



A sleeper vintage in Burgundy

Late season sun and wind result in elegant, vibrant and fruity reds in 2008

by Bruce Sanderson

By mid-september of 2008, the vintage for red Burgundy seemed to be headed for disaster. The situation looked bleak after a summer of rain and mostly cool temperatures. But the harvest was saved by a drying north wind that came in the second week of September and the three weeks of beautiful weather that followed.

The welcome change dried out the grapes, increasing sugar and stopping the spread of rot, though yields were lower than normal. "The desiccation brought density to a vintage where you didn't have density," says vintner Etienne de Montille. When the fruit was finally gathered, it represented one of the latest harvests of the past 20 years.

The resulting wines, however, are very typical Burgundies: light, elegant reds grown in a northern climate. The best are ripe, vibrant, juicy and pure, offering an abundance of red fruit flavors, with notes of mineral and spice and translucent textures.

The top 2008s from my recent tastings are full of raspberry, strawberry, red and black currant, rose, violet and mineral aromas and flavors...

Since my last report, I have blind tasted more than 550 red Burgundies, about 350 of them from the 2008 vintage, along with nearly 200 late release 2007s and a handful of early 2009's. Overall, there is a slightly higher percentage of outstanding wines (90 or more points) in 2008, compared to 2007, and because the structure of the '08 will allow them to age longer I gave an edge to the newer vintage, rating in Côte de Nuits 91 points and the Côte de Beaune 89. Moreover, I like the '08s for the brightness and energy.

In many ways, 2008 is a sleeper vintage...

The wines changed a lot after the malolactic conversions, which gave them a shape and softened the acidity. It is definitely a vintage where the élevage was critical in the development of the wines...

It is possible, however, to find values. One must search the less-famous villages and appellations to discover fine versions for the less \$40. In addition to the generic Bourgogne appellation, Marsannay, Fixin, Savigny Les Beaune, Monthélie, Santenay, and the Côte Chalonnaise Villages of Givry and Mercurey are good sources for bargains...

From Savigny Les Beaune comes the Pierre & Jean-Baptiste Lebreuil 2008 (90, \$30), with violet and black pepper notes in an aerial profile.

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Which makes the current crop of '08s even more attractive. If you like the delicacy and freshness of red Burgundy, buy some to put away for a few years. When you pull their corks in the future, they will seem bargains compared with the vintages that succeed them.

Top Values

Pierre et Jean-Baptiste Lebreuil

Savigny-lès-Beaune 2008: Score 90 - \$30

Dark tones of violet, black currant and black pepper give this depth, while its profile is more aerial.