

Beaujolais

Forget 'Nouveau' – real Beaujolais, especially the reds, are serious wines, and the past three excellent vintages show just why. By Rosemary George MW



BEAUJOLAIS WOULD BE one of my desert island wines, for the simple reason that it offers sheer pleasure with simple, uncomplicated drinking.

For Xavier Bardet of Maison Loron and vice-president of trade body InterBeaujolais, the charm and typicity of good red Beaujolais lies in 'the purity

of the fruits' – like cherries, raspberries, strawberries – which comes from the combination of the Gamay grape on granite soil. There is no other wine quite like it, for nowhere else anywhere in the world produces wines with such a wonderful combination of fruit and drinkability allied to refreshing acidity. Beaujolais is unique.

While it is true that the reputation of Beaujolais was tarnished by the fashion for Beaujolais Nouveau, these days Beaujolais (white, rosé and red) has become more serious and authentic. Overall quality has improved enormously, with a better understanding of viticulture and greater attention to work in the cellar, encouraged by an energetic generation of young wine growers.

Simple red Beaujolais is light and fruity; Beaujolais-Villages has a little more weight, and the 10 crus each have their subtle nuances: Chiroubles is the lightest, Brouilly the most fragrant, Fleurie is more floral, Juliénas and Côte de Brouilly are very similar, each with a certain structure, and Chénas has a different terroir, also making it more structured. St-Amour is spicy, while the newest cru, Régnié, has more body than some. Morgon can be quite tannic, and Moulin-à-Vent is the most ageworthy.

The classic vinification of red Beaujolais is semi-carbonic maceration, in that no extra carbon dioxide is

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added to the vat. This contributes to the fruity appeal of the wines. Old oak may be used to good effect, especially for the more structured crus, but new oak is quite inappropriate. And Beaujolais, particularly some of the more substantial crus, can age, but the character and taste change completely. 'Ca pinotte', as they say in the region, for more mature Beaujolais takes on the flavours of red Burgundy, with elegant notes reminiscent of Pinot Noir, though as a result it loses its vibrant freshness. It's still a good drink but it is not the same.

Nor should Beaujolais blanc or indeed Beaujolais rosé be ignored. They both account for a tiny part of the production of the appellation, but white Beaujolais certainly has its place, providing another interpretation of Chardonnay in the Burgundy region.

Beaujolais has had a run of three lovely vintages. For Bardet, 2009 is the best vintage since the legendary 1947, and the result of a perfect summer. 2010 followed with a more structured style – I found that some of the wines had lost their youthful fruitiness – and the 2011s, a vintage saved by a warm, sunny September, have lovely fruit. They are everything that good Beaujolais should be.

Rosemary George MW is an awarded wine journalist and author, and a regular contributor to Decanter. These were the best wines of those tasted, non-blind, at InterBeaujolais' trade tasting in London in June.

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George's Highly Recommended wines



Château Grange Cochard, Les Charmes, Morgon 2010 17 (90)

£15–£18 Berry Bros & Rudd, Jascots, Secret Cellar
Firm fruit on the nose. A touch of oak on palate, but very nicely integrated. Solid, ripe and sturdy – needs a bit of time. Stylish and characterful.
Drink 2013–2018 Alc 13%



Château Thivin, Brouilly 2011 17 (90)

£14.40 (2009) Nick Dobson
Firm, bright cherry fruit nose. Medium-weight palate with a youthful tannic streak. Good fruit and nice balance. Drink 2012–2015 Alc 12.5%



Domaine de Chênepierre, Moulin-à-Vent 2011 17 (90)

£13.95 Sipp
Firm, tight-knit nose and palate. Good structure balanced with ripe fruit. Plenty of potential.
Drink 2014–2020 Alc 12.5%