

MONT VERRIER (France, Beaujolais, Saint Julien)

BACKGROUND: Located between Lyon and Macon, south of the winemaking region of Burgundy, deep in the heart of the “Pierres Dorées” (golden stones) area of the Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages appellations region, you will find the Domaine du Mont Verrier wine estate with its magnificent 17th-century house.

The history of the estate is closely associated with that of the Hospices de Villefranche and the nuns from the Sainte Marthe de Beaune Hospitalier order.

GERARD LEGRAND AND THE AMPELOGRAPHIC COLLECTION: In 2007, Gérard Legrand took a keen interest in the estate’s history, which at that time was in danger of being dismantled. He renovated the property and opened it as a guest house in 2009. He simultaneously embarked on a major program of restructuring and diversification of the vineyards, where he adopted sustainable wine growing methods.

Since 2018, visitors have been able to enjoy a tour of Gerard’s new winery and a wine discovery experience. He is today perpetuating the history of the estate, combining a tradition of hospitality with a love of wine. Mont Verrier’s winery was fully renovated in 2017 and 2018 and is now equipped with state-of-the-art winemaking facilities.

The former stables have been replaced with temperature-controlled vats in order to ensure optimum control during the vinification process.



Starting from 2013, the Domaine du Mont Verrier hosts one of the largest national private ampelographic collections (200 different varieties of wine and table grapes) which has been developed in consultation with the IFV (French Institute of Vine and Wine) with the invaluable contribution of SICAREX and the Charentes Vineyard Conservatory.

There are over 6,000 different grape varieties around the world, 350 of which are

included in the official French catalog and used for the production of French wines. In order to identify them, the OIV (International Organization of Vine and Wine) has defined a set of criteria, of which there are 88 in total, relating to the observation of budding (color, hairiness), foliage (shape, serration) and the appearance of the clusters and grapes (shape, size, color), and the vine canes and shoots.

The collection includes a number of rare varieties for which the surface area cultivated in France is less than 10 hectares (Perdea, Muller Thurgau, Lilorila, Monerac) and even

less than one hectare for some varieties (Perlaut, Pagadebit, Lauzet, Mireille). Their rarity makes this collection very valuable.

The conservation of these varieties plays a key role in preserving biodiversity. It also provides us with a genetic databank which is used to create new varieties with an increased tolerance to the main diseases and changes in climate.

KEY NUMBERS: The Domaine du Mont Verrier consists of roughly 40 hectares of vineyards planted with Chardonnay, Gamay and Pinot Noir.

Obviously Gamay is the most important of the three and this grape gets its name from the name of a hamlet in Burgundy near Puligny-Montrachet. It is a very old cross strain of Pinot Noir and Gouais, a white variety long ago grown in central Europe. Although other wine regions of the world grow the Gamay grape, perhaps nowhere does it do as well as the granite soils of Beaujolais.

The oldest vine plot is century old and it's a tiny one, while the rest of the vines are 40 year old, with the youngest vines averaging 10 years.

This mix has allowed the ownership to experiment wine making and achieving a better balance by encouraging the various different terroirs expression to be reflected in the wine glass. The cru Fleurie is mainly pink granite soil, while clay and limestone dominate the vines' profile in the Beaujolais, Beaujolais Village and Bourgogne wines.

The yearly production is round 30 000 bottles, but technically speaking the capacity would be for more than 150 000 bottles.



The estate produces 10 wines in total: two different versions of the entry level Beaujolais Pierres Dorées (with and without added sulfites), the Beaujolais Village, two different Fleurie, one Saint Amour, one Moulin a Vent, two Chardonnay (Sieur Aubry and Sainte Marthe), one Pinot Noir (the latter three all labeled as Bourgogne).

HVE SUSTAINABLE

CERTIFICATION: The estate has obtained the sustainable certification HVE (High Environmental Value) in February 2019 and is transitioning to the organic one.

With a deep awareness for biodiversity and sustainability, Mont Verrier tends its vineyards using sustainable winegrowing methods. The Domaine doesn't apply insecticides, our vineyards are grassed, and we ensure that the soil is naturally enriched using organic fertilizers and manure. This approach allows to reduce the environmental footprint through a precise and constant monitoring of the vineyard plots throughout the vine's cycle and until the perfect grapes maturation is reached.

The estates also boasts an orchard with over 60 varieties of cherry, apple, pear, peach, plum, apricot and fig trees, most of which are old species, and a vegetable garden with

fruit and vegetables of all colours and varieties that will be enjoyed in the summer and autumn as part of our “Table d’Hôtes dinners.

Mont Verrier hosts a lovely garden full of perennials in pale shades of white, blue and pink in the spring, pink and orange in the summer, and ochre in the fall season.

Every year, from April to the end of October, the Domaine guest house offers tourist and wine lovers a choice of 5 spacious rooms and a “Table d’Hôtes (homemade prefix menu dinner) in a peaceful, bucolic, settling with breathtaking views over the hills and vineyards.

THE BEAUJOLAIS TERROIR: The Beaujolais region is unique in many ways. It has some of the highest density plantings of grapes anywhere with 3,500 to 5,500 vines per acre. Many of the vines are trained in a traditional style called the gobelet begun during Roman times. The Gobelet method trains the branches of the vines upward into a circle. Whole clusters are picked by those wineries that use the traditional carbonic maceration fermentation. They can do this because most of Beaujolais is still harvested by hand and not machine (machines would break the grapes). The harvest usually occurs in September. Just to give a reference point, the Beaujolais wine district is roughly 34 miles long and 7-9 miles wide.

As in Burgundy, there is a hierarchy to the wines of Beaujolais. At the basic end are the wines labeled as Beaujolais which are generally simple delicious wines meant to be drunk within a 2 -3 years from the vintage. About one half of all Beaujolais is sold under this AOC (these wines include the Nouveau wines).

The next step up in quality are the Beaujolais Villages wines which must be made near one of 39 listed villages in the region. Villages wines can be very good wines and the best can improve in a cellar for a few years. If the grapes come from a single village, the name of that village may appear on the label, but it is not required.

In the most recent years a new additional geographical denomination to Beaujolais has been added. It’s the Pierres Dorées (Golden Stones) and it involves 50 villages in the Southern district. The terroir is marked by limestone, clay with iron oxide and seashell fossils. For Mont Verrier the seashell fossils are called “Gryphea” and are oyster seashell dating back to 360 million years. It gives fruitiness and salinity to the white and red wines (made with Chardonnay and Gamay).

The real stars are the Cru Beaujolais. This is the highest category of Beaujolais wines and indicates the wines come from one of the top ten designated areas. The word Cru refers to the entire sub-region and not a particular vineyard. More often than not, these wines will not even list Beaujolais on the label instead relying on the consumer to recognize the name of the Cru.

Each of the ten Cru has its own distinct personality. While some may be better than others, it is a combination of the incredible diversified terroir, producer and style that should dictate what wines a consumer will purchase.

The soils of Beaujolais divide the region into a northern and southern half, with the town of Villefranche serving as a near dividing point. The northern half of Beaujolais, where most of the Cru Beaujolais communes are located, includes rolling hills of schist and granite based soils with some limestone. On hillsides, most of the granite and schist is found in the upper slopes with the lower slopes having more stone and clay composition.

The southern half of the region, also known as the *Bas Beaujolais*, has flatter terrain with richer, sandstone and clay based soils with some limestone patches. The Gamay grape fares differently in both regions-producing more structured, complex wines in the north and more lighter, fruity wines in the south, particularly in the Pierres Dorées district. The angle of the hillside vineyards in the north exposes the grapes to more sunshine which leads to harvest at an earlier time than the vineyards in the south.

Mont Verrier has focused on the crus Saint Amour, Moulin-a-Vent and Fleurie.

Saint-Amour lies just to the east of Juliéнас with soil marked by clay, sand and silica. The wines have peach aromas in addition to the typical cherries and currants. Its wines are medium bodied and in need of a few years in the cellar before consuming.

Moulin-à-Vent, sometimes called the king of Beaujolais wines for its masculinity, was



carved out of the southern end Chénas because the wines were of a much more intense quality. The soil contains sandstone, red granite and especially manganese which causes the vines to have exceptionally low yields resulting in more concentrated wines. These are sturdy wines that can age well for ten years or more.

Fleurie is to the southwest of Moulin-à-Vent. It is perhaps the most famous of the Cru wines. A feminine wine, it is sometimes referred to as the queen of Beaujolais wines due to the floral violet driven aromas. The wines from here have a great texture and are perhaps the quintessential Beaujolais Cru. The soil here is different: pink granite ... rocks! They really need a few years from vintage to really show their goods and in a great vintage can improve for 10 years and drink for 10 more after that.

Referring to the latest vintages, the area has been blessed by very few climatic problems.

2020 is an excellent vintage: good rainfall levels during spring and hot temperatures in July/August, then rain again in September so that the grapes did not get to dry because of the heat.

2019 was pretty complicated in the southern part due to heavy August storms and devastating hail. The 2018 vintage gave ripe, fruity wines, with perfect balance. In 2017, volumes were smaller than usual but of fantastic quality: concentrated, structured, aromatic, with refreshing acidity.

In 2016, a hot year in Beaujolais, wines were fruity, fresh and round, with supple and silky tannins. In 2015, they were generous, smooth, complex, rich yet perfectly balanced, with great ageing potential.