

Clark Foyster

SPECIALIST WINE IMPORTERS

BURGUNDY 2015 EN PRIMEUR

Well, it ends in a five, so it must be a great vintage. Is it? Yes I believe it is.

As the years pass, the number of vintages I have tasted increases. So when I say to myself that I have never been more impressed (or perhaps even never AS impressed as this year), I am comparing 2015 against a significant range of different years.

When I write my brief summaries to our Burgundy offer every year, perhaps I should clarify the limit of my experience. At Clark Foyster we get to know our producers well, in Burgundy and elsewhere. This is a very important part of our business philosophy. Most years in Burgundy I visit two or three other estates - some of whom subsequently end up as suppliers. But we don't spend a month making 100+ visits, and so my conclusions are limited to my own tasting experiences, conversations with growers, clients and other enthusiasts. There are caveats around this praise of 2015, I see; high alcohol being one. But if I assess the vintage on the limited number of wines I tasted and judge them on the balance, charm, intensity, complexity they showed me from barrel, then for me 2015 is a great vintage. There is ripeness, for sure, but there is freshness too. There is no shortage of terroir definition. For me it is a much better vintage than 2009 which, for all its charm, has a 2009-ness which dominated the terroir character. But in 2015, there is wonderful definition, and the individual characteristics of the crus shone out in a really impressive, heterogenous way.

How long will they need to be cellared? After the delights of the barrel tastings I want to write "who cares?" but of course this is vital. There is more structure this year than there was in the lovely 2014s, and most will need longer to come around. On the other hand there is this exuberance which we hope we will not lose. Will they be as tardy as the 2005s? I doubt it, and I hope not, but we have no crystal ball. A look at the weather conditions may shed some light here.

In all the difficult recent vintages: 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013 the opening gambit on the visit to the grower "Tell us about the vintage conditions; how was the growing season?" unleashed in reply a whole list of challenges, problems, difficulties and disasters narrowly averted. But there was none of that with 2015. It was not a perfect growing season, but it was pretty good. Winter was mild, spring was mild, occasionally hot in May, but overall dry. Flowering began at the end of May and finished mid June. Rain came after flowering

and provided sufficient reserves to keep the vines in good shape for the hot dry July which followed. August, slightly milder, brought just enough rain but without thunder or hail damage. Most of our growers began to harvest between the 7th and 12th September and brought in all their grapes in three or four days. Heavy rain fell on the 12th, but the grapes were in such good condition that this did little damage other than to delay harvest for a couple of days.

All our producers talked of small berries with thick skins; the result, no doubt, of the dry hot summer. Many of them consequently eased back on their extraction processes with pump-overs ('remontage') playing a more important role for some than the more intense punch-downs ('pigeage'). The 20-30% reduction in quantity after 2014's relative abundance is due in large part to the small size of the bunches, not the quantity of them.

PRICING

Early reports during the autumn of massive pricing hikes have not always materialised, but I'm afraid we have some significant increases. The Hospice de Beaune auction in November for the just-harvested vintage is always a useful indicator for growers of the market's confidence, and there were some significant reductions for the 2016s. So if there was early confidence of the market's willingness to pay big increases, then this has subsequently been tempered.

There are modest increases from some growers in the region of 2.5 to 5% but in the light of another tiny crop in 2016, this is modest. In other cases, often at the lower end, we have more significant increases of up to 15%. And of course then we have to compound the different exchange rate this year into the equation, which alone will bring increases in the region of 12.5 - 15%. On odd wines it's higher, but where growers' prices have not moved, the increase is 10%. Whatever we may feel about Burgundy pricing, we can't reasonably blame them for Sterling's slide since this time last year!

Our aim in buying Burgundy, and all the other wines we import, is to create relationships with producers for the long-term, and to trust them to understand the reality of our market. Some listen and absorb more carefully than others. But of course we have to listen to producers too, and particularly to take account of small harvests.

Of course if we must have the best, then we must pay, and at the very top end the law of supply and demand applies. Burgundy is unique, both the people and the wines, and we all love what they produce. Nowhere can come close to this style and quality of wine, and they know this.

But there are still bargains to be found. Look carefully at the wines of Audoin (Marsannay), Ravaut (Ladoix, Corton) Sophie Cinier. These producers offer terrific value by any standards.

Prices which follow are quoted in £ Sterling per bottle and per case of six and includes shipment from the winery into our bonded warehouse. Onward carriage to the customer's delivery address will be charged separately. Most wines come in cases of six or twelve, a few in cases of three. We have shown all case prices as six for the sake of comparison; we cannot guarantee that all cases will be available as six packs.

Shipment will take place in Spring and Autumn 2017. Wines will all be despatched or made ready for collection by customers as soon as possible after receipt in the UK as we are unable to offer extended storage to our customers.

Lance Foyster MW

Domaine Charles Audoin, Marsannay-la-Côte

Cyril Audoin is a 5th generation winemaker from this 13ha family domaine in the northern-most wine village of the Côtes de Nuits. He is apparently a rugby-loving, laid-back, relaxed young man, but he is also a focused and precise winemaker. Since our last visit, his romance with Britney has blossomed; she is now his wife and the mother to their sweet young daughter Charley.

Like all our producers, in 2015 he found the growing conditions benign in the extreme. They needed only one person to man the sorting table, such was the clean state of the fruit. There is perhaps a paradox here as these wines, albeit from a less exalted village, have structure, complexity, longevity but also elegance, which puts them in the 'very serious' category, even the excellent Bourgogne Rouge.

There is confidence and modesty here in balance and the wines are of exceptionally high quality. The 'village' wine, Cuvée Marie Ragonneau, is a blend of parcels, to contrast with the single vineyard wines which are all in line for 1er Cru status over the next few years. For now, they each cost significantly less than the village wines from further south. The domaine is well represented in these top sites, from Longeroies in the very north to Champs Salomon further south. Terroir varies throughout with the result that wines like Longeroies have a lovely easy charm for early drinking, while Favières has a more tannic structure and requires a little longer.

AUBOA15B	Bourgogne Aligoté	£51.00	£8.50
AUMAB15B	Marsannay Blanc	£102.00	£17.00
AUBOR15B	Bourgogne Rouge	£66.00	£11.00
AUMAR15B	Marsannay, Cuvée Marie Ragonneau	£99.00	£16.50
AUMLO15B	Marsannay, Les Longeroies	£129.00	£21.50
AUMFA15B	Marsannay, Favières	£144.00	£24.00
AUMCJ15B	Marsannay, Clos du Jeu	£129.00	£21.50
AUFIX15B	Fixin, Le Rozier	£138.00	£23.00

Domaine Fourrier, Gevrey Chambertin:

2015 is another year where pricing from the domaine has remained very stable. This shows admirable restraint, particularly when we see the prices realised on the secondary market.

After the crunchy freshness of 2013 and 2014 we have an obviously riper style in 2015 and with more viscosity. I clearly remember my barrel tasting of the 2005s and how impressed I was. For me this was a watershed year in my appreciation of the domaine. But I do remember discussions with others who detected a certain sameness and house style which, they felt, dominated the vineyard identity. But there was no similar doubt with the 2015s. The wines really leap out of the glass. They are bright-coloured, vibrant on both nose and palate with an irresistible sweet charm. The perfumes are spectacular in that gorgeous, shiny, pure Fourrier way throughout the whole range. Unlike some of his neighbours, Jean-Marie was in no way tempted to use the conditions of the vintage to experiment with any whole bunch fermentation, or to add back any stems. Extraction was gentle, with less pigeage than in recent vintages.

Malolactic fermentations happened in the spring of 2016, and then, as usual, the wines were held in barrel without racking. The wines all appeared nicely settled, and will be ready for bottling by early March. Jean-Marie likes to use the CO₂ naturally produced during fermentation and 'malo' to reduce the quantity of sulphur he has to add after the 'malo' has finished. He too commented on the small berries and the small quantity of juice released from the berries: 25 - 30% less than in 2014. They picked with a new team of harvesters this year, beginning at 7.30am and finishing at 2.30 pm, allowing them to harvest cooler grapes.

N.B. Gevrey Vieille Vigne is bottled with Diam corks.

DFBOB15B	Bourgogne Blanc	£93.00	£15.50
DFMSD15B	Morey St Denis, Clos Solon	£186.00	£31.00
DFGCH15B	Gevrey Chambertin, Vieille Vigne	£192.00	£32.00
DFGCC15B	Gevrey Chambertin, 1er Cru Cherbaudes	£336.00	£56.00
DFGCG15B	Gevrey Chambertin, 1er Cru Les Goulots	£396.00	£66.00
DFCAM15B	Gevrey Chambertin, 1er Cru Combe aux Moines	£396.00	£66.00
DFCSJ15B	Gevrey Chambertin, 1er Cru Clos St Jacques	£894.00	£149.00
DFGRI15B	Griotte Chambertin, Grand Cru	n/a	£165.00

Domaine Heresztyn-Mazzini, Gevrey Chambertin:

We've hit a new level this year at this domaine. Their intense effort and ambition since taking over in 2012 is paying off. If the first few years presented work-in-progress wines, albeit with some great successes already, I had the impression this year that everything has come together for 2015. There have been a lot of changes, as mentioned in last year's report, where I wrote that interest was snowballing. It was well-deserved then, but this year we have an avalanche. The move toward biodynamic principles for the whole estate continues. Tellingly, in the very tricky conditions of 2016, their faith in biodynamics remains undimmed. They have several illustrious neighbours who have abandoned this practice in 2016, but for Florence and Simon the success of their experiment in Les Goulots, one of the coolest, dampest and most challenging of their *climats* has convinced them to work in the same way throughout the domaine. So from the 2016 vintage, the estate is entirely biodynamic.

All the wines have a high proportion of whole bunches, up to 60% on the Clos St Denis. This is clearly a consuming passion for Florence who is convinced that this is the right way forward for them to vinify. It has certainly worked a treat in 2015. Like their neighbours, they applied a lighter touch to the extraction, reducing pigeage in favour of remontage. The wines are in 20 - 50% new oak. My notes for the 2015s comment on the brilliant texture of all the wines and the very gentle feeling of the tannins in what are in some cases very powerful wines. At the same time, the red fruit purity and precision of some of the wines - I might single out Les Goulots - keeps them thrillingly vibrant.

DHGCH15B	Gevrey Chambertin, Vieilles Vignes	£177.00	£29.50
DHGCV15B	Gevrey Chambertin, Clos Village	£198.00	£33.00
DHGCS15B	Gevrey Chambertin, Les Songes	£195.00	£32.50
DHGCI15B	Gevrey Chambertin, Les Jouis	£195.00	£32.50
DHGCP15B	Gevrey Chambertin, 1er Cru La Perrière	£276.00	£46.00
DHGCC15B	Gevrey Chambertin, 1er Cru Les Champonnets	£276.00	£46.00
DHGCG15B	Gevrey Chambertin, 1er Cru Les Goulots	£276.00	£46.00
DHMOM15B	Morey St Denis, 1er Cru Les Millandes	£306.00	£51.00
DHCSD15B	Clos St Denis, Grand Cru	£600.00	£100.00

Domaine Henri Jouan, Morey St Denis:

Visits to Philippe Jouan involve none of the formality one might observe at a grander *domaine*. It's small-scale, barely three hectares, spread over 10 parcels. Vine age is impressive, particularly in Clos Sorbé and Clos St Denis with an average of 70 and 60 years respectively. Rounded, soft, silky and charming; these are the words I find I use year after year. It means the wines are forward and work very well for drinking with a couple of years of age. This is the last year for Passetoutgrains, which will be pulled out next week (20th January) after being crippled by the 2016 frost.

There was a small percentage of whole bunches for the first time in 2014, and this continued in 2015 (less than 25%). Philippe did this, he says, to bring in a little more 'nervosité' (freshness). It's barely perceptible. He describes 2015, in his call-a-spade-a-spade way, as an *année de soleil*, with all the characteristics of a hot year, but with an exuberance of fruit which, despite the small berries, dominates over the more structured notes the wines possess. He will bottle at the end of January in order to preserve this explosive fruit which is so much a hallmark of the domaine's style. So, like every year, I am sure they will drink young (five to eight years is Philippe's optimum).

Wine is still sold in barrel to Joseph Drouhin - the Drouhin Clos St Denis is essentially Jouan's wine - but we've benefitted in recent years from an increasing proportion going under their own label. This proportion will continue to increase, and we are lucky to have a good allocation across the range. Hand bottling and labelling is a thing of the past now with the new bottling machine which arrived last year, but the wines are still bottled unfiltered and unfiltered.

DJPTG15B	Bourgogne Passetoutgrains	£39.00	£6.50
DJCOB15B	Côteaux Bourguignons	£57.00	£9.50
DJMSD15B	Morey St Denis	£165.00	£27.50
DJCHM15B	Chambolle Musigny	£177.00	£29.50
DJGCH15B	Gevrey Chambertin, Aux Echézeaux	£177.00	£29.50
DJMCS15B	Morey St Denis, 1er Cru Clos Sorbé	£294.00	£49.00
DJCSD15B	Clos St Denis, Grand Cru	£510.00	£85.00

Domaine François Bertheau, Chambolle Musigny:

François' crop is smaller by about 20% this year, resulting of course in a smaller allocation for us. Next year will be dramatically smaller still, meaning that in the five vintages from 2012 to 2016, there will be only 2014 where volumes were more or less normal and two with a quantity well below half. Nevertheless the quality is magnificent: classic Chambolle, with red fruit notes, minerals behind and then, this year in particular, with a slightly more prominent tannic back bone. François harvested a little later than some, beginning on 12th September, but he saw the quality of the fruit, and felt the grapes were in such good condition that he could afford to wait a day or two more. His decision was good.

Not for François the temptation to fiddle with a winemaking process which works for him well each year, so no whole bunches in 2015, and the same vinification and maturation which works so well for him year on year. Roughly 20% new oak is used across the whole range with the exception of the two new large *foudres* of 27 hectolitres. These have replaced the old ones which were leaking last year and in fact the totality of the Premier Cru wine (made up from small parcels of Beaudes, Noirots, Groseilles Gruenchers) has been matured in this vat.

This is a domaine where very little is done to 'make' the wine, though the wines exude the sense of a sympathetic and very delicate hand. The wines will be bottled in early February.

FBCHM15B	Chambolle Musigny	£228.00	£38.00
FBCPC15B	Chambolle Musigny, 1er Cru	£306.00	£51.00
FBCMC15B	Chambolle Musigny, 1er Cru Les Charmes	£426.00	£71.00
FBCMA15B	Chambolle Musigny, 1er Cru Les Amoureuses	£960.00	£160.00
FBBOM15B	Bonnes-Mares, Grand Cru	£1,050.00	£175.00

Domaine Confuron-Gindre, Vosne Romanée:

We first met to look at the 2010 vintage, and have bought with increasing enthusiasm ever since. François Confuron is from the well-known Vosne family, and his wife Claudine (née Gindre) is from Morey. Last year their son Edouard joined the family business and has plenty of ideas for the future of the domaine. This year they have stopped selling off a part of their crop to the *négociant*, so this will go some way to offset the shortage next year following bad frost damage in Echézeaux and Vosne Beaumonts.

There is a little more structure and density to the 2015s after the supple gentleness of the 2014s. These will need a little longer in bottle. But since we began buying the wines there has been a remarkable consistency to the vintages, and the odd bottles which remain of the first vintages which we bought make a fine impression, as do the occasional older bottles opened for us at lunch after tastings. It's a cold cellar here, and the wines are always among the most backward when it comes to en primeur tasting. There are a few whole bunch experiments here, and a modest reduction in the use of new oak - down to 25% for the village wines. Old wood fermenters are used, and the must gets a five to six day cold soak before fermentation and a total of up to three weeks on the skins with regular pigeage and some remontage. The style is structured, but the wines have great class and good ageing potential.

These wines offer fantastic value.

CGBOR15B	Bourgogne Rouge	£51.00	£8.50
CGGCH15B	Gevrey Chambertin	£150.00	£25.00
CGNSG15B	Nuits St Georges	£150.00	£25.00
CGVOR15B	Vosne Romanée	£156.00	£26.00
CGVRC15B	Vosne Romanée, 1er Cru Chaumes	£264.00	£44.00
CGVBR15B	Vosne Romanée, 1er Cru Les Brûlées	£264.00	£44.00
CGVBE15B	Vosne Romanée, 1er Cru Les Beaumonts	£264.00	£44.00
CGECH15B	Echézeaux, Grand Cru	£420.00	£70.00

Domaine Sylvain Cathiard et Fils, Vosne Romanée:

Sébastien hit the ground running in 2011 in his first vintage unsupervised by his father, Sylvain, and there have been impressive developments in the subsequent vintages. There have been subtle changes to viticulture, winemaking and *élevage* and Sébastien's quietly-spoken confidence is most impressive when he describes his winemaking. One senses he knows exactly where he is going. Of course he has some fabulous terroirs and has taken over a brilliantly-equipped winery and cellar, but these alone guarantee nothing. Having been impressed by the vintages from 2011 onwards, I know I am not alone in being blown away by the quality in 2015. These wines are spectacular.

He described the vintage as easy in the vineyard and easy in the cellar. It's a vintage with a 'grosse richesse' but a 'bel équilibre'. He began the harvest on 12th September - later than most and picked with forty pickers in three days. The wines had a good level of tartaric acid, but relatively low malic acid. He kept the wines cool as far as possible during *élevage* to delay the malolactic fermentation. He achieved his objective as some of the barrels were only completing their *malo* in November 2016. Vinification was as in 2014 and oak is now reduced to 50% new for village wines, rising to 66% for the top wines, using a lighter toast than previously.

The wines have explosive fruit, brilliant balance, and a gloriously supple texture - like thick velvet. With due respect to Sylvain, whom I have known and consistently admired since 1999, this was the finest barrel tasting I have made at this domaine.

SCBOR15B	Bourgogne Rouge	£126.00	£21.00
SCNSG15B	Nuits St Georges	£279.00	£46.50
SCVOR15B	Vosne Romanée	£279.00	£46.50
SCCHM15B	Chambolle Musigny, Clos de l'Orme	£300.00	£50.00
SCNUT15B	Nuits St Georges, 1er Cru Aux Thorey	£528.00	£88.00
SCNUM15B	Nuits St Georges, 1er Cru Aux Murgers	£588.00	£98.00
SCVRO15B	Vosne Romanée, 1er Cru En Orveaux	£600.00	£100.00
SCVRR15B	Vosne Romanée, 1er Cru Reignots	£600.00	£100.00
SCVRS15B	Vosne Romanée, 1er Cru Suchots	£720.00	£120.00
SCVRM15B	Vosne Romanée, 1er Cru Aux Malconsorts	£1,020.00	£170.00
SCRSV15B	Romanée St Vivant, Grand Cru	n/a	£460.00

Domaine Ravaut, Ladoix/Corton:

We made a positive start last year, introducing this domaine for the first time, and were pleased with the uptake by a range of different clients. Since the retirement of their father, the two brothers Pierre and Vincent have decided to separate the family domaine. Vincent retains, for now, the domaine name, and a little over half of the 18 hectares of the original estate which are located in Ladoix, Aloxe-Corton and Corton. The main emphasis is on red wine, though there is a fine Corton Charlemagne. There was a liveliness and freshness to the 2014s, but 2015 offers something altogether richer, denser, fruitier and spicier, with sweet notes and ripe cherry fruit perfumes.

It's worth pointing out that single domaine wines are a relatively recent development in the wine history of Burgundy, but that chez Ravaut this process was begun in the 1920's by the original Gaston Ravaut and his son, Pierre. They are situated right at the complex geological point where the Côte de Beaune becomes the Côte de Nuits.

There is a wide range of wine styles here from such a wide variety of terroirs that it is difficult to generalise about the style of the domaine. The Ladoix wines, at least where the vineyards have a high limestone component, including Basses Mourottes, are generally slightly earlier-maturing styles, with a prominent ripe red fruit note and charming perfume. Corton Bressandes also comes into this category. Most of Aloxe-Corton and other parts of Corton wines, just to the south of Ladoix, are heftier, their heavier marne (clay) soil producing more structured, powerful and tannic wines, generally requiring more time in bottle. The AC 1er Cru is a blend of Valozières, Vercots and Fournières and has impressive concentration, but 2015 seems also to have lent it much youthful charm.

Fruit is totally de-stemmed and fermentation takes place in concrete followed by a minimum of 12 months in barrel using a low proportion of about 15% to 20% new oak. Part of the oak is supplied by the well-known tonnellerie Rémond, based in Ladoix. There is very good value all round here.

DRCDN15B	Côte de Nuits Villages	£81.00	£13.50
DRLBR15B	Ladoix, 1er Cru Le Bois Rousot	£111.00	£18.50
DRACP15B	Aloxe Corton, 1er Cru	£147.00	£24.50
DRCBR15B	Corton Bressandes, Grand Cru	£237.00	£39.50
DRCCH15B	Corton-Charlemagne, Grand Cru (blanc)	£312.00	£52.00

Domaine Sophie Cinier, Pouilly-Fuissé:

The warm (hot) weather in the Mâconnais proved more challenging towards the end of summer for this white region. It's sixty miles south of the Côte de Nuits and discernibly warmer. The same fine and dry summer conditions maintained perfect health in the grapes and indicated an early harvest, producing normal quantities. However, a hot southerly wind at the end of August accelerated ripening and it took some rapid re-organisation for Sophie to begin harvesting on 27th August. It's a tiny domaine - only 2.5 hectares, (though there are now more negociant wines) so everything was picked between Friday and Sunday. The wines had a good level of tartaric acid, but were relatively low in malic. Encouraged by the success of the St-Véran, Sophie has developed her négociant business and now offers also a Viré-Clessé. If overall the wines are riper and less taut than in 2014, there are attractive citrus notes to be found as well as riper exotic fruit tones.

She has again separated one of her favourite vineyards, the 62 year old La Dame Charnay, with its tiny berries and old vines to produce her Pouilly-Fuissé Collection (11 barrels, one of which is new). Then there are the 82 year old vines from Pouilly-Fuissé Vers Crâs, a parcel of 0.3 hectares, producing eight barrels (2,000 bottles) and a Pouilly Vinzelles, Les Longeays, only 0.134 hectares, producing just three barrels (750 bottles) which was planted in 1905.

The Pouilly-Fuissé appellation is eighty years old and finally, in 2018, seems likely to be granted Premier Cru status for its best vineyards. Both Vers Crâs and Les Longeays should receive this promotion with the 2018 harvest.

Pouilly-Fuissé Collection and Viré-Clessé are both bottled. Vers Crâs and Les Longeays will be bottled in spring 2017.

CIVCL15B	Viré-Clessé	£78.00	£13.00
CIPVL15B	Pouilly-Vinzelles, Les Longeays	£111.00	£18.50
CIPOC15B	Pouilly-Fuissé Collection	£93.00	£15.50
CIPVC15B	Pouilly-Fuissé, Vers Crâs	£111.00	£18.50