

BEAUJOLAIS 2009

Forget all you know about Beaujolais Nouveau. In this stellar vintage, **CHRISTELLE GUIBERT** finds the crus wines are worth serious attention

Rolling hills, winding country lanes, medieval villages and the snowcapped Alps on the horizon... Why is the picturesque region of Beaujolais so overlooked? And its wine so underrated? Beaujolais Nouveau may have a bit to do with it – this unfashionable marketing spectacle has damaged the region's image. But Beaujolais has much more to offer in its 10 crus, which reflect the heart and soul of its terroir.

In a great vintage, crus Beaujolais are a real bargain – and 2009 was such a year, blessed with ideal weather: moderate heat, sufficient rain and cool intervals, resulting in a uniform harvest, healthy grapes and perfect maturation. The wines are exceptional; producers haven't seen a vintage like this in decades.

Isabelle Legeron MW and I tasted our way through 144 wines over several days

in the region, and we were overwhelmed by the purity of fruit, structure, richness and freshness of the wines.

We found two distinct forms of winemaking: the traditional Burgundian style; and the classic carbonic maceration method where whole, uncrushed Gamay grapes are fermented in a sealed tank filled with carbon dioxide. This latter technique results in wines tasting of bubblegum and banana, which masks the grape's character and terroir identity.

But when made like Burgundy, Gamay can age and taste like a fine Pinot Noir, with wild red fruit, truffle and gamey characters. I was lucky enough to share a 1962 Morgon with the producer Jean-Marc Burgaud. The wine was very much alive and still had amazing freshness.

Below: the crus Beaujolais of 2009 are as spectacular as the region's scenery

The winemaking techniques back in the 1960s were very different, so time will tell if these 2009s will age as well, but the top wines will definitely improve. Don't rush to drink them – keep a few bottles in your cellar to age gracefully. With luck, in 10 or 20 years' time, they will develop into something remarkable. Cru Beaujolais is at its best cool, but not cold. Here's our pick of the best wines of 2009, cru by cru...

Brouilly

The 10 Beaujolais crus are located in the north of the region and Brouilly is the furthest south – and also the largest. With a high proportion of granite in the soil, the wines typically express buckets of red juicy fruit, and have a soft structure. Brouilly wines have traditionally been the most popular Beaujolais served in Parisian bistros.



Lathuillère Gravallon, Pisse-Vieille

★★★★★ (18.5pts/20)

Ripe black cherry, aniseed and savoury nose. Complex palate of chewy tannins and intense fruit characters. Structured, with fine minerality and a long, lingering finish. Very serious. Drink now–2013.

£12.49; Ave, NDW, Tem

Alain Michaud, Vieilles Vignes ★★★★★ (17.5)

Fresh, juicy red fruit nose – elegant. Medium body and well-structured, lots of juicy fruit characters and a long finish.

Now–2012. £12.95; BBR



Jean-Paul Dubost ★★★★★ (17.5)

Rich yet delicate red cherry fruit – very fresh. The palate is clean and pure packed with juicy fruit. Now–2012.

£13.95; BBR

JJ Béréziat, Domaine de la Roche

St-Martin ★★★★★ (16.5)

Attractive aromas of morello cherries – clean and fresh. Vibrant and juicy on the palate with chewy but balanced tannins and lots of ripe cherry fruit on the finish. Now–2012. £11.99; Ave

R Perroud ★★★★★ (16)

Intense, generous wine packed with red cherry fruit and a hint of spice. Full bodied with vibrant black fruit and good weight. Structured and long. Now–2012.

£11.99; Lam

Côte de Brouilly

Located in an enclave within Brouilly, this cru's wines have a fuller flavour and more structure and minerality than the surrounding cru.

JJ Béréziat, Domaine de la Roche

St-Martin ★★★★★ (16.5)

Elegant, pretty and savoury; blackberry fruits. Soft, ripe tannins – complex with lots of ripe fruit and an almost dark chocolate finish. Drink now.

£11.49; Ave

Château Thivin,

Clos Bertrand ★★★★★ (17.5)

Very pretty and elegant with delicate cherry fruit. Fresh and very moreish with juicy red fruits and soft tannins. Lots of finesse on the long finish. Now–2012.

£15.50; BBR

Château Thivin, Les Sept Vignes ★★★★★ (17)

Very pretty red fruit scented with notes of wild strawberry and strawberry. Good

intensity on the palate with impressive substance and plenty of fresh red fruit characters. Nice delicate finish. Very approachable now. Drink now **£14.95; BBR**

Chiroubles

The highest-altitude cru in Beaujolais and also where the Gamay grape gives the best expression. The wines tend to have more freshness and a lighter structure than other crus, showing more floral rather than fruity characters.

Cécile et Armand Vernus,

Château Moulin Favre ★★★★★ (16.5)

Young but promising nose of black cherries and liquorice. Nice substance on the palate with elegant tannins and rich black fruit. Mineral finish. Now–2013.

£10.50; Bib



Chantal et Eric Coudert-Appert, Domaine

de la Chapelle des Bois ★★★ (16.5)

Lovely bright red cherry and redcurrant nose with delicate floral notes; fresh and vibrant. Fleshy, ripe palate with crunchy tannins; a very light style. Now–2012.

£10.50; ChM, Haw, SVS

PHOTOGRAPH: FANTUZ OLIMPIO/SIME-4CORNERS



Fleurie

The most widely available cru in the UK market. As the name suggests, the wines are the most floral of the crus, showing great charm, fragrance and silkiness.

Michel Chignard & Fils ★★★★★ (18)

Beautiful aroma of morello cherry with floral hints. The palate is supple and lifted, with vibrant red fruit, fresh acidity and a nice juicy finish. Now–2015.

£14.95; BBR

D Sambardier, Manoir du Carra,

Vers le Mont ★★★★★ (17.5)

Beautiful, intense, savoury nose with rich black fruit and liquorice. Lovely depth and ripeness on the palate: tight, silky tannins, long and mineral – almost volcanic stone in taste. Complex. Now–2020.

£13.99; Wgr

D Sambardier, Manoir du Carra ★★★★★ (17)

Lovely, elegant, red cherry aroma and hint of violet. Perfumed palate with good fruit purity; chewy, soft structure, very elegant and promising. Now–2015.

£12.99; Wgr



Cave de Fleurie, Présidente Marguerite

Subtile ★★★★★ (16.5)

Lovely perfume of red cherry, rose and violet; very pretty. The palate is ripe and intense, a full-bodied style, reflecting the vintage quality with intense black cherry fruit, elegant minerality, silky tannins and a moreish finish. Now–2012.

£11.50; Wis



Cave des Grands Vins de Fleurie,

La Madone ★★★★★ (16.5)

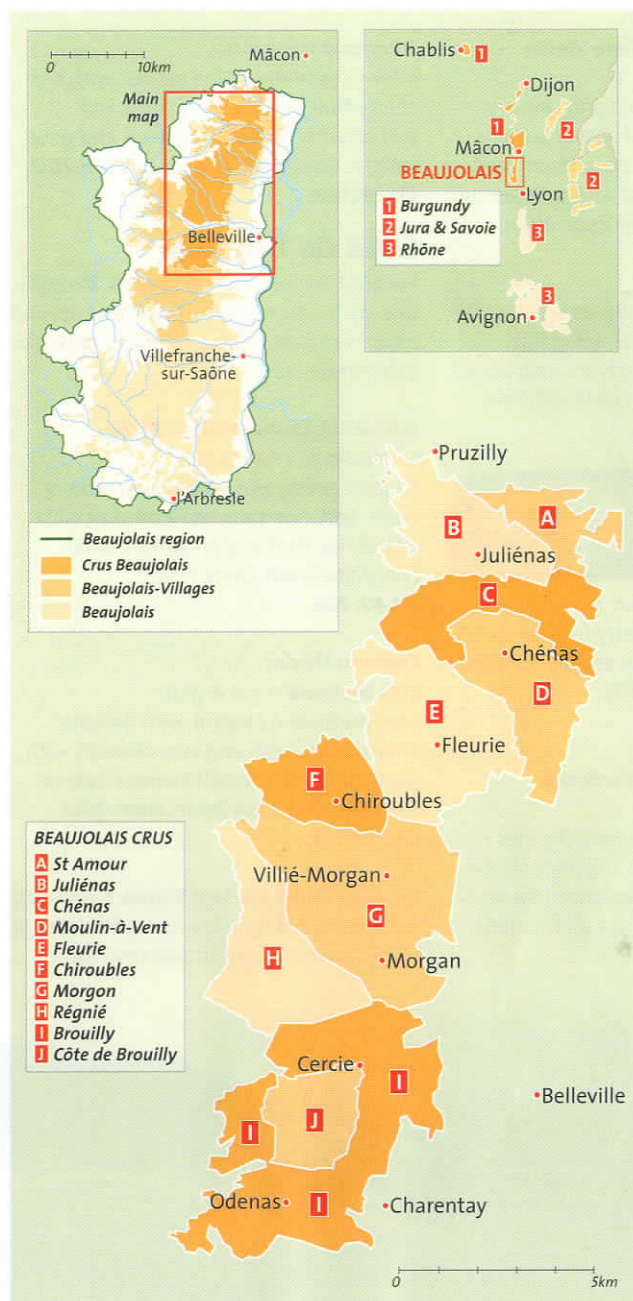
Pretty violet nose, very pure – a great example of Fleurie. The palate is intense, dense and ripe, with chewy tannins and a velvety texture. Upfront and generous dark fruit with liquorice and more florals. Good concentration, lovely length. Now–2013.

£11.99 Lai

Christian Gaidon ★★★★★ (16.5)

Pretty, soft and juicy, very floral with a mulberry hint. Tight structure with ripe silky tannins, crunchy black cherry fruit and nice minerality on the finish.

Now–2012. £10.50; WSo



Above: the wines of Moulin-à-Vent are the most Burgundian of the 10 Beaujolais crus, shown left. The 2009s represent a standout vintage for the region



Gilles Gelin, Dom des Nuges ★★★★★ (16.5)

Crunchy but still fleshy, mulberry and plum fruit. Juicy, good concentration of fruit supported by silky, ripe tannins. Easy drinking, lovely density and an intense finish. Now–2012.

£11.99 (2008); Maj



Martine et Guénael Jambon, Domaine des Roches du Py ★★★★★ (16.5)

Dense and concentrated with lots of

elegance and lifted floral notes. Crunchy texture with ripe tannins and nice complexity. Liquorice hint on the long finish. A lovely wine with great purity.

Now–2012. £13.50; MCK

Bruno Coperet, Domaine de Roche

Guillon ★★★★★ (16)

Pretty and floral. Light and mouthwatering palate with fruit-driven blueberry characters and a soft, chewy texture with extra ripeness from the vintage. Now–2012.

£15.50; FMV

Juliéna

This northerly cru has a soil composition of either schist or granite. The wines tend to have a deeper colour than other crus



and be more vigorous and fleshy, boasting rich red fruit and spice.

Bernard Santé, Vieilles Vignes ★★★★★ (17.5)
Fragrant and juicy with ripe cherry aromas. Fine, silky tannins and an almost Rhone-like liquorice complexity, with a fine structure. Fruit-driven but also mineral and stony. Now–2012. **£14.50; SVS**

Eve & Michel Rey, Les Paquelets ★★★★★ (17)
The nose is packed with black fruit and spice – a rich style for cru Beaujolais. The palate is round with silky tannins and complex black fruit and nice spiciness on the finish. A serious style of Beaujolais. Now–2013. **£15.50; BBR**

Michel Tête, Domaine du Clos du Fief ★★★★★ (17)
Inviting, expressive, ripe red cherry fruit. Crunchy, appealing, fresh and elegant on the palate. Lovely Gamay showing the ripe vintage with its immediate appeal and drinkability. Now–2013. **£11.95; Tan**

Chénas

The smallest of the 10 crus and probably the least well-known. Floral and spice notes are the main distinctive characters and the wines are often full of flavour with the capacity to age well.



Cave de Chénas ★★★★★ (16.5)
Inviting, generous perfume of fresh, ripe cherry fruit. Chewy palate with firm tannins: harmonious, complex and powerful with lots of red cherry fruit. Needs time to settle but promising complexity and concentration. Now–2015. **£8.99; Maj**

Domaine Champagnon ★★★★★ (16)
Elegant, mineral style with lovely ripeness of fresh cherry fruit and floral notes showing the generosity of the vintage while retaining freshness. Crunchy tannins and long finish with good Gamay purity. Now–2015. **£10.95; NDW**

Morgon

On a granite and schist soil, Gamay ripens well here, resulting in richly flavoured, dense wines that get even more complex with ageing. The verb *morgonner* is used to describe Morgon wines that develop more Burgundian Pinot-style flavours.

Domaine Grange Cochard, Côte du Py ★★★★★ (18)
Fresh, balanced nose with lovely purity. Medium bodied with firm tannins and lots of scented red fruit. A fleshy style

with a tight structure. Long finish. Now–2015. **£10.75 (in bond); BBR**

Domaine Grange Cochard, Vieilles Vignes ★★★★★ (17.5)
Elegant and pure nose of raspberry and strawberry. Packed with fresh fruit on the palate with a chewy but fine structure. Good minerality on the finish. Now–2014. **£13.95; BBR**

Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes, Côte du Py ★★★★★ (17)
Intense, layered aroma of summer pudding fruit. Freshness supported by a powerful structure and intense black fruit. Chewy tannins and lovely minerality on the finish. Now–2014. **£9 (IB); BBR**



Louis-Claude Desvignes, Voute St-Vincent ★★★★★ (17)
Typical Beaujolais: fresh, elegant and full of summer fruit. The palate is light and soft with lots of raspberry and strawberry fruit and an elegant structure. Perfect summer wine. Now–2012. **£12.50; BBR**



Sylvain Rosier, Château du Chatelard, Les Roches ★★★★★ (17)
Pretty, scented fruit with notes of red cherry. Tight but elegant style with a lovely minerality; bright cherry / and ripe redcurrant, fine tannins with a silky texture, long and vibrant palate, quite moreish. Now–2016. **£11.99; CCL**

Domaine Lathuillère ★★★★★ (16.5)
Fresh, lifted, pretty nose. Tannic and structured yet elegant and balanced. Long and juicy – savoury notes too, nice minerality. A serious style. Now–2014. **£10.95–£11.99; Ave, NDW, Tem**

Lathuillère Gravallon, Premium ★★★★★ (16.5)
Elegant, vibrant perfume of red cherry and violets. Still very primary and young, with nice tannin grip and complexity. Good freshness from the acidity. Needs time. Now–2015. **£11.99; Ave, Tem**

J Boulon, Cuvée Pauline ★★★★★ (16)
Soft, juicy and easy-drinking style with great purity of raspberry and mulberry fruit. Light style with great drinkability, and showing ripeness of vintage while

retaining freshness. A great Beaujolais example. Now–2013. **£9.95; ED**

Louis Jadot, Château des Jacques, Côte du Py ★★★★★ (16)

Modern, with lots of ripe fruit and intense vanilla oak. Integrated, though tannins are very dominant from the oak. Vanilla notes are overpowering now, but still packed with ripe fruit. Not very Morgon but good. Now–2013. **£21.50; HaM**

Moulin-à-Vent

The grandest of the crus and the most Burgundian. The wines are deeper in colour, robust and tannic with ripe black fruit and spice. The structure responds well to oak ageing and the wines need more time to mature before bottling.

Jean-Pierre Dubost, En Brenay ★★★★★ (17)

Animally with lots of black fruit – a good sense of terroir. Powerful but elegant with

firm tannins and a tight structure. Deep, complex finish. Now–2015. **£15.95; BBR**

Olivier Merlin ★★★★★ (17)

Perfumed, with hint of ripe red cherry and redcurrant. Supple, showing lots of flesh; robust with chewy tannins and a long finish. Now–2014. **£10.50 (IB); BBR**



Olivier Merlin, La Rochelle ★★★★★ (17)

Deep red fruit and savoury notes; very primary. Tight structure with firm tannins and good layered depth. Still young; will open in time. Now–2015. **£13.25 (IB); BBR**

Thibault Liger-Belair, Vieilles Vignes ★★★★★ (17)

Inviting nose packed with red and black fruit. Good fruit purity but also shows

concentration, fruit richness and a nice minerality on the finish. A balanced wine. Now–2015. **£13 (IB); BBR**

Régnié

The newest cru, formed in 1988. The wines – honest, but lacking real character – are stylistically between Brouilly and Morgon and tend to go well with food.

No recommendations

St-Amour

The wines from this most northerly cru are generous (but can be rustic) and need more ageing than others. The link between the cru name and Valentine's Day means the wines are the priciest.

No recommendations

Christelle Guibert is Decanter's tastings director

For full details of UK stockists, see p114

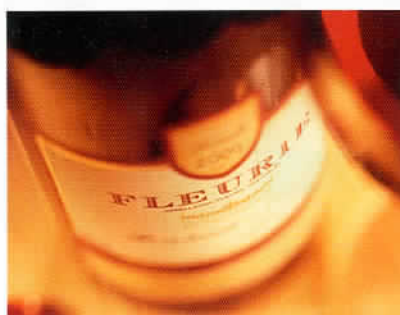
REINVENTING BEAUJOLAIS by Giles Fallowfield

It's a happy coincidence. Just as a spurt of outside investment triggers wider interest in Beaujolais, along comes the 'vintage of the century' to remind drinkers who have stopped buying these wines just what they've been missing. Add to this a just begun re-evaluation of the terroir of the appellation and perhaps it is an opportunity to put Beaujolais, certainly cru Beaujolais, back on the map.

Beaujolais is the only appellation in France best-known not for its icon wines – its *vins de terroir* – but for its cheapest product: Nouveau. Even though sales of Nouveau have declined, they still accounted for just over a third of the appellation's total production in 2009. Some producers fear the name of Beaujolais has been so tarnished by the association that they use the crus names of Fleurie, Moulin-à-Vent, Chiroubles et al in isolation, without making any reference to the wider Beaujolais appellation on their labels.

Terroir zones

Guillaume de Castelneau of Louis Jadot-owned Château des Jacques puts it succinctly: 'Beaujolais has a bad image. Since Nouveau was first successful 40 years ago, the notion of Beaujolais being an interaction of soil, grape and man has disappeared.' But he and other producers are trying to do something about it. Last year, under the auspices of InterBeaujolais, the region's promotional body, they started a major project to



Above: could we soon see premier cru Fleurie on Beaujolais bottles?

re-evaluate the diverse terroirs of the appellation, starting with the 10 crus.

The idea is to re-establish Beaujolais as a high-quality wine region more in line with Burgundy to the north in the hope that prices, in particular of cru Beaujolais, will rise to a level closer to that of village wines from the likes of Gevrey-Chambertin and Volnay.

'At Jadot we began to look at the individual terroirs when we first arrived in the region from Burgundy in 1996,' says de Castelneau. 'We are sure the soil is like that [further north] in Burgundy. Our objective is to reorganise the market like the 1855 Bordeaux classification or Burgundy at the start of the 20th century. We've decided to base this on the soil. We don't have any historic [vineyard] maps, so we are creating them based on geology, subsoil, climate and history. Ultimately, we will have a map showing certain zones of the same

character. Whether this will give new premier and grand cru designations for Beaujolais is too early to say.'

Too complicated

Bruno Pépin is commercial director at Louis Latour – another major Burgundian investor in the region, taking over Henry Fessy in January 2008 and since then buying more than 50ha (hectares) of cru vineyards. He has his doubts about the project. 'We already have a clear definition of what the 10 crus are. It would be very complex to have a new classification and hard to explain "premier cru Fleurie". The idea of different terroirs [within one cru] is too complicated. It's going to be hard enough to put Beaujolais back on the map.'

Right now, though, there's a lot to get excited about in Beaujolais, and in the current economic climate the same unrealised potential that has kept prices low could prove a significant benefit as consumers search for affordable, terroir-driven wines. The fact that these wines are relatively low in alcohol and blessed with a lively acidity that keeps them fresh and food friendly should also increase their appeal as consumers turn away from turbo-charged reds.

Investment in the region coupled with re-classification of its vineyards offers a real chance to change perceptions of what Beaujolais is all about.

Giles Fallowfield is a freelance wine writer

PHOTOGRAPH: FANTILZ OLIMPIO/SIME-4CORNERS