



HIDDEN GEMS

DISCOVER GOOD-VALUE JEWELS AMONG BURGUNDY'S WINES. BY DEBORAH GROSSMAN

Medieval Burgundian monks were onto something when they built stone walls around plots of vines that made wine they liked. Centuries later, wines from these plots garner top prices.

« When you make wine here, you can't cheat. You have one grape from one vineyard and one winemaker to create it », says Grégory Patriat, winemaker at Jean-Claude Boisset in Nuits-Saint-Georges.

Pinot noir and chardonnay – these two grapes consume the majority of Patriat's time, and that of winemakers at the **3,890** domaines (wine-producing estates), **282** négociants (wine merchants) and **17** cooperative cellars.

Along with the plethora of wineries, Burgundy comprises **100** AOCs (appellation d'origine contrôlée) – a whopping **22%** of all AOCs in France. The most acclaimed are in the Côte d'Or, comprising the Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune, running north-south from Dijon to Santenay.

On top of the complex geography and multiple ownership models, a reduced wine supply due to climatic conditions has resulted in burgeoning prices. Finding good-value Burgundy wine is a challenge. Yet winemakers such as Patriat and other vintners believe that hidden joyaux (jewels) are currently produced in the Côte d'Or and geographically contiguous AOCs.

DISCOVERING THE HIDDEN GEMS

On her wine list at The Restaurant at Meadowood, St. Helena, California, wine director Victoria Kulinich honors the highest-level AOC grand cru wines. But the next level, premier cru, are often as exciting to drink, she says. « For a hidden gem, consider the wonderful whites from an AOC such as Meursault, which is not as sought-after, say, as the Montrachet premier crus. »

Pierre Jhean, president/winemaker at Henri de Villamont based in Savigny-lès-Beaune, makes both grand cru and premier cru wines, but enjoys crafting the latter more. « With grand cru, you can only use grapes from one vineyard plot or *climat* (named vineyard for an AOC). Many smaller plots within the same *climat* can be used for premier cru. The additional selections give more choice and more elegance », says Jhean.

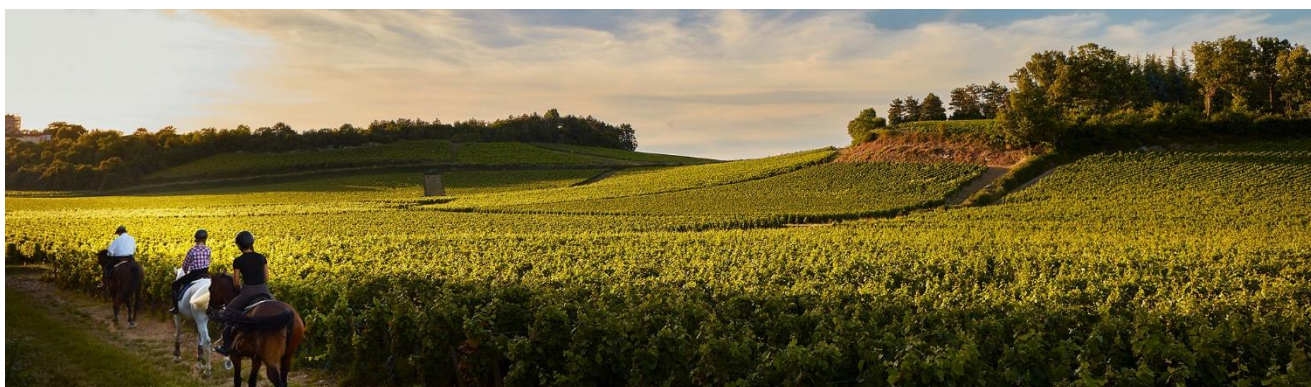
The next level are the **44** villages designated as AOCs. Kulinich has a wide variety of village wines to choose from. « These entry-level wines are often very good » she says. « We list Domaine Roulot Meursault village wine, which I would recommend over some premier crus. »



Kulinich also recommends several of the six regional AOCs that contain grapes from across Burgundy, adding that regional Bourgogne white and red wines are excellent value. The regional appellations, including Crémant de Bourgogne sparkling wines, are half of Burgundy's production.

Hidden gems can also be found by acknowledging that the quality of winemaking can evolve affirmatively. « Jean-Claude Boisset is only **50** years old, but in **2002**, we extensively upgraded the vineyards and took major steps in winemaking to improve quality », says Patriat.

Kulinich recommends seeking out smaller villages such as Mercurey in the Côte Chalonnaise region south of Côtes de Beaune. There are no grand cru climats here, but producers focus on excellent-quality premier cru and villages wines.



DOMAINES DEVILLARD

Amaury Devillard, owner of Domaines Devillard, is president of the Chalonnaise winegrowers. « In the Chalonnaise, we work together on improvements. The area is booming, with 160 growers and a growing list of awards, » says Devillard. « What is important to vintners in Mercurey and Burgundy is the vision of the land and the taste in the glass, » he adds.

The third-generation owner's home estate is Château de Chamirey in Mercurey. Devillard is especially pleased with Château de Chamirey Mercurey La Mission premier cru monopole (single-owner vineyard) and the village AOC wine Chateau de Chamirey Mercurey En Pierrelet, another monopole. The latter white wine is fruity with well-balanced acidity to pair with jambon persillé, a local ham and parsley dish served at the winery's bistro. « We dislike flabby wines, and seek power and finesse with freshness, » Devillard says.

Other Devillard wineries include Domaine des Perdrix, with a wide range of AOCs, Le Renard, with regional and village appellations, and La Garenne, which offers well-valued wines from the Mâconnais, the most southern Burgundian region.

