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16 Bracing Jura Whites – New Reviews of Savagnin and Chardonnay from France

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I've been calling for folks to check out Jura wines for nearly 10 years now, and during that time it's been exciting to see this small region's profile grow—even if in just some niches of the consumer market.

Named for the mountain range that runs through the region, the Jura's vineyards cover a 60-mile stretch of land, with about 5,000 acres of vines. Sitting just east of Burgundy, the Jura also shares some similarities with its more famous cousin, namely a vein of limestone running through its soils and a general reliance on Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Even some well-known Burgundian vintners, lured by those similarities, as well as both proximity and cheaper land prices, have moved into the region in recent years to augment their production from the Cote d'Or.

I generally prefer the whites to the reds (which rely on Poulsard and Trousseau in addition to Pinot Noir). The reds at their best are merely ephemeral, and at their worst are often marred by brett, reduction or fizzy texture (if not a combination of all three). The whites, on the other hand, with the Savagnin grape an important player, show what the Jura does best. The wines are flattering yet bracing, with taut, slightly oxidized textures that

feature pure orchard fruit cores and finishes that ripple with salted butter and mineral notes.

Even the region's dessert wine, vin jaune, is dry in style, relying on Sherry-like notes of walnut and almond rather than the unctuous sweetness of, say, a Sauternes or late-harvest Chenin Blanc from the Loire. Try serving it with Comté, the region's best-known cheese.

If you're new to the whites of the Jura, I'd recommend starting with a producer such as Tissot, whose wines straddle the line between the fresh and oxidized versions. Next, proceed to the more distinctive wines of Jean-François Ganevat, Philippe Bornard and Les Chais du Vieux Bourg, from vigneron Ludwig Bindernagel.

LES CHAIS DU VIEUX BOURG Côtes du Jura Vin Jaune 2004 Score: 92 | \$90 / 620ml

Very lively, with piercing orange zest, chamomile, hazelnut husk, dried lemon peel and white peach notes rippling through a long, finely tuned finish. Hints of dried peach and mango flicker in the background, lending a hint of sweetness to offset the nervy side. Everything pulls together on the tightly coiled finish. Distinctive and delicious.

LES CHAIS DU VIEUX BOURG Savagnin Côtes du Jura 2011 Score: 92 | \$43

Alluring, with wet straw, verbena, lemon shortbread, warm brioche and quinine notes all weaving around a core of lemon curd and white peach flavors. The long finish has finesse and mouthwatering minerality.

LES CHAIS DU VIEUX BOURG Côtes du Jura BB1 2011 Score: 91 | \$38

This shows a lightly smoky edge, with warm hazelnut and matchstick hints giving way to creamed apple, white peach and white ginger notes. The long finish has a lingering verbena edge and a stony underpinning.

