



Clos des Ursules is the 1.26-hectare upper portion of a larger Beaune Premier Cru, Les Vignes Franches.

A VERTICAL TASTING IN NEW YORK CITY TRACED THE TRAJECTORY OF **MAISON LOUIS JADOT'S CLOS DES URSULES** OVER THE COURSE OF TWO CENTURIES

story by Michael Apstein / photos by Mikhail Lipyanskiy

To celebrate the 200th anniversary of the acquisition of its first vineyard, Clos des Ursules, Maison Louis Jadot sent its technical director, Frédéric Barnier, to New York City in February to conduct a vertical tasting that spanned nearly a century. Kurt Eckert, general manager for Jadot at importer Kobrand Fine Wine and Spirits, welcomed guests to host venue Palladino's Steak & Seafood, located in Grand Central Terminal, with the promise of "an iconic wine in an iconic setting." "It is our DNA, our flagship," Barnier confirmed with his signature broad smile.

While Jadot, as one of Burgundy's top négociants, today owns plots in many red

Grand Cru vineyards, including Chambertin-Clos de Bèze and Bonnes Mares, I agree with Barnier that Clos des Ursules is the producer's flagship red wine. Some might find that surprising: After all, although wines from Beaune Premier Cru vineyards can be excellent and certainly represent superb value, few rise to the level of Grand Cru quality. Clos des Ursules does so by consistently delivering more than you'd expect from a Beaune Premier Cru, as this tasting demonstrated.

Spoiler alert: The wines were sensational, even those from so-called "lesser" vintages like 2021 and 2017. Despite the enormous variation in growing conditions, they shared a mid-weight profile

and showed a mineral elegance that testified to the strength of the terroir: Even the more powerful wines from riper vintages such as 2023, 2020, and 2018 displayed vivacity and finesse. One of the essential signs of a great wine is how it develops over time: The 1988, 1976, and especially the 1964 and the 1959 vintages proved that Clos des Ursules is just that. Jin Ahn, sommelier and managing partner at noretuh in New York City's East Village, agreed with me that Clos des Ursules is Jadot's greatest vineyard given the wine's consistency over the decades. (By the way, the stunning 2022 is still readily available at retail for about \$120 a bottle.)

A Vineyard Overview

The name Clos des Ursules comes from the Order of Saint Ursula, a Catholic group dedicated to educating girls. A branch of these Ursuline nuns (*ursuline* means “little female bear”) settled in Beaune in 1626 and acquired the vineyard 50 years later.

Many sources mistakenly describe Clos des Ursules as a 2.15-hectare site composed of two parts separated by a narrow road: an upper section fully enclosed by walls and a smaller, lower section. However, Barnier clarified that only the former, at 1.26 hectares, is actually Clos des Ursules; though both portions lie within the Beaune Premier Cru Les Vignes Franches, grapes from the lower parcel are not included in the Clos des Ursules bottling. Similarly, many sources claim that Jadot acquired the vineyard in 1826, but in reality, Jadot was taking poetic license by hosting a 200th anniversary tasting. The true story, according to Barnier, is that one Monsieur Moreau purchased Clos des Ursules in 1826. It wasn't until 1859, the year Maison Louis Jadot was founded, that it obtained the parcel as part of the dowry of Moreau's daughter upon her marriage to Louis Henri Denis Jadot.



In 2011, France's National Institute of Origin and Quality finally recognized the uniqueness of Clos des Ursules by proclaiming it to be a standalone Premier Cru—Beaune's 42nd—apart from Les Vignes Franches. Prior to that year, Jadot's label read, “Beaune Clos des Ursules, Appellation Premier Cru Vignes Franches Contrôlée.” Currently, it reads “Beaune Clos des Ursules, Appellation Beaune Premier Cru Contrôlée,” without refer-

ence to Les Vignes Franches. The word “monopole” also appears on the label to indicate that Jadot owns the entire vineyard—a rarity in Burgundy, where most sites are divided among many vigneron. (Sharp-eyed readers will notice, based on the photograph above, that most of the bottles from vintages prior to 2011 carry the new appellation. That's because they came directly from Jadot's cellars, where they had rested without



Kurt Eckert, general manager for Jadot at importer Kobrand Fine Wine and Spirits, welcomes guests to the tasting at Palladino's Steak & Seafood. (Seated to his right is Joe Janish, Kobrand's senior director of PR.)

labels lest they disintegrate in the humid conditions. Prior to the tasting, Jadot affixed new ones.)

Barnier considers the location of Clos des Ursules on a mid-slope that faces east—as do most of Burgundy’s red Grand Cru sites—to be “classic.” He noted that the soil here, in the southern part of Beaune on the border with Pommard, is more complex than that in the northern part: The topsoil is thin at only about 60 centimeters deep, which means that the region’s iconic Jurassic white limestone is near the surface, while water-retaining clay and iron result in more full-bodied wines that are generally less expressive when young. On average, the vines are between 55 and 65 years of age, though some are as old as 100.

Barnier described winemaking at Clos des Ursules as “standard.” The team destems the grapes entirely, including no whole bunches (at least for now). The juice undergoes a long maceration along with twice-daily pigeage to ensure a gentle but thorough extraction. It then spends just under two years in oak before bottling—the second year in 500-liter foudres, which Jadot notably substituted for the standard 228-liter Burgundy barrel in 2020 to adjust for climate change and maintain freshness in the wine. This aging regimen has evolved over the decades, but Jadot’s philosophy has remained constant: Express a unique sense of place.

Jadot typically produces about 20 barrels (6,000 bottles) of Clos des Ursules in good vintages such as 2017, 2018, 2022, and 2023, according to Barnier.

Tasting Notes

Here are my thoughts on 15 vintages of Maison Louis Jadot Clos des Ursules Beaune Premier Cru.

2023: Paradoxically, robust yields saved this hot vintage from producing over-the-top wines: With a smaller crop, Barnier explained, all the vines’ energy would have been concentrated on producing overripe grapes. The dark color of the 2023 presages its generosity on the palate. Great acidity imbues it with vivacity, keeping it fresh and in balance. Fine tannins and an overall charming aspect make it surprisingly approachable. It showed beautifully when I tasted it in barrel in November 2024, and it has evolved nicely since then. I suspect it will close down in a year or two, so drink it now or wait a decade. **93**

2022: Alluding to the Winter Olympics, Barnier claimed that the 2022 deserved a place “on the podium.” To me, it’s a clear gold. It was marvelous when I tasted it from barrel in Jadot’s cellars in 2023, and it has just exploded since then: “Harmonious” is a good descriptor, because there’s a bit of everything and not too much of anything. Although there’s plenty of concentration, this wine wows with its elegance, silky texture, and length, not its power. Drink 2032–2072. **97**

2021: This was a cool year, exacerbated by frost that reduced the crop by 80% in many places. As in 2023, however, the yield saved the vintage, albeit in the reverse: A larger yield never would have ripened. The 2021 showed well from barrel in 2022 and has continued to expand. Despite its lighter profile, its site-derived elegance and minerality show



clearly; an alluring herbal aspect adds to its appeal. Further aging will allow the tannins to harmonize with the other elements, so drink 2031–2051. **92**

2020: Barnier explained that a hot, dry summer led to Jadot’s earliest-ever harvest, starting on August 19. Reflecting those conditions, the 2020 is concentrated and dense but not overdone, displaying balancing acidity; the tannins are ripe and supple, lending a suave texture to this youthful beauty. Muscular yet elegant, it is, as Barnier put it, “built for aging.” Drink 2030–2060. **95**

2018: This was another hot vintage saved by generous yields, according to Barnier: When I tasted it from barrel in 2019, it was all about power; since then, its finesse has come into focus. Although perhaps a little chunkier and less elegant



Maison Louis Jadot technical director *Frédéric Barnier*.



Jin Ahn, sommelier/managing partner of New York City restaurant *noreetuh*, was among the attendees.



than the 2020, it possesses uplifting acidity on the finish that keeps it fresh and lively. A few more years to allow the tannins to settle down will serve it well—drink 2030–2060. **93**

2017: This vintage was panned by many at the outset; indeed, when I tasted it from barrel in 2018, I found it to lack charm. Oh, how it's blossomed! A brick-like color and a hint of leafiness on the nose accurately suggest some maturity on the palate. Fragrant and floral, the mid-weight beauty is quintessentially Burgundian, offering what I call "flavor without weight." It's a delight now, but because it's still fresh and shows no sign of fatigue, drink now through 2035. **94**

2012: Plagued almost biblically by frost, mildew, hail, and poor flowering, this vintage birthed small amounts of firm, concentrated wine. Served from magnum, the 2012 Clos des Ursules fits that profile, displaying a youthful combination of floral touches and dark minerals, all sitting atop noticeably firm tannins. Drink 2030–2070. **94**

2010: The fresh and fragrant 2010 is just gorgeous. Precise and focused, this mid-weight delight explodes and then dances on the palate without a trace of heaviness before a firm, long, lovely finish. Barrier described the vintage as "old-time," featuring lower alcohol. For me, it's another example of Burgundy's aforementioned hallmark, flavor without weight. Drink now through 2070. **96**

2005: Barrier said that this "firm" vintage was the first to hint at the climate

change to come: Poor flowering and a few weeks of heat resulted in a smaller, more concentrated crop. As beautiful as the 2010 is, the 2005 is even more thrilling, providing just a touch more stuffing without sacrificing subtlety or elegance. The firm tannins evident in its youth have been transformed and now provide supple structure. Drink now through 2070. **98**

1997: Jacques Lardière, Jadot's technical director for some 40 years prior to Barrier, always loved the 1997, a vintage abhorred by most everyone else. Rain fell just before harvest, forcing producers to either pick early and make wine from unripe grapes or wait and hope the vines dried before rot set in. Lardière waited, and rot indeed destroyed 75% of the crop—but he made fabulous wine from the remainder. Fully mature, the weighty 1997 coats the palate with an alluringly savory, meaty, and dried-leafy character atop a firm (but not hard) base. Enlivening, freshening acidity keeps you coming back for more. Drink now through 2036. **95**

1988: Barrier noted that this vintage produced wines of good ripeness following a "classic end-of-September harvest." Fragrant and muscular, the 1988 Clos des Ursules still has a hint of the brooding tannins it showed in its youth, but not enough to throw it out of balance. More youthful than expected, it will benefit from additional bottle age; drink 2030–2070. **94**

1976: Barrier reminded us that this was a severe drought year, yielding grapes with

thick skins and lots of tannins. Emblematic of the site, the wine retains life and freshness though it's clearly mature, with savory, leafy elements enveloping the senses. The barest hint of drying tannins appears on the finish to remind you of the drought. Drink now through 2035. **93**

1964: Although most critics consider 1964 to be an outstanding vintage for red Burgundy, Barrier, in his characteristically understated way, pronounced it simply "good." Regardless, this wine is magnificent, offering a perfectly balanced panoply of fruit and savory flavors. While Erin Healy, chef sommelier at New York City's Restaurant Daniel, detected hints of coffee and delicate caramel, I was struck by its silky texture, abundant nuance, and enormous length. Drink whenever you can (I initially gave it 100 points but had to revise it after tasting the 1959). **99**

1959: Lardière once cautioned me that, sometimes, trying to describe a wine diminishes it. After tasting the 1959 Clos des Ursules poured from magnum, I understand what he meant. As exceptional as the 1964 was, this was, well, even better. No rush—drink it whenever you can. **100**

1929: There's no question that the 1929 would have received a higher score had it not followed the exceptional '64 and '59. Less explosive and complete, it seemed to be on the downside of its life. That said, at 94 years of age, it was damn good. Drink now—should you be so lucky! **93** *sj*