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Mâconnais appellations 2016

The Chardonnays from the five key appellations in this underrated Burgundy region offer some of France's most exciting and great-value wines, says Andy Howard MW

THE MACONNAIS WINE region, centred around the provincial town of Mâcon, is arguably one of the most exciting and dynamic areas of Burgundy. The wines have a distinctly southern accent – an interesting contrast to the more classically structured (and much more expensive) wines of the Côte d'Or. Chardonnay is dominant (80% of all wines), with a warmer, more generous character than the wines of Chablis.

Bordered to the east and west by the valleys of the rivers Saône and Grosne, the Mâconnais wine-growing area sits on complex subsoils formed about 200 million years ago. To the north, closer to the town of Tournus, the landscape is formed of wooded hills and small valleys with many different aspects creating distinct terroir characters. Further south, large stone outcrops start to dominate, the most famous being the Rock of Solutré which dominates the vineyards of Pouilly-Fuissé.

Based on 2016 figures, the total area under vine exceeds 5,600 hectares of white wine, with 70% of production under the Mâcon, Mâcon-Villages and Mâcon named village appellations. The latter is an excellent source for well-made, highly affordable white Burgundy; however, it is the neighbouring AC's of Pouilly-Fuissé, Pouilly-Vinzelles, Pouilly-Loché, St-Veran and Viré-Clessé which provide some of France's most exciting (and well-priced) whites – worthy alternatives to the Côte d'Or's other more famous Chardonnays.

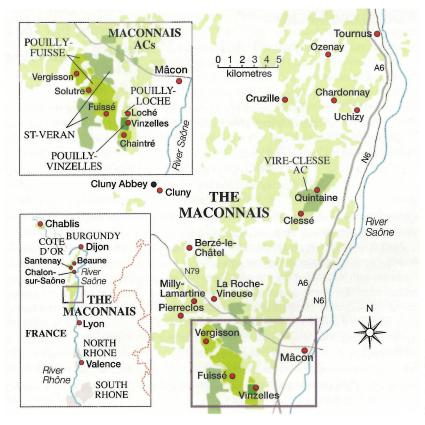
The five key appellations

Pouilly-Fuissé has led the way for years, but a fresher style is emerging. In the past, many wines were weighed down by excessive new oak and were popular in the US market at that time. Now the watchword is restraint, and wines increasingly use oak to emphasise – rather than dominate – the complex terroir. These modern styles are more aligned with current market tastes and offer great value when compared to other white Burgundies.

Neighbouring Pouilly-Vinzelles and Pouilly-Loché also merit attention, the former exhibiting real focus and minerality. St-Véran is also significant in size and, despite lying next to some of Pouilly-Fuissé's top sites, has a reputation for wines that are just a small step up from the named Mâcon villages. This does St-Véran a disservice as it also is a source of increasingly exciting options. All of these ACs are in the process of applying for a premier cru designation which, if approved, would cover more than 400ha of vineyards.

Viré-Clessé lives up to its quality elevation in 1999 with a style that offers richness, complexity and finesse. With some top producers here, it is well worth exploring.

Andy Howard MW is a regular Decanter contributor and judge who specialises in the wines of Burgundy



Mâcon: know your vintages

2016 Volumes cut by frost, hail and mildew, yet a potentially terrible vintage was saved by a warm and dry secondhalf. Lower alcohol than 2015, fine acidity and finesse. Keep.

2015 Healthy, ripe and round vintage but with acidity to balance. Concentration and power in the best wines will encourage further ageing. Drink or keep.

2014 A great white vintage with cooler weather promoting high acidity but also great

purity and wonderful restraint. Keep the best cuvées; otherwise drink.

2013 Another cool season with firm acidity when young. This has softened and the wines are drinking well now.

2012 Some hail but a long growing season with fine late weather led to a very good vintage. Drinking well.

2011 Underrated, as between 2010 and 2012. Yields higher than in subsequent years. Drink up if you have any left.

Mâconnais whites: the facts

Mâcon-Villages 1,985ha, 133,052hl Mâcon named villages

1,548ha, 97,911hl **Pouilly-Fuissé** 263 producers, 759ha, 35,671hl

St-Véran 201 producers, 730ha, 36,275hl

Viré-Clessé 56 producers, 432ha, 26,840hl

Pouilly-Vinzelles 32 producers, 54ha, 2,745hl

Pouilly-Loché 14 producers, 32ha, 1.76

producers, 32ha, 1,761hl >>

The results

Finding value in Burgundy is harder than ever, but this tasting confirms Mâcon as a great source, with Pouilly-Fuissé still the leading area. Christelle Guibert reports

MACONNAIS MAY BE seen as one of Burgundy's more humble sub-regions, but with stock shortages and prices creeping up across Chablis and the Côte d'Or, our trio of experts urged savvy consumers to take a closer look.

Emma Dawson MW said 'Burgundy is big challenge for Marks & Spencer, and we've been trying harder and harder to keep hold of a decent range under £20, so wines from the Mâconnais are becoming increasingly interesting because they definitely offer that.'

Stephen Brook recalled that 'a few decades ago, the Mâconnais used to be a sea of dullness. There were some good wines and good producers, but you really had to seek them out. That's changed, and the average quality is now much higher.' This tasting certainly demonstrated that, with our experts rating 93% of the wines Recommended or more.

Matt Wilkins MS was pleasantly surprised by the quality. 'You're guaranteed a certain amount of freshness with Mâcon, but the top wines here had an added dimension of energy and vibrancy.' But as with the rest of Burgundy, these wines will sell out fast, so if fresh whites are what you are looking for, then Wilkins advised 'getting in early before it's too late'. He added: 'With premium Burgundy as rare as hen's teeth, restaurants are going to jump on the Mâconnais, particularly when some producers in Chablis have lost as much as 80% of their crop, or even more.'

Alas, also like the rest of Burgundy, prices have crept up. Brook confessed: 'You used to think of Mâconnais whites as a bargain, but I don't think that's really true any more. When you think about the kind of Chardonnay you can get from South Africa or Australia for £20 or £25, Mâcon's producers have to be careful. With all the problems of small crops and wine shortages, prices have become slightly inflated. This is understandable, but at

'You're guaranteed freshness with Mâcon, but the top wines had added energy and vibrancy' Matt Wilkin MS

the same time the domaines still have to find a market and a few of them seem to be slightly pushing it.'

Dawson agreed: 'Customers still remember when they could get a Côte d'Or white for £30 to £50. If Mâcon wines are now commanding similar prices, they need to show that level of ambition and quality. From what I tasted, many are reaching that level, especially the wines from Viré-Clessé and Pouilly-Fuissé.'

As expected, Pouilly-Fuissé shone. Wilkins felt 'it was one area where you saw the diversity between classic, traditional and modern'. Brook concurred: 'What I look for in Pouilly-Fuissé is more exotic – almost tropical fruit such as mango or touches of pineapple – as well as wines of some structure and grip with a medium-term ageing ability. Some of the top wines here were really classy – they had power, density, complexity and showed the potential of the appellation. But you can't assume that everything that comes out of a fashionable area is going to be good. You've got to pick and choose.'

Viré-Clessé also had the thumbs up from our judges for delivering pure and fresh wines at excellent value. However, St-Véran failed to impress, the wines deemed simple and lacking dimension.

Across all the appellations, Dawson felt the unoaked or lightly oaked examples were the most enjoyable, showcasing their pure fruit characters. 'They don't need to try to mimic the Côte d'Or,' she said. 'They should find their own style and focus on that.'

The scores

139 wines tasted

Exceptional O

Outstanding

Highly Recommended

46
Recommended

Commended

7

Fair 3

Poor

Ο

Faulty O

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their 2016 white wines (two per producer) from St-Véran, Viré-Clessé, Pouilly-Fuissé, Pouilly-Loché and Pouilly-Vinzelles

The judges

Stephen Brook



Brook has been a contributing editor to Decanter since 1996. He is the author of almost 40 books, including The Complete Bordeaux, now the definitive study of the region,

and The Wines of California, which won three awards. His most recent book is The Wines of Austria. Brook also fully revised the last two editions of Hugh Johnson's Wine Companion.

Emma Dawson MW



Dawson is a wine buyer for supermarket Marks & Spencer, with Burgundy one of her many specialist regions. She studied wine while working in film and media and then moved into the

wine industry working for Sainsbury's. In 2018 she and her partner launched 52grapes.com, a free online project that challenges consumers to taste 52 grapes over 52 weeks.

Mark Wilkin MS



Wilkin is an awarded Master Sommelier who has worked in wine for 30 years, including at London's Michelin two-starred Capital Hotel Group. He now jointly owns wine company H2Vin,

which specialises in the Loire, Burgundy, Rhône, Spain and South Africa. He also teaches and examines for the Court of Master Sommeliers and judges at international wine competitions.

Outstanding 95-97pts



Domaine Ferret, Clos des Prouges, Pouilly-Fuissé

Decanter average score: 95/100pts Individual judges' scores: Stephen Brook 95 Emma Dawson MW 95 Matt Wilkin MS 95

£43 Hatch Mansfield, Luvians

Established in 1840, Domaine Ferret was a family-owned estate until 2008, when Burgundy titan Louis Jadot bought the property. Ferret has long been regarded as a key player in Pouilly-Fuissé, which arguably played a significant role in Jadot's decision. This wine comes from a 2ha vineyard planted on a gentle, east-facing slope in the heart of Fuissé. Fermentation and ageing takes place in barrel, one-third new. It then spends five months in stainless steel before bottling.

Stephen Brook A powerful nose – quite oaky – showing tropical and stone fruits. The rich, velvety palate is very concentrated, with fine tension and punch. It's still youthful and assertive, impressively dense and structured without seeming overworked. Long, mineral finish.

Emma Dawson MW Layered aromas of lemon, apple, wax and hay. On the palate it's tense and bright with great mineral focus. Flavours of lemon balm and honey combine with gentle, herbal bay notes. Vervy acidity is backed by a creaminess to balance and give depth to the finish.

Matt Wilkin MS Pronounced, forward, ripe blood orange, plus vanilla oak and savoury, grainy oatmeal tones. The palate also has a savoury side, yet is structured and energetic, with ripe fruit. It shows great focus, tension and restraint, with harmonious balance and persistence.

Drink 2019-2023 Alcohol 13.5%



Gilles Morat, Sur la Roche, Pouilly-Fuissé 95 sB 95 ED 95 MW 96

£29.50 Stannary St Wine Co

Gilles Morat took over a share in the family domaine in 1997. His wife Joëlle joined the business in 2004 after land holdings and productivity expanded. They have vines in St-Véran but are very much Pouilly-Fuissé devotees, with 17 parcels planted in Vergisson. 'We choose to work a smaller vineyard area to keep with our artisanal, organic approach,' says Gilles. The handpicked fruit is grown at 350m-400m altitude, and is fermented in barrel before spending a further 11 months on its lees.



Domaine Trouillet, Cœur de Pouilly, Pouilly-Fuissé 95 sb 95 ed 95 mw 95

£24.50 Exel Wines

Nestled near the base of the famous Rock of Solutré in Pouilly, Trouillet specialises in Pouilly-Fuissé while also dabbling in other appellations, including St-Véran and Mâcon-Solutré. Now in its fourth generation of family management, it has continued to increase its vineyard holdings, and what started out as a venture working 4ha of share-cropped land now boasts more than 20ha of vines. Cœur de Pouilly is the apex of Trouillet's output – a selection of the best plots, aged in oak barrels.

SB A rich melon and lemon curd nose with restrained oak. Rich, plump and fleshy, it has admirable breadth of weighty fruit, with good acidity and some cut from the oak, which also provides texture. It's perhaps not for the long haul, but is still a serious wine with good typicity, vibrancy and length.

ED Focused, elegant, waxy lemon aromas lead into a lean and pure citrus-led palate with a gentle, creamy weight. It has mineral finesse and subtle mushroomy undertones, followed by a gentle, lingering, nutty, brioche-rich finish with pure acacia honey notes. Lively acidity gives balance and promises a good life in the cellar.

MW Savoury melon, orange and stone fruit aromas are accompanied by refined seasoned cedar, classy nutty notes, and a floral edge with underlying chalk. There's juicy, upfront citrus intensity on the palate, flowing and full with good balance and fine saline persistence.

Drink 2018-2021 Alc 13.5%

SB Reticent melon nose with a whiff of woodsmoke. It's rich and broad, with weight and flesh, and it's just on the right side of heaviness thanks to its concentration and mineral bite. Perky and persistent, this should go the distance.

ED Sweet, honeyed stone fruit aromas with a waxy elegance. It's very tense and poised on the palate, with a linear focus to the citrus and bright apricot fruit, combining well with a gentle infusion of fresh, peppery vanilla spice. There's a gentle candied sweetness which adds depth, and the fruit remains fresh and bright to the finish, the vervy acidity promising an ageworthy wine.

MW Ripe, savoury melon, grilled nuts and toasted oak scents, with notes of vanilla, orange and stony earth. It has ripe stone fruit flavours on the palate, with a blood orange core. Weighted and balanced, it shows great energy, savoury movement and fine, saline persistence.

Drink 2018-2023 Alc 13% >

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Highly Recommended 90-94pts



Château des Rontets, Clos Varambon, Pouilly-Fuissé 90 SB 91 ED 88 MW 90

POA Berry Bros & Rudd

Restrained, savoury stone fruit aromas plus herbs and lemon balm. Bright, racy and zesty, the palate has a citric tang and a pithy, saline finish that shows tension. Atypical, but attractive and long, **Drink** 2018-2023 **Alc** 13%



Clos des Rocs, En Chantone, Pouilly-Loché 90 SB 90 ED 90 MW 89

£29.50 Stannary St Wine Co

Spicy, waxy aromas are joined by apple pie and stone fruits. To taste, it's creamy, textured and rich. The acidity provides the perfect foil to the concentration and density, leading to a lively finish. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13.5%



Closerie des Alisiers, St-Véran 90 SB 90 ED 91 MW 90

N/A UK +44 (0)3 80 52 07 71

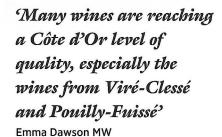
A reticent nose of ripe melon, tangy cream and a light, smoky tone. There's a nice texture to the palate, with flavours of ripe green apple, citrus and quince, plus mineral undertones. Pure, bright and complex, with lovely integrated acidity. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 12.5%



Domaine Carrette, Les Crays, Pouilly-Fuissé 90 SB 92 ED 89 MW 90

N/A UK www.domaine-carrette.fr

A gently smoky nose of lanolin, oatmeal, apricot, cedar and flowers. Rich yet sleek, this has fine texture and depth of fruit. The acidity brings persistence and finesse. Very attractive and fine tuned. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 13%





Domaine Carrette, Ronchevat, Pouilly-Fuissé 90 SB 91 ED 89 MW 91

N/A UK www.domaine-carrette.fr

Savoury aromas of oatmeal, seasoned oak and wax backed by ripe melon and stone fruit. This has vigour and drive, with tart apple and citrus brightness, a smoky, buttery richness as well as clove and cinnamon. **Drink** 2019-2022 **Alc** 13%



Domaine Chataigneraie-Laborier, Gilles Morat, Belemnites, Pouilly-Fuissé 90 SB 88 ED 92 MW 90

£27.95 Stannary St Wine Co

Candied peel aromas join tropical fruit, apricot compote and a chalky undertone. The silky palate has soft vanilla and lemon curd richness, balanced by lovely energy and a fine texture. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13%



Domaine Chataigneraie-Laborier, Gilles Morat, St-Véran 90 SB 91 ED 89 MW 89

£22.50 Stannary St Wine Co

A pretty nose of ripe citrus fruit, apple, apricot and melon. The palate is sleek and fresh with a sweet and sour character. It's linear but driven, with intense fruit and zesty acidity before a honey-rich finish. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13.5%



Domaine de la Croix Senaillet, Les Buis, St-Véran 90 SB 89 ED 91 MW 90

$£19 \ \, \text{Bancroft Wines, Domaine Direct, Goedhuis \& Co,} \\ \text{L'Art du Vin, Thorman Hunt}$

Chalky, mineral aromas – almost Chablis-like – with stone fruits, citrus and white flowers. It's creamy in texture, with lemon, green apple and a hint of mushroom leading to a spicy finish. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13%



Domaine de la Croix Senaillet, Les Rochats, St-Véran 90 SB 88 ED 92 MW 91

£19 Bancroft Wines, Domaine Direct, L'Art du Vin,

A savoury, chalky nose is bolstered by quince, citrus and kumquat. Vigorous, youthful and intense with a saline richness, bold acidity and a nervy mineral finish. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13%



Domaine du Mont Epin, Breillonde, Viré-Clessé 90 SB 90 ED 89 MW 92

£17.50 Thorman Hunt

Citrus, stone fruit and oak aromas. Bright and zesty flavours replicate the nose. The oak is slightly obtrusive now but should integrate into the weighty palate. There's white pepper on the long finish. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13%



Domaine Ferrand, Le Vin au Feminin, St-Véran 90 SB 89 ED 90 MW 91

£17.60-£20.49 Exel Wines, Hallgarten, Nickolls & Perks, Strictly Wine

Ripe melon, apple, orange, peach, apricot and honeysuckle nose. The palate has vibrant fruit, a lively mineral backbone and a quinine slant on the zesty finish. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13.5%

Highly Recommended (continued) 90-94pts



Domaine Luquet, Cuvée Terroir, Pouilly-Fuissé 90 SB 90 ED 92 MW 88

£19.99 Laithwaite's

A vigorous nose of mango, melon, stone fruits, oatmeal and apple blossom. Rich and voluptuous in the mouth, it has a crisp edge of citrus and floral notes. This needs a bit more time to fully integrate, but is showing its potential form. Drink 2018-2022 Alc 13%



Domaine Sangouard-Guyot, Au Brûlé, St-Véran 90 SB 88 ED 92 MW 89

£19.50 City Wine Collection

Savoury but ripe melon on the nose, along with touches of orange, papaya, apricot and hazelnuts. Fresh but silky, the palate has a biscuity spice with gentle, creamy undertones and a long, finely spiced, perky finish. Drink 2018-2020 Alc 13%



Domaine Sophie Cinier, Collection, Pouilly-Fuissé 90 SB 87 ED 92 MW 91

£29.90 Clark Foyster

Delicate apple and apricot aromas are joined by patisserie cream, cedar, chalk and nuts. The palate is brisk, with notes of preserved lemon, sea-salt, vanilla pod and sweet citrus fruit. It manages to marry elegance with power.

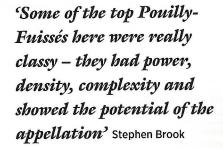
Drink 2018-2022 Alc 13.5%



Gilles Morat, Terroir de Vergisson, Pouilly-Fuissé 90 SB 89 ED 90 MW 92

POA New Generation Mckinley

An exotic nose of banana, ripe citrus, toasted nuts and orange blossom. Concentrated yet svelte, it has lots of ripe, energetic stone fruits backed by lifted acidity, which lends tension. Gentle toffee finish. Drink 2018-2022 Alc 13%





Henri de Villamont, Les Vaudrans, Pouilly-Fuissé 90 SB 89 ED 90 MW 91

N/A UK www.hdv.fr

Big and grippy, with aromas of lemon curd, stone fruits, chalk, grapefruit and toasted nuts. It has heft and weight, but the fruit matches up to the oak, and the finish is textural, persistent and zesty. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13%



Joseph Burrier, Château de Beauregard, Pouilly-Fuissé 90 SB 88 ED 92 MW 89

POA Domaine Direct

Broad nose of baked apple alongside melon, banana, stone fruit and cedar oak. Textured and concentrated, this is nonetheless fresh and sleek, where the fruit has been allowed to shine above the oak. Drink 2018-2021 Alc 13%



Meurgey-Croses, Vieilles Vignes, Viré-Clessé 90 SB 88 ED 93 MW 90

£18.50 Private Cellar

Rich, creamy lanolin aromas are partnered by restrained stone fruits, while the supple, textured palate features an underlying mineral seam overlaid by tropical fruit. This has drive and energy, with the oak playing a seamless supporting role. Drink 2018-2020 Alc 13%



Olivier Merlin, Sur la Roche, Pouilly-Fuissé 90 SB 89 ED 89 MW 92

POA Berry Bros & Rudd

A bold nose of mandarin, toasted nuts, papaya, melon and vanilla. It's perky, lively and silky in the mouth, delivering flavours of orange peel, honey, caramel and melon, with underlying smoke. Good tension, focus and persistence, Drink 2018-2022 Alc 13%



P Ferraud & Fils, La Chardonneraie, St-Véran 90 SB 86 ED 92 MW 92

N/A UK www.ferraud.com

Ripe but savoury orange, mandarin and stone fruit aromas, with a chalky undertone. The palate is energetic, with good weight and pitch, and boasts a long, savoury finish with a yoghurt note. Drink 2019-2022 Alc 13%



Rijckaert, En Crêches, St-Véran 90 SB 89 ED 92 MW 90

POA Bibendum

Rich, buttery aromas of mango, citrus, apricot compote and honey lead into a full-bodied, creamy palate layered with fruit and spicy oak. This is complex, full-throttled and ambitious, with a long and zesty finish. Drink 2018-2021 Alc 13%



Rijckaert, Les Vercherres, Viré-Clessé 90 SB 89 ED 93 MW 87

POA Bibendum

A rich, broad-grained, toasted oak nose with melon, apricot, butter, honey, and an underlying mineral seam. Rich, creamy and lush, the palate has buttery richness and smoky complexity. Needs time but has fine potential. **Drink** 2019-2022 **Alc** 13% ➤

My top three Stephen Brook

- Domaine Ferret, Clos des Prouges, Pouilly-Fuissé A fine estate bought in 2008 by Jadot. From just 2ha, this is one of a number of single-vineyard wines, and is aged in one-third new oak. Classic Pouilly-Fuissé: structured, richly fruity and powerful. 95 Drink 2019-2023
- **Gilles Morat, Sur la Roche, Pouilly-Fuissé** Morat is a rising star, and Sur la Roche is consistently fine. This is mineral, structured and seductive, and has great cellaring potential. A dazzling successor to 2014. **95 Drink** 2018-2023
- Bret Brothers, Climat La Verchère, Viré-Clessé The négociant label of La Soufrandière, a consistently impressive biodynamic domaine. This cuvée shows how fine Viré-Clessé can be. Great potential. 92 Drink 2018-2022

My top three

Emma Dawson MW

- Domaine Trouillet, Cœur de Pouilly, Pouilly-Fuissé 2016 The vibrancy and tension made this stand out with a mineral finesse you'd expect from the Côte D'Or paired with the richer fruit of the Mâconnais. 95 Drink 2018-2021
- Bret Brothers, Climat La Verchère, Viré-Clessé 2016 Seriously enticing wine. Ripe creamy apricots and white peaches, well-judged cinnamon and coconut oak and a zesty tingle to the fine structure. 93 Drink 2018-2022
- Rijckaert, Les Vercherres, Viré-Clessé 2016 I first met winemaker Florent Rouve in Jura and from there discovered his Mâconnais wines. They represent excellent value for money with more flavour than most Viré-Clessé wines. 93 Drink 2019-2022

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

My top threeMatt Wilkin MS

- Pouilly-Fuissé 2016 Grown on shallow soils of Vergisson's southeast slopes.

 Tactile, ripe, savoury, nutty and smoky with great energy, this conveys fine saline persistence. 96 Drink 2018-2023
- Domaine Ferret, Clos des
 Prouges, Pouilly-Fuissé 2016 Audrey
 Braccini delivers power and grace from
 this 2ha amphitheatre surrounding Fuissé
 itself. Forward blood orange, vanilla and
 oatmeal on a punchy palate, that is
 structured and and energetic with great
 focus and restraint. 95 Drink 2019-2023
- Domaine Trouillet, Cœur de Pouilly, Pouilly-Fuissé 2016 From the best plots at the heart of Pouilly. Marie-Agnès and son William deliver an impressive wine that is ready to enjoy. Bright, zesty upfront stone fruits, refined cedar, nuts and floral notes with great structure and length. 95 Drink 2018-2021

