2024 Alc 12.5%**

Photograph: Tim Atkin MW

Apstein's take: the alternative Burgundies

ST-BRIS

Profile Fruity and minerally; great value; weekday wine
More interesting than Varietal Sauvignon Blanc
Food pairing Seafood, though its mineral-infused edginess also allows it to balance more substantial fare, such as roast pork or Asian-spiced dishes

COTEAUX BOURGUIGNON BLANC

Profile Fruity and zesty; great value; weekday wine
More interesting than Comparably priced New World Chardonnay
Food pairing Seafood, chicken in a cream sauce

COTEAUX BOURGUIGNON ROUGE & PASSE-TOUT-GRAINS

Profile Fruity and savoury; great value; weekday wine
More interesting than Comparably priced New World Pinot Noir
Food pairing Quintessential roast chicken wine

Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains

One of the first appellations established in Burgundy, Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains (also frequently seen on labels as 'Passetoutgrain') received AC status in 1937. Regulations require a blend of Pinot Noir (one-third minimum) and Gamay, which must be combined in the vat before fermentation, making it a blend of grapes, not of wines. The Pinot Noir comes from anywhere in Burgundy, while the Gamay usually, but not always, comes from the granitic soils of Beaujolais.

Though Philippe the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, banished Gamay from the Côte d'Or in 1395, some remained. Historically, Gamay was an important grape in Morey-St-Denis, where Stéphane Magnien, a small grower, has 50-year-old Gamay vines from which he consistently makes a winsome Passe-tout-grains. Domaine Lamarche in Vosne-Romanée has plots of 45- and 50-year-old Gamay vines and is planting new ones. And in the Côte de Beaune, Domaine Lafarge has old Gamay vines that add complexity to its Passe-tout-grains.

Passe-tout-grains presents at least three hurdles for producers: winemaking, marketing and a disappearing name. Harvesting and then fermenting two different varieties together in mandated proportions is challenging. Pinot Noir and Gamay grown in different vineyards ripen at different times. Getting the harvest date(s) correct takes enormous experience. Jeanne-Marie de Champs, one of Burgundy's top brokers, thinks that these wines offer good value, especially from top growers. 'We just need to explain the name and the wine to consumers.' >

Below: Maison Louis Latour, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2017 (see p32)



Photograph: Jon Wyand

Unintentionally, Coteaux Bourguignons may be replacing Passe-tout-grains. Louis Jadot ceased production of Passe-tout-grains in 2011 with the introduction of the flexible regulations of Coteaux Bourguignons. With the 2017 vintage, Magnien began doing the same for the same reason. Gilles Lafouge, a top Auxey-Duresses-based grower with an excellent track record for Passe-tout-grains, says he has stopped using the appellation because it's 'from the 1950s', whereas Coteaux Bourguignons is 'au courant'.

Others push on enthusiastically. Bernard Retornaz, president of Louis Latour, notes that the company has been making Passe-tout-grains 'forever', and intends to keep doing so.

Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains, similar to red Coteaux Bourguignons, can seamlessly combine the upfront fruity aspect of Gamay with a backbone provided by Pinot Noir. Either will transform a take-out rotisserie chicken.

WINES TO TRY

⑥ **Domaine Michel Lafarge, L'Exception, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2017** 93

£13 (ib)-£21.75 **Bowes, Corney & Barrow, Handford, Hic** Aptly named, as this leading Volnay-based estate has 1ha of vines, almost 10% of its estate, planted to Passe-tout-grains, some older than 90 years. This organic, biodynamic domaine typically uses equal amounts of Pinot Noir and Gamay with wild yeast to make this truly exceptional wine. More substantial and complex than you'd expect of this appellation, it delivers raspberry-like nuances with spicy savoury notes. It fits my definition of Burgundy: flavour without weight. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 12.5%**

⑦ **Robert Chevillon, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2016** 93

£16.68 **Justerini & Brooks** Chevillon, one of the top producers in Nuits-St-Georges, has a little more than half a hectare



‘Maison Louis Latour has been making Passe-tout-grains “forever”, and intends to keep doing so’

planted to Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains (two-thirds Gamay, one-third Pinot Noir) in three lieux-dits nearby. It takes as much care with it as with the far nobler, and more expensive, premiers crus. Suave and seamless, black fruit-like flavours meld with savoury, almost peppery notes. Lively acidity keeps it fresh. Fine tannins permit immediate enjoyment. A great introduction to the talents of this producer. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 12.5%**

⑧ **Domaine Trapet, A Minima, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2017** 91

£18.50 (2014) **Corney & Barrow** Trapet Père et Fils, a stellar producer based in Gevrey-Chambertin, blends equal parts Pinot Noir and Gamay grown in Grand Champs, a vineyard in that village, for its Passe-tout-grains. It takes its name from the philosophy of minimal intervention, which in this case means biodynamic farming, indigenous yeasts and the addition of only a hint of sulphur at bottling. The result is a delicious blend of juicy red fruit and spicy, herbal, earthy notes. Tannins are suave, which makes it fine for drinking now. Its acidity keeps it fresh and lively throughout a meal. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 13%**

Domaine Bernard Moreau, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2017 89

N/A UK domainebernardmoreau@gmail.com Brothers Alexandre and Benoît Moreau have run this top-notch Chassagne-Montrachet-based estate since 1999. Through their diligence in the vineyards and care in the winery, all of their wines – even from this lowly appellation – shine. A lighter-weight, forward wine that reflects the vintage, this conveys bright red fruit flavours with a perfect balance of tannins providing structure without astringency. Its finesse shows how this appellation can punch above its weight. **Drink 2020-2022 Alc 12.5%**

Louis Latour, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2017 88

POA **Louis Latour Agencies** The traditional blend of two-thirds Gamay, one-third Pinot Noir makes this classically framed and easy-to-like Passe-tout-grains. The Pinot Noir comes from the Mâconnais and provides backbone, while Gamay from Beaujolais delivers upfront fruitiness. The lack of oak allows the fruit to shine, resulting in a ready-to-drink, mid-weight wine with charming rusticity and vivacity. It's the French version of a pizza wine. **Drink 2020-2021 Alc 13%** **D**



Above: producer Gilles Lafouge exemplifies a trend away from using the Passe-tout-grains label in favour of the more 'au courant' Coteaux Bourguignons