

THE POUR

12 Top-Tier (but Undervalued) Burgundy Producers

Though prices for prized Burgundies are orbiting the moon, you can still enjoy many bottles at more down-to-earth rates (relatively speaking).



By Eric Asimov

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Burgundy is glorious. Everybody knows it. And that is a problem.

Over the last 20 years, prices for Burgundy, both reds and whites, have rocketed upward as growing demand for the wines has far outrun the supply.

Financial trackers might quibble as to whether Bordeaux or Burgundies are the better investments, but ordinary consumers who love to drink Burgundy, not resell it for profit, agree on one thing: Without the resources of a hedge-fund manager, they are mostly out of luck.

That is not strictly true. Becky Wasserman, an American wine broker in Beaune who has done more than anybody over the last 40 years to introduce Americans to the best in Burgundy, insists that wonderful wines are available at all prices.

She points primarily to lesser-known appellations and regional wines from good producers. And she is right. Even though prices for the best Burgundies are now orbiting the moon, you can still enjoy many bottles at more down-to-earth rates, which, for Burgundy, means under \$50.

This is an excellent strategy. Yet it is not always satisfying for anybody who wants to understand Burgundy in its fullest dimension — which not only encompasses great bottles, but a way of thinking about wine and its meaning that has captured the imagination of people the world over.

In this view, every bottle of Burgundy lives somewhere on a spectrum of potential distinctiveness and greatness. At the base lie regional wines, Bourgogne Rouge or Bourgogne Blanc, bottles that have the capacity to represent the general character of Burgundy, but not the intricacy of more specific places.

With each step higher, the wines become more coveted and more expensive. A leap up from regional wines are village wines, in which the grapes come from vineyards that express the essence of villages that over time have demonstrated their singular personalities, like Nuits-St.-George, Vosnes-Romanée and Volnay, just to name some of the more famous ones.

Next are the premier crus, particularly good vineyards that can amplify distinguishing traits of a village. And at the top are grand crus, in which the character of a vineyard transcends all other categories. These are the exorbitant few, with hallowed names like Chambertin, Musigny and Montrachet.

This way of thinking about wine, in which its potential is defined by the place it is grown — by its terroir — has influenced almost every great wine region and conscientious winemaker in the world. It has far eclipsed the Bordeaux notion that judges the quality of a producer by the price its wine fetches.

For this reason, wine lovers crave the opportunity to drink Burgundy — or at minimum to taste it — at every level, if only to understand the notion of a grand cru in relation to wines judged to have less potential.

Wine, and Burgundy, are never that clear-cut. Other variables come into play beyond the vineyard hierarchy: the philosophy and skill of the growers and producers, primarily. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the desire to try the foremost examples, at least a few times.

Let's stipulate that the best Burgundies, the premier crus and grand crus, are going to be exorbitant. But the level of exorbitance rises with the most famous and most exalted producers, legendary names like Romanée-Conti and Leroy, Rousseau and Roumier, Leflaive and Coche-Dury, Lafon and Roulot.

The good news is that Burgundy is full of less-heralded great producers, those whose names do not yet make the wines too expensive to drink. They would still be a splurge for most people — \$100, say, for a premier cru bottle, but the equivalent from a more heralded producer might cost twice that.

These producers may be young and new, or perhaps they took over an underperforming family estate. Some may not have access to the most illustrious terroirs, but do great work with what they have. Others may not be able to afford to own vineyards, so they buy grapes.

None of these names are truly under the radar. The world's molecular obsession with Burgundy does not permit that. But for whatever reason, in my opinion, they offer good value relative to the more celebrated names, and exceptional insight into what makes good Burgundy so revered.

If you want to drink Burgundy without climbing the most daunting financial peaks, here are 12 wonderful producers, in alphabetical order, whose prices may be steep, but are not quite so challenging to scale.



Cyprien Arlaud's wines at Domaine Arlaud are fresh, fine and pure.
Romain Etienne for The New York Times

Domaine Arlaud

Since Cyprien Arlaud took over his family estate and moved to biodynamic viticulture, the freshness, finesse and purity of the wines has improved noticeably. Arlaud, based in Morey-St.-Denis, makes a wide range of Côte de Nuits reds, with fine choices in village, premier cru and grand cru. Aside from the estate wines, good négociant wines are labeled Cyprien Arlaud. (Skurnik Wines, New York)

Domaine Ballot-Millot

This domaine, run by Charles Ballot, is based in Meursault and specializes in white wines that are racy, energetic and fine, rather than extravagant and sumptuous. There are also some very good reds from Volnay. (Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, N.Y.)

Simon Bize et Fils

The Bize domaine is well known, yet the wines almost always seem to be reasonably priced in the context of other Burgundies, with village wines starting around \$50. Perhaps this is because the terroirs, both white and red, of Savigny-lès-Beaune, its home territory, are not universally esteemed. Regardless, the wines are graceful, limpid and entrancing, and I almost always love them. (Grand Cru Selections, New York)

Domaine Chandon de Briailles

The proprietors, the de Nicolay family, make natural, pure, delicious whites and reds that reward aging. They do make grand cru Cortons, both white and red, but most of their production is village and premier crus from Savigny-lès-Beaune, Pernand-Vergelesses and Aloxe-Corton. The reds are spicy and expressive. Highly recommended. (David Bowler Wine, New York)

Chanterêves

This négociant, the husband-and-wife team of Guillaume Bott and Tomoko Kuriyama, dates back only to 2010, has its roots in Simon Bize and is likewise based in Savigny-lès-Beaune. Its wines, whites and reds, are gorgeously transparent, fresh and unadorned. They are excellent values. (Grand Cru Selections)

Jean-Philippe Fichet

Here is a prime example of a wonderful grower and producer who is underestimated because he does not have access to the great terroirs. Jean-Philippe Fichet is based in Meursault. He makes a number of white wines from specific village terroirs like Le Tesson and Les Gruyaches that are distinctive enough to have their own names but are not judged to be premier cru. Regardless, they are lovely wines that burst with energy and linearity. (Polaner Selections)

Domaine Génot-Boulanger

This fourth-generation family domaine owns vineyards throughout the Côte d'Or, the heart of Burgundy. It is not well known, but the wines, both whites and reds, are exceptionally true to their terroirs, and are good values. (Grand Cru Selections)

Benjamin Leroux

Benjamin Leroux does not come from a winemaking family, and so inherited no vines. After managing Domaine du Comte Armand, a fine Pommard estate, for many years, he struck out on his own as a micronégociant making small quantities of wine from up and down the Côte d'Or. Mr. Leroux is a thoughtful, questing winemaker whose aim is to understand each parcel of land with which he works. The wines are terrific examples of their terroirs. (Verity Wine Partners, New York)



Pierre Morey, whose wines are focused, precise and understated.
Michel Joly for The New York Times

Domaine Pierre Morey

Over the years I've had many wonderful wines from the father-daughter team of Pierre and Anne Morey, and yet this estate, based in Meursault, remains one of Burgundy's most underrated. Perhaps it's because the wines are understated and seemingly modest. Still, both the red and the whites, from regional to grand cru, are exquisite and beautifully calibrated. The fine négociant wines are labeled Morey-Blanc. (Grand Cru Selections)

Domaine Jean-Claude Rateau

I hesitate to mention this estate because the wines are hard to find. But they are so fresh and seductive, both reds and whites from village and premier cru sites in Beaune, that they are worth seeking out. Mr. Rateau farms biodynamically, which is no longer news in Burgundy, but it was when he began in 1979. This commitment shows up in the wines as well. (Fruit of the Vines, New York)

Domaine Marc Roy

Alexandrine Roy took over her family estate at a young age, yet the wines under her direction have shown uncommon precision and depth. This estate, based in Gevrey-Chambertin, owns only village terroirs, but the wines are superb examples of the depth that even village Gevrey-Chambertin can offer. (Skurnik Wines)

Domaine Trapet Père & Fils

Unlike Domaine Marc Roy, Domaine Trapet has holdings in some of Gevrey-Chambertin's finest terroirs, including the grand cru vineyards Chambertin, Chappelle-Chambertin and Latricière-Chambertin. These are all excellent wines: fine, elegant and aromatic, concentrated but never weighty. (Polaner Selections)

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