



France, Burgundy: Mercurey Rising – Recent and Forthcoming Releases from the Côte Chalonnaise

featuring Jean-Charles Fagot
reviewed by William Kelley

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South of Chagny, Burgundy changes. The long escarpment of the Côte d'Or gives way to the rolling hills of the Côte Chalonnaise. Vineyards no longer dominate, instead sharing the landscape with cereals, pasture and woodland. This was a prosperous region once—witness the substantial walls of numerous enclosed vineyards and the faded grandeur of dilapidated mansions—but it has never truly recovered from the devastation wrought by phylloxera and two World Wars. Decline became a vicious cycle: denied the advantage of appellations that commanded a premium, growers pursued quantity over quality, planting high-yielding selections of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Agrichemical-intensive farming and machine harvesting became the norm. Vinification was often just as industrial, the objective being to bottle the wines and sell them as soon as possible. And in turn, the reputation of the Côte Chalonnaise suffered further. Today, even expert commentators are liable to dismiss these wines as unglamorously rustic quaffers that gain little with bottle age.

The time is ripe, however, to think again. There have always been high-quality outliers in the Côte Chalonnaise: the Joblot family's rich, red Givrays, for example, and Aubert de Villaine's long-lived Aligotés from Bouzéron. But in recent years their ranks have swelled. There are now increasing numbers of serious producers in the Côte Chalonnaise, breaking the vicious cycle that began with phylloxera. Their approaches differ but typically involve replanting with superior vine selections, working the soils, minimizing herbicides and pesticides, harvesting by hand and vinification and élevage along artisanal lines. Of course, some producers are further along this path than others, but the tendency is clear—in evidence, just as much among small, new

producers such as Xavier Moissenet's fledgling Domaine Les Champs de Thémis as it is at large and well-established addresses such as the Château de Chamirey.

Consumers willing to open their minds to the wines of the Côte Chalonnaise couldn't have picked a better time, as there's a lot to like in the 2015, 2016 and 2017 vintages. What's more, while pricing soars in the Côte d'Or, tariffs here remain modest and stable. I'd appeal to importers to pass on as much of the value as possible to their customers: some of the wines reviewed in this report sadly carry price tags in the USA that are double what the same wines retail for in France.

***2015** was hotter and drier here than it was in the Côte d'Or. A few of the reds display rustic tannins, which suggests phenolic ripening was arrested by hydric stress, and the whites are sometimes flabby and overripe. But the bulk of the reds are rich and generous, with concentration and structure to burn, but balanced by juicy acids. From the best addresses, it's a promising vintage for the cellar. **2016** was more consistent, producing deep, concentrated wines that are more classically Burgundian in profile than the richer, headier and more overtly sun-kissed 2015s. The reds will be charming in their youth and develop well, while the whites are fleshy but succulent, more serious from bottle than they seemed from barrel. **2017** is also shaping up to be an excellent vintage, generous and supple in style, equally successful for reds and whites. As ever, the tasting notes for individual wines will be more informative than any generalizations, since the Côte Chalonnaise encompasses such geographical and stylistic variety.*

***Jean-Charles Fagot:** Jean-Charles Fagot, proprietor of Corpeau's institution the Auberge de Vieux Vigneron (a restaurant well worth a visit for its wine list and rustic cuisine), also produces a range of wines under his own label, from both domaine and purchased grapes. Keenly priced, flavorful and expressive, they reflect a restaurateur's priorities, and they'd make excellent daily drinkers or by-the-glass pours. With higher appellation Burgundy becoming more expensive by the hour, they're well worth seeking out.*

2017 Auxey-Duresses Les Ruchottes

Reliably one of Fagot's best cuvées, the 2017 Auxey-Duresses Les Ruchottes exhibits notes of tart pear, lime zest and hazelnuts, subtly framed by new oak. On the palate, it's medium to full-bodied, with good depth and chewy extract, balanced by succulent acids. **(90 points)**

2017 Bourgogne Blanc Les Champs l'Huillier

The 2017 Bourgogne Blanc Les Champs l'Huillier is terrific, wafting from the glass with aromas of lemon oil, grapefruit pith and oatmeal. On the palate, it's medium to full-bodied, elegantly textural and tangy, with more depth and concentration than the Louères. It's a serious Bourgogne Blanc that over-performs for the price. **(89 points)**

2017 Puligny-Montrachet

Tasted from barrel, the 2017 Puligny-Montrachet is potentially the best of Fagot's whites, offering up classy aromas of lemon oil, sweet white flowers and iodine. On the palate, it's medium to full-bodied, elegant but concentrated, with a layered mid-palate and a nicely delineated finish. **(89-91 points)**

2017 Rully

Notes of peaches, green orchard fruit and subtle spice introduce the 2017 Rully, a glossy, medium to full-bodied wine that's gourmand, open-knit and succulent. A Rully that wears its heart on its sleeve, enjoy it over the coming 2 or 3 years. **(88 points)**

