

# Burgundy 2004: its star wines, and some to avoid

Though not a glorious year for the vintners of Côte d'Or, Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune, the best of this recently released vintage have freshness, poise and purity. From a tasting of 300 wines, Neal Martin recommends those which deserve a place in the cellar

**T**HE heart of Burgundy is a slither of vineyards located on a geographical fault line which formed an escarpment 30 miles long and 250 metres high, rich in the seabed deposits that create complex and individual wines. The Côte d'Or is divided into the Côte de Nuits in the North, home to Gevrey-Chambertin, Vosne-Romanée, Nuits-Saint-Georges and Musigny; and Côte de Beaune in the South, and the treasures of Volnay, Pommard, Meursault and Puligny.

The subtle differences between these tiny plots of vines make Burgundy both fascinating and infuriating—and an even more influ-

ential factor is the skill of the winemaker. One vintner may wish to avoid the risk of autumn rains and thus he will harvest early, even if it means his fruit will be unripe. Another may prefer quantity over quality, permitting his vines to produce a large amount of average fruit instead of a small amount of high-quality fruit. But every bottle of Burgundy is labelled with the name of the grower—a prime indicator of the quality inside—and it pays to heed the names of those who are devoted to enhancing the liquid inside the bottle, and those who are not.

Each January the Burgundy vintners cross La Manche to show their wares to prospective buyers, giving the world a chance to assess both the wines and the growers. The difficulty in buying Burgundy is that the quantities produced are tiny, much smaller than even the most prestigious Bordeaux. The annual production of Grand Vin at Château Latour, for example, is 10,000 cases; in Burgundy, a grower often owns a scattering of vines here and there, which means he can offer several labels but in tiny quantities, perhaps a dozen barrels (3,600 bottles) or fewer.

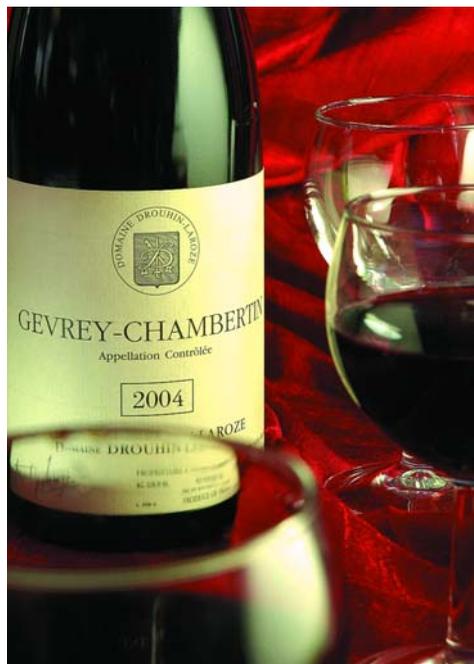
Last month, it was the turn of the 2004 vintage. From my tasting of 300 of its wines, here are some that deserve a place in your cellar.

Two meteorological events shaped the wines in 2004. Firstly, a cool August slowed the ripening of the grapes, a situation redeemed by a warm, dry September. Second,

ent factor is the skill of the winemaker. One vintner may wish to avoid the risk of autumn rains and thus he will harvest early, even if it means his fruit will be unripe. Another may prefer quantity over quality, permitting his vines to produce a large amount of average fruit instead of a small amount of high-quality fruit. But every bottle of Burgundy is labelled with the name of the grower—a prime indicator of the quality inside—and it pays to heed the names of those who are devoted to enhancing the liquid inside the bottle, and those who are not.

Each January the Burgundy vintners cross La Manche to show their wares to prospective buyers, giving the world a chance to assess both the wines and the growers. The difficulty in buying Burgundy is that the quantities produced are tiny, much smaller than even the most prestigious Bordeaux. The annual production of Grand Vin at Château Latour, for example, is 10,000 cases; in Burgundy, a grower often owns a scattering of vines here and there, which means he can offer several labels but in tiny quantities, perhaps a dozen barrels (3,600 bottles) or fewer.

Last month, it was the turn of the 2004 vintage. From my tasting of 300 of its wines, here are some that deserve a place in your cellar.



**Last month the Burgundy wine growers crossed La Manche to show the 2004 vintage to their prospective buyers. Among the jewels in its crown, Gevrey-Chambertin (left and right).**



ES  
2004

MAINE D



VIN DE BOURGOGNE  
ES  
LA GARENNE  
Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru Contrôlé  
tienne Saugé  
Mis en bouteille par ... COTÉ D'OR - FRANCE

JEAN

2004  
BEAUNE GREVES  
PREMIER CRU  
Appellation Beauce Contrôlée  
MISE EN BOUTEILLES AU DOMAINE TOLLOTT-BEAUT  
PROPRIÉTAIRE-RÉCOLTANT A CHOREY-LES-BEAUNE (CÔTÉ D'OR - FRANCE)  
750 ml  
DOMAINE TOLLOTT-BEAUT

2004

ROZE



750 ml  
APPELLATION GEVREY-CHAMBERTIN CONTRÔLÉE  
DOMAINE ARMAND ROUSSEAU FRÈRES  
21220 GEVREY-CHAMBERTIN FRANCE  
GEVREY-CHAMBERTIN  
MISE EN BOUTEILLES AU DOMAINE TOLLOTT-BEAUT  
PROPRIÉTAIRE-RÉCOLTANT A CHOREY-LES-BEAUNE (CÔTÉ D'OR - FRANCE)

hailstorms hit some vineyards and spared others: Pommard, Volnay and Beaune were particularly hard-hit. At Domaine Marquis d'Angerville, Guillaume d'Angerville lost more than half the grapes from Les Fremiets, one of his Premier Cru vineyards.

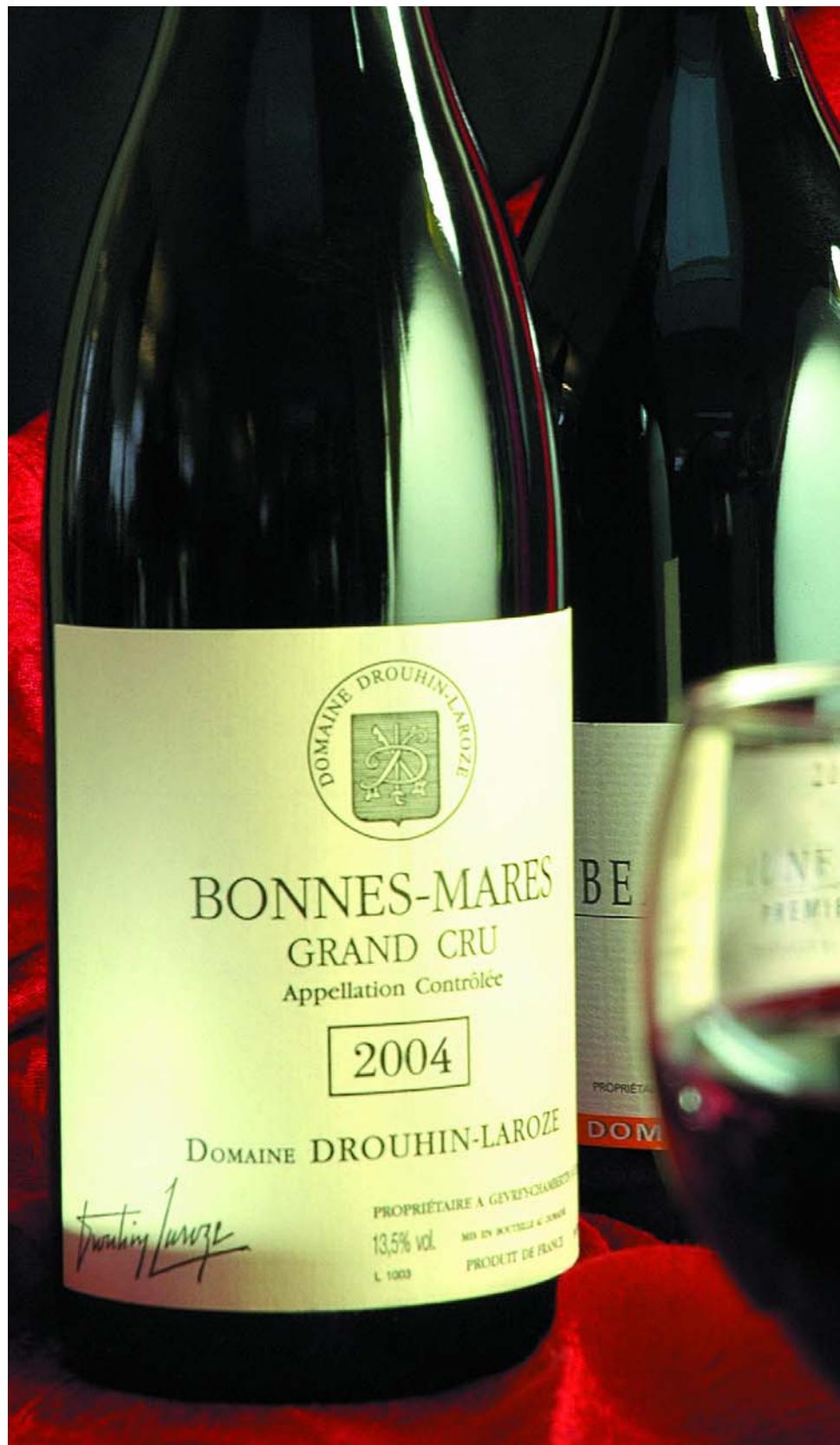
The most skilful vintners rose to the challenge of this difficult season. 'I loved the 2004 vintage,' declared an eternally ebullient Annicke Parent, who owns auspicious vines in

Pommard. 'The 2005 was an easy vintage for making good wines but the 2004 was a real challenge to the winemaker. Making a good 2004 gave a real sense of achievement.'

Given the growing season, it is no surprise to find that the 2004 vintage is not one for especially full-bodied, fruit-driven, tannic, long-lasting wines. It is a lighter vintage with higher acidity, freshness, poise and finesse; wine to enjoy within two to five years for the

generic and Village Crus, five to eight years for the best Premier Crus, seven to 12 years for the Grand Crus. That said, do not be fooled by their apparent approachability, as shown by some 1906 and 1918 Burgundies. Tasted at the end of last year, many are still as fresh as a daisy. So, what to buy?

I recommend comparing prices between wine merchants, since many identical wines are offered at disparate prices. For those



## The superlative Burgundy wines of 2004, and where they grew

seeking something simple to drink in the near future, usually I recommend a basic Bourgogne Rouge or Bourgogne Blanc, but nothing stood out this year and many Village Crus offer far more interesting wines for little more money. But Domaine Comte-Armand's Bourgogne Chardonnay 2004 had pronounced, well-integrated new oak with an attractive hazelnut finish; and for red I recommend Domaine Anne Parent's graceful Bourgogne Pinot Noir 2004. At Village level, matters become far more interesting and there is much to recommend.

**Left: For a Grand Cru, Domaine Drouhin-Laroze's Bonnes-Mares is an exceptional wine with 'a heavenly nose of damson and sloe, a sturdy tannic backbone within a feast of plum and cherries'.**

The Gevrey-Chambertin Village 2004 from Domaine Drouhin-Laroze is smooth, with a gorgeous wild strawberry finish. The Nuits-St-Georges 'Les Lavières' from Domaine Daniel Rion put most Premier Cru wines to shame (Nuits was relatively unscathed by the hail). Treat yourself

to a velvety Vosne-Romanée from Domaine Sylvain Cathiard, source of some of the finest Côte de Nuits in 2004. The whites are more variable, though Domaine Hubert Lamy's Saint Aubin 'La Princée' was a crisp delight.

At Premier Cru level, an often overlooked appellation is Beaune, perhaps because the vines' proximity to an urban area detracts from their kudos. But some superb Premier Cru vineyards surround the town, and unpretentious beauties such as Tolleot-Beaut's Beaune 1er Cru Grève and Jean-Marc Bouley's Beaune 1er Cru Les Reversées illustrate what these vineyards can achieve in the hands of a conscientious winemaker.

Elsewhere are some commendable Chambolle-Musigny's, my pick being Domaine Bruno Clavelier's superb 1er Cru Combe d'Orveau—medium-bodied and beautiful—

ly balanced, with a raspberry-tinged finish that is reluctant to leave the palate. In Nuits-Saint-Georges, Henri Gouges produced a sublime 1er Cru Clos des Porrets, a joyous Pinot Noir with a succulent black cherry core—but even this paled against a vivacious, lush Vosne-Romanée 1er Cru Les Suchots from Jacques Cacheux, a wine imbued with the concentration and ripeness more redolent of the fruit-driven 2003s.

One Premier Cru vineyard is a Grand Cru in all but name—Clos-Saint-Jacques in Gevrey-Chambertin. I encountered two fabulous wines from here: one from Armande Rousseau, closed but utterly sensuous, with beautiful balance; the second from ascendant Jean-Marie Fourrier, more extrovert, with a silky texture and unerring long finish.

Among the white Premier Crus, the Chassagne-Montrachet is to be preferred over the Pulignys and Meuraults. Jean-Noel Gagnard is a source of prime Chassagnes, winemaker Caroline L'Estimée offering two wonderfully crisp, mineral-rich Premier Crus: Les Caillerets and Les Blanchots-Dessus (the latter better value for money.) Etienne Sauzet produced better wines in 2004 than in 2003 and offers some exquisite Puligny 1er Crus, in particular his Les Champs Canet with its attractive, granite-scented nose and brilliant definition on the palate; then his racy, citrus-flavored 1er Cru Folatières that begs to be married to a dish of white fish.

For those who have deeper pockets and seek a Grand Cru, Domaine Drouhin-Laroze's Bonnes-Mares is an exceptional wine, a heavenly nose of sloes and damson, a sturdy tannic backbone enmeshed within a feast of ripe black cherries and plums. The village of Vosne is surrounded by auspicious Grand Cru vineyards. Domaine Rene Engel's Grands Echézeaux exhibits bewitching scents of violets and wild strawberry accompanied by a velvety texture on the palate, a testament to winemaker Philippe Engel, who died last year.

If money really is no object, then choose Domaine Comte Liger-Belair's sensuous La Romanée Grand Cru, imbued with a Richebourg-like nose of great complexity and a silky-smooth texture, but at £2,000 per six bottles it is not a wine to enhance your beef bourguignon. Alternatively, the brilliant Denis Bachelet's divine Charmes-Chambertin is a cut above the rest. It has a purity and elegance that only Pinot Noir can provide, though there are but a few barrels to satisfy the world. The white Grand Crus are more inconsistent, and I would go for a cheaper Premier Cru.

The 2004 are not fruit-driven 'monsters' that would satisfy those accustomed to New World wines: they are traditional Burgun-

**In Burgundy, the name of the grower, seen on the label, is a key to what is inside. Two to seek: Jean-Noel Gagnard, 'a source of prime Chassagnes', and the great Drouhin-Laroze.**



dies, whose virtues are freshness, poise and purity. In theory, the 2004 is not a long-term vintage—though it is easy to be fooled by Burgundy's apparent lightness: many of its wines can last the distance as well as the finest Bordeaux. Neither is it a consistent vintage: there are plenty of unimpressive, bland wines you would do well to steer clear of. Yet 2004 offers many fine wines from the Côte de Nu-

its, especially Chambolle-Musigny, Vosne-Romanée and Gevrey-Chambertin. It is a fine, medium-term drinking vintage that offers respite from the overblown 2003s—a good, rather than a great vintage, studded with an occasional ruby and diamond. □  
*¶ The writer is Editor of the website winejournal.com and the first-class wine buyer for Japan Air Lines (JAL), among others.*