



France, Burgundy: Chablis 2017 & 2018

featuring Samuel Billaud
reviewed by William Kelley

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Samuel Billaud

As I wrote last year, after parting ways with Domaine Billaud Simon after some 20 years, Samuel Billaud has established his own state-of-the-art winery in central Chablis, where he is ably vinifying the fruit of some four hectares of estate vineyards, supplemented by purchased grapes. Manual harvesting of ripe but bright fruit is the rule here, followed by fermentation at 16 degrees to 20 degrees Celsius in tank and inconspicuous wood and maturation for 15 to 18 months on the lees for the premiers crus. These are bright, nervy expressions of Chablis with plenty of concentration and length. In a sense, Billaud's evolution as a free agent has followed a similar trajectory to that of Billaud Simon under its new management. Producing classy wines of crystalline purity, this address already belongs on any list of Chablis's best, and the 2017s, revisited from bottle, are showing brilliantly. Billaud was one of several producers who observed that the vintage had tightened up with élevage, and all his 2017 offerings come warmly recommended.

2017 Chablis 1er Cru Fourneaux

From a parcel of 45-year-old vines that are farmed organically, the 2017 Chablis 1er Cru Fourneaux offers up a lovely bouquet of green apple, honeycomb, orange rind and dried white flowers. On the palate, it's medium to full-bodied, ample and layered, with a fleshy but well-defined core, concluding with a precise, delicately chalky finish. **(92 points)**

2017 Chablis 1er Cru Mont de Milieu

The 2017 Chablis 1er Cru Mont de Milieu confirms its strong showing last year, unwinding in the glass with aromas of peach, grapefruit and honeycomb, with some subtle musky floral tones waiting in the wings that I suspect will become more prominent with time. On the palate, it's medium to full-bodied, concentrated and gourmand, with racy acids and a long, saline finish. Billaud tells me that this was cropped at less than 20 hectoliters per hectare, and that shows. **(93+ points)**

2017 Chablis 1er Cru Montmains

Open and expressive, Billaud's 2017 Chablis 1er Cru Montmains soars from the glass with a lively bouquet of beeswax, citrus fruit, green apple, mint and white flowers. On the palate, it's medium to full-bodied, satiny and giving, with ripe acids, a fleshy core and a saline finish. **(91 points)**

2017 Chablis 1er Cru Montée de Tonnerre

The 2017 Chablis 1er Cru Montée de Tonnerre is also performing well, though it doesn't attain quite the heights I thought it might a year ago. A youthfully reserved bouquet of white flowers, citrus oil and honeycomb precedes a medium to full-bodied, satiny and enveloping palate that's nicely concentrated, concluding with a chalky finish but without the electric energy one looks for in a top vintage. **(92 points)**

2017 Chablis 1er Cru Séchet Vieilles Vignes

The insider's choice at this domaine is the superb 2017 Chablis 1er Cru Séchet Vieilles Vignes, a terrific wine that is amply living up to its promising showing 12 months ago. Unfurling in the glass with notes of ripe citrus fruit, white flower, crushed chalk and oyster shell, it's medium to full-bodied, ample and layered, with an elegantly textural attack, excellent concentration and the racy acids so typical of this site. The finish is long and penetrating. This comes warmly recommended. **(94 points)**

2017 Chablis 1er Cru Vaillons Vieilles Vignes

The 2017 Chablis 1er Cru Vaillons Vieilles Vignes derives from Le Vaillon itself, and this is a serious rendition, unfurling with aromas of fresh peach, white flowers, yellow orchard fruit, orange rind and fresh pastry. On the palate, it's medium to full-bodied, satiny and incisive, with an ample core of crisp, fragrant fruit and a saline finish. **(92 points)**

2017 Chablis Grand Cru Blanchot

Billaud's 2017 Chablis Grand Cru Blanchot was another wine cropped at very low yields, around 20 hectoliters per hectare in this case. Offering up a pretty bouquet of citrus blossom, peaches and pears that's subtly framed by a discrete touch of oak, it's full-bodied, satiny and layered, with a broad attack, a fleshy core and a precise but delicately exotic finish. **(93 points)**

2017 Chablis Grand Cru Bougros

Billaud produced a mere 450 liters of the 2017 Chablis Grand Cru Bougros, a full-bodied, fleshy wine that's deep and concentrated, redolent of honeycomb, orange rind and vanilla pod. Despite its broad shoulders, it's racy and precise and concludes with a saline finish, but it won't be easy to find. **(92+ points)**

2017 Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos

Cropped at a meager 15 hectoliters per hectare, Billaud produced only two barrels of the 2017 Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos. Offering up aromas of musky peach, mandarin and green apple, it's full-bodied, deep and textural, with the structure of a red wine on the palate. This is a powerful, super concentrated Les Clos, but it's also nicely balanced. **(94 points)**

2017 Chablis Grand Cru Les Preuses

The 2017 Chablis Grand Cru Les Preuses offers up lovely aromas of orange blossom, oyster shells, iodine and beeswax. On the palate, it's medium to full-bodied, fine-boned, elegant and precise, with ripe acids and a saline finish. It's a fine rendition of this ethereal climat. **(93 points)**

2017 Chablis Grand Cru Valmur

Billaud produced a mere 25 cases of the 2017 Chablis Grand Cru Valmur, a dense, blocky and muscular wine that evokes oatmeal and citrus oil. Long, intense and powerful, it's a serious wine, though it will be decidedly difficult to find. **(93 points)**

2017 Chablis Grand Cru Vaudésir

The 2017 Chablis Grand Cru Vaudésir is one of the highlights of the portfolio this year, wafting from the glass with aromas of aromatic citrus fruit, clear honey, oyster shell and almond paste. On the palate, it's full-bodied, concentrated and layered, with racy acids and an intense and penetrating finish. This will be well worth following for the better part of two decades. **(94 points)**

2017 Chablis Les Grandes Terroirs

Aromas of citrus blossom, fresh peach and green apple introduce the 2017 Chablis Les Grandes Terroirs, a medium to full-bodied, satiny and layered wine that's fleshy, fragrant and floral, with a lively but open-knit profile. Simon tells me that the usual blend of Les Parges, Chapelot and Les Cartes contains less Chapelot than usual due to the year's frosts. **(90 points)**

2017 Petit Chablis Sur les Clos

The 2017 Petit Chablis Sur les Clos confirms its strong showing last year, bursting with aromas of waxy lemon rind, white flower and orange, followed by a medium-bodied, pure and precise palate with a long, mineral finish. **(88 points)**

