

Handford Wines Burgundy En Primeur 2011.

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Jean Chauvenet, Nuits-Saint-Georges

Jean's cellars are just off the main road. Fork right as you go north out of town and you will be treated to what are fast becoming the best range in the village. Vineyard holdings are relatively large here but in Bousselots, Vaucrains and Perrieres, Jean has some of the finest 1er Cru vineyards in the Cotes de Nuits. Truly outstanding in recent years such as 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010 and now 2011. Son in law Christophe Drag is one of the biggest movers in quality terms. His latest trick is to harvest into even smaller boxes and so cleaner and less damaged fruit can be moved directly into the fermentation vats without the need of auger or pump. There is always some pretty rich colour and extract here so I asked Christophe why. He believes he does nothing particularly different but hopes that his experience will show that slightly longer and cooler macerations are beneficial. He explained 'tapotage', used a little more in 2010 and 2011; pigeage, or pushing down the cap of fermenting must to rotate it and to allow gaseous exchange, risks extracting harder tannins. In 2011 there was minimal pigeage but tapotage, tapping the must rather than pushing it right down, keeps the fermentation smooth whilst avoiding over-extraction. Wines are not filtered and rarely fined here; Christophe adds a small amount of pectic enzyme that allows for natural settling prior to the final racking from barrel. Stunning range and the Vaucrains is world beater.

Bourgogne Pinot Noir 2011 £125.00

Rather like seeing the Northern Lights, it's worth the trip to Christophe to witness the colour, depth and concentration of his Bourgogne Rouge. Cherry skin fruits with a black cherry middle and all balanced by tender acids. This comes from a parcel of vines around the house in Nuits. Wonderful stuff. 2013 to 2016

Nuits Saint Georges 'les 6 Pieces' 2011 £195.00

A wine first launched in 2008 to show off the quality, freshness and vivacity of these six parcels of Nuits Villages. It continues to be an excellent benchmark of the vintage and house style; focussed but even cherry and raspberry nose, and there are delicious, chewy fruits with vanilla cream and bright natural acids. There's a great combination of energy and delicacy here resulting in a red to drink in the short and medium term. 2014 to 2018.

Nuits Saint Georges 2011 £240.00

Focussed, compote of red fruits but with a little more briar fruit and even cassis and black cherry on the palate. Soft vanilla and a delectable, creamy edge to the finish. There are stricter tannins here but once again it is purity and freshness of fruit that dominates the length. 2016 to 2021.

Nuits Saint Georges 1er Cru Aux Argillas 2011 £360.00

On the north side of town where vines usually produce an elegant, sometime nervous and more mineral style. This is a little closed now showing only delicate red and black fruits and some sweetness on the nose. Classic and uplifting raspberry and redcurrant are balanced with firm, youthful tannins and bright acids. Ample on the length and showing a little more soft, sugary cassis, along with chalky mineral notes to the finish. 2018 to 2026

Nuits Saint Georges 1er Cru Bousselots 2011 £360.00

Bousselots often yields a tighter bunch and smaller berry giving this definite and concentrated cassis note. Firm tannins, mineral notes and a unique, almost minty freshness. Even, persistent and seriously expressive. 2020 to 2026

Nuits Saint Georges 1er Cru Damodes 2011 £399.00

One of the best known vineyards and deservedly so. These vines were planted by the young Jean Chauvenet and his father in 1953 and 1954. Deep, red/black in colour and with huge richness of persistent red and black fruit salad with hints of the sweet shop too. Tannins are ripe, but tempered, as this relies more on crunchy acidity and earthy notes for its balance and ageing potential. A ripe, grape skin finish gives a pleasant natural style to this Damodes. 2018 to 2027

Nuits Saint Georges 1er Cru Rue de Chaux £360.00

Moving south of town these wines tend to be a little more dense and brooding. This is even deeper in colour and with restrained but defined cassis and bramble along with hints of chocolate. There's a lovely dark chocolate bitterness about this. (Christophe and I couldn't work out a way to describe a nice bitterness so I'll go with that!). Only 3 barrels of this very pleasing potion. 2021 to 2030

Nuits Saint Georges 1er Cru les Perrieres £435.00

The final two need little introduction; they are two of the greatest 1er Cru in Burgundy. More closed but with fine focus and a strong, mineral note. The concentration of pure, Pinot fruit really piques the tongue and is only enhanced by yet more powerful, cassis fruit on the finish. There is great elegance and coolness. As said in 2010 ... this is what great Burgundy should be about ... not stretching the bounds of concentration and extraction beyond the natural limit that Pinot and its great terroirs determine. 2023 to 2032

Nuits Saint Georges 1er Cru Vaucrains £275.00 (6)

This should surely be considered for Grand Cru status; the politics though are that there are just a handful of local owners in les Saint Georges, including the Hospices, but, at neighbouring Vaucrains, there are 22, and those owners are more dispersed throughout the region. Christophe has 42 ares that produce a fairly healthy 8 barrels. The wine itself is truly exceptional and the closest 1er Cru to 100 points for me. The 2011 offers brilliant, if unusual complexity of soft red fruits, strawberry sorbet with thyme and even a hint of ripe green olive. A real gourmet wine with huge peaks of fruit concentration alongside a powerful, sinewy body. Stunning. 2024 to 2036