



VOLNAY PREMIER CRU 2010

Decanter PANEL TASTING

Volnay premier cru 2010

Volnay has a reputation for elegance, finesse and fragrance, but wines from the Pommard side can be burly. Much depends on the grower, says Stephen Brook

JUST SOUTH OF Beaune, Volnay is sandwiched between Pommard and Meursault, and given the rugged character of many Pommards, it comes as a surprise that Volnay is regarded, alongside Chambolle-Musigny to the north, as the embodiment of Burgundian finesse. The best wines don't lack structure and ageing potential – far from it – but a Volnay, even a premier cru, can be surprisingly accessible in its youth. As it ages, the wine should show exceptional fragrance, clarity and persistence.

Volnay is richly endowed in premiers crus, which, in terms of hectares under vine, outnumber the village vineyards. Most of the highly regarded premiers crus lie on the slopes above the main road. The vineyards visible around the village are all premiers crus. But about half the premiers lie below the road on flatter soil. Those close to Pommard, such as Frémiets and Chanlin, tend to be more tannic and even rugged. Those hugging, or even within, the village tend to be *monopoles* owned by the leading producers, while most of the finest premiers crus lie on the most southerly slopes towards Meursault, and include Clos des Chênes, Taillepiéds and Cailleret. Champans, the most central of the premiers, is also esteemed.

As always in Burgundy, much depends on individual producers. Volnay is fortunate here. Properties such as Lafarge, Marquis d'Angerville, Pousse d'Or, de Montille, Henri Boillot and, in recent years, Nicolas Rossignol are renowned for consistency as well as quality. Inevitably they differ in approach. Lafarge farms biodynamically and promotes purity of fruit; at the other end of the spectrum, Pousse d'Or (which changed hands in 1997) delivers darker, more modern-style wines. Their *monopoles* are also noteworthy, although they are mostly small: Pousse d'Or alone owns three, of which the best is Clos de la Bousse d'Or; Lafarge owns Clos du Château des Ducs, Angerville the Clos des Ducs, and Clerget owns Clos de Verseuil. Fortunately the best-known premiers crus are large sites and the wines more widely available.

Finesse not weight

Many leading négociants regularly release good Volnays. Bouchard Père et Fils and Jadot are among those that usually offer more than one premier cru. Another top wine made by a domaine outside the commune is the superb Santenots-du-Milieu from Domaine des Comtes Lafon.

Although, with its multiplicity of vineyards and estates, Volnay is not the easiest village for consumers to master, the general standard of winemaking is high here and a truly disappointing bottle is, or should be, rare.

The 2010 vintage was fine, compensating for the lack of the richness of 2005 and 2009 with purity and finesse. It will be fascinating to compare them after another decade. The early summer was warm, even hot at times, but damp spells led to mildew and rot, and a wet August slowed the ripening. Rigorous sorting proved essential. What remained was healthy and ripe, with greater freshness and clarity than the more opulent 2009s. There is likely to be a finer expression of individual terroirs, too. Some winemakers prefer the classicism of 2010 to the opulence of 2009. But that was probably a minority view, and only the passage of time will see whether it is justified.



Volnay: know your vintages

2011 Wines appear elegant and silky, with moderate alcohols. Comparable to 2007, but fruitier.

overall quality is patchy. Fresh wines with quite high acidity.

2010 Choose carefully. The best wines have purity and finesse.

2007 The wines have charm and will drink well over the next few years.

2009 Optimal growing conditions, so no excuse for poor wines. Low acidity may give faster-developing wines than 2005, to which 2009 is often compared.

2006 Less concentrated than 2005, but wines of charm and moderate structure. Lowish acidity, so medium-term wines.

2008 Some superb wines, but

2005 Wines of density and structure, built to last.

Volnay: the facts

Volnay has 213 hectares planted, of which the 30 premiers crus occupy 115ha.

Major premiers crus (hectares): Les Angles (3.3), Brouillards (5.6), Carelles/Carelles Sous la Chapelle (5.2), Champans (11.2), Chanlin (2.9), Chevret (6.3), Clos de la Barre (1.3), Clos de la Bousse d'Or (2.1), Clos de la Chapelle (0.6), Clos des Chênes (15.4), Clos des Ducs (2.4), Frémiets (5.9), Gigotte (0.5), Mitans (4.0), Pitures (4.1), Robardelle (3.0), Ronceret (1.9), Santenot (29), Taillepiéds (7.1)

Stephen Brook has been a contributing editor to Decanter since 1996 and is an awarded author of more than 30 books

The results

These 2010s showed purity and austerity, but some producers struggled to achieve full ripeness. While not a great vintage, our panel said it's a good one to buy – but with care. Amy Wislocki reports

'ELEGANCE AND FINESSE, refinement and perfume.' So quintessential Volnay was described by Michael Schuster at the outset of the post-tasting discussion. Did our panel find that in this line-up of premiers crus from the 2010 vintage? To an extent, yes. 'I think this is certainly a vintage to buy,' said Sebastian Thomas. 'It's very much a Burgundy lover's vintage – not a ripe year, but a precise year where terroir should shine through. As ever with Burgundy, the choice of producer is key.'

'This isn't a grand vintage,' agreed Schuster, 'but it has a lovely purity. It was a difficult, cool vintage, saved by a warm September, and as a result is more austere than either 2005 or 2007. It's a sort of super-2008, lean in style with crisp red fruit, marked acidity and fine tannins.'

Steven Spurrier found many nice wines but was less impressed overall than he expected to be. 'I knew that 2010 was slightly underripe as a vintage, but there is so much good wine being made in Burgundy today that I came expecting clarity and precision of fruit – Volnay is one of the best appellations in Burgundy for that. What I found was a very varied and fascinating range. Some were medium in colour, others were dark; some were dominated

'It's a Burgundy lover's vintage – not ripe, but a precise year where terroir shines' Sebastian Thomas

by oak, others had well-integrated oak; some had red fruits, others black. In general, these are really nice, good quality wines that aren't going to let people down and will age very nicely over the next seven to eight years.'

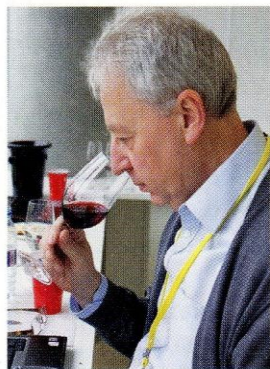
On the subject of ageing potential, Schuster expressed surprise that the colour of some wines was fairly advanced. 'But the good wines clearly need time,' he added. 'One always thinks of Burgundy as ageing more slowly than claret, but good Burgundy needs just as much time, and lasts at least as long.' Thomas agreed that colour could be deceptive: 'Colour isn't always an indication of ageing potential. I think we'll be surprised by this vintage, and that some of these wines will go on and on. You could draw comparisons with 1993, another high-acidity vintage; the best wines from that year are still youthful.'

The scores

65 wines tasted
2
Outstanding
11
Highly recommended
43
Recommended
7
Fair
0
Poor
2
Faulty
7
£ Good value (£30 and under)

The tasters' verdicts

Michael Schuster



Schuster is the DWVA Regional Chair for Burgundy. He runs his own wine school at Bordeaux Index in north London and lectures to both amateurs and professionals throughout the UK and abroad. His books include a translation of Emile Peynaud's *Le Goût du Vin*, *Understanding Wine* and the award-winning *Essential Winetasting*.

Schuster's verdict

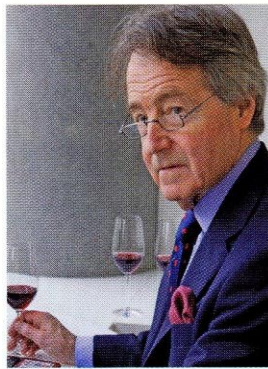
'When I drink Burgundy I want above all to be able to taste the class that the label lays

claim to. This was a premier cru tasting where a couple of standout wines were nudging grand cru quality, where there was a solid core of decent to very good premiers crus, but where we also tasted a fair number of wines which were surprisingly advanced in colour, with an obtrusive acidity and a noticeable lack of premier cru scope.

'Of the top vineyards, the wines from Santenots performed strongly as a group, as did those of Caillerets for the most part; but Clos des Chênes, source of some of Volnay's finest wines was, with a couple of notable exceptions, disappointing.

'The good wines had a sweet red fruit flavour and were delicate, fresh and fine-textured, not big but pure and transparent. In other words, wines for true red-Burgundy lovers. Overall the vintage comes across as very good rather than great; a superior, more harmonious version of 2008. And the challenges of the year (frost, irregular flowering, a difficult summer) were clear to taste too, with many wines showing the leaner, marked red fruit character of grapes that were barely rather than fully ripe, in spite of the significantly lower overall yield. The best, however, are really lovely.'

Steven Spurrier



Spurrier is Decanter's consultant editor. He is an author, renowned taster and set up the Christie's Wine Course with Michael Broadbent. Additionally he is a consultant to Singapore Airlines, founded The Wine Society of India and owns Bride Valley Vineyard in Dorset.

Spurrier's verdict

'There were some wonderful wines among the 65 premiers crus that we tasted, but there were also some less good examples

that showed the leanness of the 2010 vintage, which was not helped by an overuse, in some cases, of oak.

'The wines were tasted from the north to south of the appellation, starting with Les Chanlins on the borders of Pommard and ending with Les Santenots which is actually within the boundaries of Meursault. To say that Meursault makes the best Volnays would be incorrect, but it did provide one of our top two wines and an overall richness of texture that was lacking in some other crus. I found the wines from Pommard's neighbour Les Brouillards rather tough, a complete contrast to the elegance from Les Mitans and Les Taillepiés. I expected a little more depth from the Clos des Chênes, then hit a good run with Les Champans (wines with roundness very much to my taste) and again with elegance from Les Caillerets, before ending on the supple depth of fruit from Les Santenots.

'These wines should not be drunk now, although the drinking window for most begins in 2014. I feel that by the summer they will have settled down and will progress and improve over the next decade.'

When the discussion moved to communes, Santenots was clearly a favourite. 'I love the richness of Santenots,' enthused Spurrier, who highlighted it as one of his top two communes of the tasting. 'The vineyard is in neighbouring Meursault and so the wines have flesh, warmth, fruit and an exoticism to them. You find that still in 2010, absolutely.'

The Santenots soil is very different to the soil in Meursault though, pointed out Schuster, with less limestone and more red soil, making for a wine that is 'richer, darker and more generous' than many others in Volnay. That came across clearly, he added. 'Richer doesn't necessarily mean finer, but these were very good.'

Caillerets – sometimes referred to as 'the Margaux of Volnay', and Spurrier's other star commune of the tasting – also performed well, unsurprisingly: Caillerets, Santenots and Clos des Chênes are widely recognised by Burgundy experts as the best premiers crus in Volnay (Volnay has no grands crus).

Given that these wines are all in the top tier of the appellation, Schuster said: 'At this level, you should find premier cru complexity, scope and quality, whatever the style. Most of these wines showed that, but some tasted very much at the bottom end of premier cru.' As ever with Burgundy, the panel advised to buy with caution, using these pages as your guide.

**Entry criteria:
Producers and UK
agents were invited
to submit any 2010
premier cru Volnay**

Sebastian Thomas



Thomas is a judge on the DWWA Burgundy panel. He moved to London from New York in 1995, and worked for wine merchant Laytons before joining Burgundy specialist Howard Ripley in 2000. Since then, its portfolio has grown to include Pinot Noir from New Zealand, Switzerland and Oregon as well as a broad selection of German wines.

Thomas' verdict

'2010 is not a forgiving vintage. The vibrant acidity highlights any flaws, clearly separating growers who go the extra mile from those who do not. Despite this, what impressed me was the consistently high quality of the 65 entries. While some wines lacked real purity and length, they were for the most part correct. Had we tasted the same wines 10 or 15 years ago, the verdict would have been more negative.'

'The simple explanation for this rise in quality is price. Long-term buyers often bemoan having to pay more and more for their favourite bottles, but higher prices have enabled producers to invest time and money to produce ever-better wines. The style of the vintage has helped them – in this tasting, vineyard characteristics were clearly on display, with finer wines from Santenots, Caillerets, Clos des Chênes and Champans on the Meursault side, and more powerful examples from Fremiets, Pitures and Mitans on the Pommard side. Overall, the best characteristics of Volnay were on show: crunchy red fruit, fine tannins and a delicate, often silky texture that will appeal to all Burgundy lovers.'



Bitouzet-Prieur, Pitures 17 (90)

MS17 SS 16.5 TS 17.5

£42 McKinley Vintners

Attractive sour cherry nose. Very fine and ripe in the mouth, with concentrated red berry fruits.

Integrated, naturally sweet, fine, silky fruit with fine, elegant tannins. Long, ripe and gentle to taste, with classic Volnay finesse and premier cru scope. Elegant with a hint of minerals on the finish. **Drink** 2013–2026 **Alc** 13.5%