



Red Burgundy 2016 and 2015, Part 1: Two Terrific but Very Different Vintage

BY STEPHEN TANZER | JANUARY 25, 2018

Despite extreme weather conditions in both 2016 and 2015, Burgundy's Côte d'Or has produced an outstanding pair of back-to-back vintages studded with hauntingly beautiful reds.

Domaine Bitouzet-Prieur || Domaine Georges Lignier ||

Ten years from now, when their painful memories of the arduous 2016 growing season have receded, Burgundy's producers may be able to enjoy their wines without nightmare flashbacks of the frost blanket and recurring mildew that plagued the vintage. Happily, Burgundy-loving civilians, who are naturally more concerned with the price and availability of their favorite wines than with the challenges of producing them, will derive great pleasure from the precise, perfumed, suavely tannic 2016s from the outset. One caveat: following a small crop of very ripe, large-scaled wines in 2015 that are quickly disappearing from retail shelves around the world, if they made it that far in the first place, the more classic '16s won't be easy to find either. (Relief is on the horizon, though, as the Côte d'Or miraculously dodged frost in April of 2017 and has finally produced a full crop of wines.)

Domaine Bitouzet-Prieur

2016 Volnay (Bitouzet pulled this sample the day before my visit, just before the wine received a dose of SO₂): Palish medium red. Slightly herbal aromas of cherry and licorice. Supple on entry, then a bit lean in the middle palate, showing a medicinal quality and a saline element but in need of a bit more flesh. A bit dusty on the finish. An unexciting showing, but I suspect this wine gained in precision with the sulfuring. (87-88)

2016 Volnay Les Aussy 1er Cru Palish, moderately saturated red. Riper on the nose than the village Volnay, offering scents of black cherry and spices. Also juicier and more penetrating in the mouth, conveying good subtle intensity and salinity to its flavors of cherry, minerals and soil. Bitouzet notes that this wine has same pH as its 2015 sibling: 3.46. I find it less exuberant than that wine but every bit as precise. Dusty tannins reach the front teeth on the long back end. (90-92)

2016 Volnay Taillepieds 1er Cru Bright medium red; more saturated than the Les Aussy. Musky, slightly reduced aromas of redcurrant, boysenberry and violet. Fine-grained and classically dry but not at all austere, conveying considerable early complexity to its flavors of purple fruits and subtle saline minerality. Finishes quite refined, with a serious dusting of smooth tannins and lingering notes of black raspberry and menthol. Lovely potential here. This shows a relaxed quality in the way of so many 2016s that escaped the frost. (91-93)

2016 Volnay Caillerets 1er Cru Barely medium red. Precise soil-driven aromas of purple fruits and dried flowers hint at a sexy carnal quality. Pliant and fruit-driven, conveying a

restrained sweetness to its dark berry, spice and herb flavors. In a distinctly lighter style than the 2015 version but wonderfully spicy, pure and long. This classy Caillerets has the firm structural underpinning to age gracefully. (I will wait to taste Bitouzet's 2016 Volnay Clos des Chênes from bottle, as it finished its malolactic fermentation in cuve and was sulfured shortly before my visit and was tough going in November.) (92-93)

2016 Volnay Pitures 1er Cru Barely medium red. Ripe but high-pitched aromas of raspberry, strawberry and licorice complicated by a captivating floral quality. The plushest and sweetest of these young '16s but also with terrific inner-mouth lift and an element of delicacy to its precise red berry, salty mineral and soil flavors. This sexy, classy wine finishes with rather massive dusty tannins that avoid dryness. (Bitouzet describes this wine as "the German cousin: another branch of the family.") It strikes me as suaver than its even more tannic 2015 sibling. (92-93)

2015 Volnay Medium red. Ripe aromas of cherry, raspberry and menthol. Offers good stuffing for village wine, but with a touch of menthol coolness to its red berry and spice flavors. Seriously rich wine with good palate presence. 89

2015 Beaune Cent-Vignes 1er Cru (from vines planted in 1986 and 1987): Medium red. Aromas of plum and smoke show a touch of reduction. Round and slightly sweet on entry, with its redcurrant and plum flavors showing a slightly leathery quality in a Beaune way. Tightens up on the back half, finishes with serious, slightly drying tannins that will require some patience. Incidentally, some of these vines were replanted in 2012 due to snow and frost in 2009, and will begin to go into the final blend with the 2017 Cent-Vignes. 89+

2015 Volnay Les Aussy 1er Cru (13.6% alcohol): Medium red. Deep, ripe scents of raspberry and minerals. Plush and fine-grained but a bit darker and fresher than the Beaune Cent-Vignes, conveying a more delicate quality to its flavors of redcurrant, red cherry, menthol and fresh herbs. Ultimately a bit darker and fresher than the Cent-Vignes, and distinctly juicier and sappier on the finish. The tannins are fine-grained. 91

2015 Volnay Les Mitans 1er Cru (13.5% alcohol; from vines planted in 1986): Deep medium red, the most saturated among Spicy aromas of redcurrant, licorice and mocha are riper and deeper than those of the Les Aussy. Plush, silky and fairly large-scaled, showing a distinctly spicy character to its darker fruit flavors. Finishes broad and classically dry, with a mouthful of dusty, slightly aggressive tannins and some alcoholic warmth. Seems a bit more energetically extracted than the Les Aussy and will probably need more time in the cellar. 91

2015 Volnay Taillepieds 1er Cru (14.2% alcohol): Medium red. A hint of musky, resinous reduction to the aromas of cherry, wild strawberry and licorice. Fine-grained, dry wine with terrific concentration and depth to its dark berry and spice flavors. Actually begins a bit austere but serious, late-arriving tannins carry the fruit through a very long finish. This big, rich Volnay is slightly high-toned in a positive way. The yield here was a healthy 37 hectoliters per hectare in 2015, according to François Bitouzet. 92

2015 Volnay Caillerets 1er Cru (13.9% alcohol): Moderately saturated medium red. Sexy, lightly medicinal aromas of cherry, redcurrant and milk chocolate, with a touch of peppery, spicy lift. (Unlike the foregoing wines, which are from totally destemmed fruit, this cuvée was vinified with a small percentage of whole clusters for the first time.) At once denser and more delicate than the Taillepieds, more reticent in the middle palate but with lovely mineral precision to its flavors of raspberry, black cherry, licorice and spices. Shows less of the vintage's obvious warmth than the Taillepieds, no doubt due at least in part to the lightly peppery stem influence. This wine should evolve slowly and gracefully. 92+

2015 Volnay Clos des Chènes 1er Cru (vinified with about 20% whole clusters): Moderately saturated medium red. Sexy, musky aromas of fresh, ripe strawberry, raspberry, menthol and licorice. Quite penetrating for the vintage, with its touch of sweetness effortlessly carried by firm acidity cooling menthol and underlying minerality. This very sexy wine finishes firm and long, with a solid tannic spine and an element of saline complexity. Really spreads out on the end to dust the entire palate and vibrate. 92

2015 Volnay Pitures 1er Cru (25% vendange entier): Moderately saturated red. Strong musky reduction currently mutes aromas of plum, raspberry and spices. At once fat and dry, showing pepper and spice notes that may be from the stems. This strikes me as very unevolved, but does it have the inherent sweetness to reward cellaring? In any event, it's dominated in the early going by its rather severe tannic structure. 90

Domaine Georges Lignier

2016 Bourgogne Rouge Champs de la Vigne Palish red. Slightly medicinal cast to the aromas of cherry, redcurrant and menthol. Very supple, spicy wine with a faint iron taste and a pliant mouthfeel for its appellation. Much of this wine is from replanted six-year-old vines, which Stehly believes have contributed added energy to the end. (86-87)

2016 Gevrey-Chambertin Moderately saturated palish red. Rather reduced aromas of redcurrant and leather. Juicy acidity (which Stehly says is provided by his vines in La Fourneau) and calcaire minerality frame and enliven the flavors of redcurrant, cherry and spices. Finishes with dusty tannins and coffee and spice notes that reminded me of Morey-Saint-Denis. (Stehly's Chambolle-Musigny was too reduced to assess with confidence.) (87-89)

2016 Morey-Saint-Denis (no new oak used here or in the foregoing wines): Palish medium red. Spicy redcurrant and raspberry aromas are complemented by a suggestion of smoke. Subtly sweet and a touch reduced, showing good intensity and verve to its flavors of red fruits, brown spices and underbrush. Finishes with rather fine-grained tannins and a slightly rustic peppery nuance. (87-90)

2016 Morey-Saint-Denis Clos des Ormes 1er Cru (25% new oak): Palish bright medium red. Nose dominated by musky, rocky, smoky calcaire. A step up in silkiness, sweetness and depth from the village Morey but a bit reduced, displaying very good intensity to its flavors of redcurrant, tobacco, spices and saline minerality. Finishes with very good spine and length, with a lingering note of dried flowers. This wine comes from vines on very poor subsoil below Clos de la Roche; Stehly notes that it is "always strict when young and poor in color." (89-91)

2016 Gevrey-Chambertin Les Combottes 1er Cru (Lignier is aging this wine—and his grand crus—in 40% new oak): Moderately saturated bright red. Deep, alluring aromas of cherry and crushed stone. A step up in intensity and penetration from the Clos des Ormes, offering juicy, savory flavors of strawberry, cherry, spices and stone. Nicely delineated, juicy premier cru with a firm spine and terrific floral length. Really captures the salty minerality of this well-placed premier cru. (90-93)

2016 Clos Saint-Denis Grand Cru (half of these vines are 70 years old, the other half 60): Moderately saturated medium red. Musky, soil-driven scents of fresh red fruits, crushed rock, flint and rose petal. Penetrating and sharply delineated, offering terrific intensity to its flavors of red berries, sappy cherry, minerals and blood orange. At once salty and juicy, this very long wine leaves the palate perfumed. Stehly compares this wine to a Musigny in its youthful strictness, and it strikes me as a classic young Clos Saint-Denis that will need time in bottle

to expand. Stehly used to work mostly with spicy Cadus barrels for this wine but now uses one-third each Berthomieu and Tonnellerie du Val du Loire for his Clos Saint-Denis, as he feels these barrels are at once sweeter and more delicate. (91-94)

2016 Clos de la Roche Grand Cru (the estate owns five plots on a range of different soil, with the vines averaging about 60 years of age): Moderately saturated medium red. Aromas of cherry, strawberry and raspberry accented by brown spices; the nose suggests a bigger wine than the Clos Saint-Denis. The large-scaled and deeper in the mouth but tightly wound, with its red fruit flavors complicated by soil-driven notes of menthol, stone, dried flowers, spices and underbrush. A bit more powerful and tannic than the Clos Saint-Denis, this wine will also require a minimum of five or six years of aging upon release. (91-94)

2016 Bonnes-Mares Grand Cru (these vines on red soil in Chambolle-Musigny date back to 1926, with an average age of at least 70 years, according to Stehly; three barrels made, vs. a normal five): Bright medium red. Rather backward aromas of raspberry, menthol and spices convey a cool, lightly medicinal aspect. Densely packed and fresh, with a captivating sweetness perfectly countered by a salty element. The raspberry fruit is perfumed by dried rose petal and spicy soil tones. Finishes with terrific subtle floral length and lift. Stehly had previously harvested these vines late because he thought the fruit needed to be very mature, but he picked early in 2016 owing to the frost and liked the results so much that he may pick earlier in the future. Due to the small crop, Stehly vinified this wine in a small plastic tank and was unable to increase the fermentation temperature above 26 degrees C. (he prefers 30); this no doubt partly accounts for the wine's cooler perfume. (92-94)

2015 Gevrey-Chambertin Medium red with a slightly pale rim. Expressive aromas of strawberry, menthol, spices and underbrush. Offers good richness in the mouth, with an almost exotic flavor of cherry liqueur enlivened by a minty nuance. Finishes with a slightly peppery quality and sneaky length. 88

2015 Morey-Saint-Denis Palish medium red with a hint of amber. Inviting scents of strawberry, tobacco, dried rose, menthol and white pepper. Juicy, youthful, harmonious village wine with red fruit flavors complicated by red rose and saline soil tones. Lovely precision and delicacy here. Finishes with fine-grained tannins and sneaky length. 90

2015 Chambolle-Musigny Palish red with a healthy rim. Deeper-pitched and less forthcoming on the nose than the preceding village wines, showing an element of medicinal reserve to its aromas of cherry, herbs and spices. Bright and lively on entry, then quite closed in the mid-palate, with its savory red fruit and herb flavors conveying classic dryness. This substantial, tactile wine perks up the taste buds on the back end, finishing with fine-grained tannins. 89+

2015 Morey-Saint-Denis Clos des Ormes 1er Cru (picked at 12.9% potential alcohol and chaptalized to 13.1%, which Benoit Stehly described as typical for the vintage): Good medium red; darker than the village wines. Inviting ripe perfume of cherry, raspberry, dried flowers and crushed rock. A step up in silky ripeness from the estate's village wines, but also offering lovely inner-mouth energy and precision to its sweet, smooth flavors of red berries, mocha, minerals and flowers. There's more wine here! The rising spicy/floral finish displays substantial but fine-grained tannins and a leathery nuance. Perhaps a touch rustic but I like this. Clos des Ormes is the estate's largest holding, at two hectares, and includes a range of soil types and vine age. 91

2015 Gevrey-Chambertin Les Combottes 1er Cru (just 30 hectoliters per hectare produced in 2016): Bright, moderately saturated medium red. Deeply pitched scents of black cherry and menthol; showing less early perfume than the Clos des Ormes. Dark fruit flavors are sweet and concentrated, with ripe acidity giving energy and definition to the middle

palate. A rather powerful, structured wine but with tannins that show the finesse of the year's better examples. The rising finish features aromatic dark fruits and lingering sweetness. This may well shut down in bottle but it's sexy right now. 92

2015 Clos Saint-Denis Grand Cru Medium red, with a trace of development. Medicinal dark raspberry, menthol and earth aromas are complicated by dried flowers and cinnamon. Plush and rich in the middle palate in the style of the 2015 but still with lovely floral, menthol lift to its red berry and underbrush flavors. Very concentrated and fresh, conveying a restrained sweetness to its strong kernel of fruit. Really saturates the mouth and builds slowly on the finish, leaving behind a scent of dried flowers. 93

2015 Clos de la Roche Grand Cru The darkest color to this point among these 2015s: bright medium red. Alluring, vibrant perfume of raspberry, dark cherry and rose petal. Sappy and extract-rich, with its deep, slightly medicinal flavors of blueberry, dark raspberry and tart red cherry enlivened by elements of saline minerality and crushed rock. This very concentrated but youthfully backward wine finishes with outstanding length; compared to the Clos Saint-Denis, it's a bit less refined but more powerful. This may age longer owing to the richness of its tannins but it's also quite showy today. 93+

2015 Bonnes-Mares Grand Cru Palish red with a hint of amber. A bit cooler and more peppery than the Clos Saint-Denis and Clos de la Roche, with its reticent red fruit aromas complicated by herbs and menthol. Then densely packed, savory and intense, more about soil tones than primary fruit. Not a sweet style but youthfully penetrating. Finishes sweet, slightly medicinal and classically dry, with lingering salty and spicy qualities. A rather rigorous wine in the context of the vintage, but then this is Bonnes-Mares, which has traditionally been one of Burgundy's longest-aging grand crus. 92+