



Wines of the Week

Samuel Billaud Chablis 1er Cru “Montée de Tonnerre” 2012
by Jancis Robinson

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Chablis is a boon for the purist lover of white burgundy. It ages so much more reliably and longer than many white burgundies from the Côte d'Or and oak is rarely a major player in its taste profile.

Because the Chablis region is so far north, vintages can vary enormously, but the most promising recent one has been 2012. Congratulations, then, to Berry Bros' Burgundy buyer Jasper Morris MW for putting together a fine collection of 2012 Chablis that looks set for a long life. I tasted eight of them recently and my tasting notes are published in our Burgundian assortment. I was most taken by the quality of two wines from the excellent Montée de Tonnerre premier cru. Gérard Duplessis, Montée de Tonnerre Premier Cru 2012 Chablis was most impressive, relatively evolved, and £2 less than the Samuel Billaud example, but is not as widely available and I would suggest drinking it between 2014 and 2019.

On the other hand, I'm predicting a much longer life for Samuel Billaud, Montée de Tonnerre Premier Cru 2012 Chablis, about 10 years from now. Just 13% alcohol, it's delightfully tight and tense at the moment, stuffed with crunchy green fruit and seems wonderfully chiselled and classic. (Any good Chablis should get the saliva flowing much more freely than most wines.)

Samuel Billaud (pictured) is the son of Jean Billaud and nephew of Bernard Billaud of Domaine Billaud-Simon who made great wines at this family domaine, sold to negociants Faiveley earlier this year, but left to found his own négociant business, the business model that has proved so successful on the Côte d'Or. (After his departure Billaud-Simon wines were made by the local oenologist Jean-Pierre Lédé.) As Jasper wrote in Berrys' tasting list, 'the brilliantly talented Samuel Billaud was finding family politics hard going... while he does not own the vineyards, he manages them himself, as well as crushing the grapes and vinifying the resulting wines. We can certainly recognise his winemaking style in these offerings'.

Apparently, this Montée de Tonnerre 2012 was made from the produce of two parcels, one farmed organically in the centre of the original six-hectare Montée de Tonnerre vineyard and vinified in oak, and the other unoaked parcel came from the Chapelot enclave within it. I thoroughly recommend this wine to enthusiasts of pure, crystalline Chardonnay, particularly those who are able to store it for a few years. Note that 2013 produced nicely balanced but lighter Chablis which will almost certainly have a shorter life than the 2012s.



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