

A taste of new Burgundy in Old Montreal

After Washington and Chicago, Montreal is visited by over 30 producers showcasing some 200 wines

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Text by Jeff Heinrich

Who doesn't like a good glass of Chardonnay? Whether it's New World, like the fine stuff produced by Canadian wineries Le Clos Jordanne and Hillebrand, or Old World, like the ones from France's Burgundy region, the pleasure can be sublime, anytime of the year.



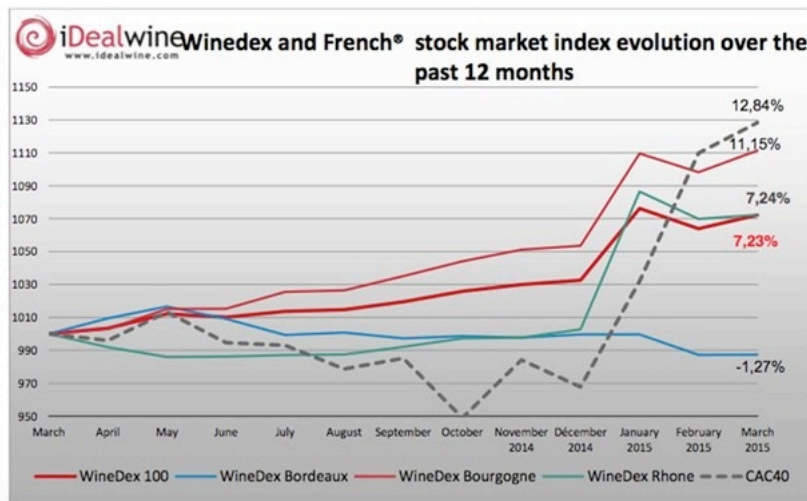
Photo: Xavier Dachez

So when I got an invitation to attend a free taste-all-you-can Burgundy event in Old Montreal on a sunny Tuesday in April, you can bet I wasn't going to say no. The chance of drinking some great whites from the part of the world that made them famous – plus the prospect of some lovely and very pricey reds – was too good to pass up. I go to these Burgundy-in-Montreal events every five years or so, and learned from experience in 2009 and 2004 that it's best to bring along a buddy, preferably from France, who knows his stuff. The wine-show ritual of swirl-taste-'n'-spit is always more enjoyable and educational when you can bounce impressions off someone you know and kibbitz with people presenting their wine, often the owners of the vineyard or the winemakers themselves.

I forwarded my invite to my friend Dominique, a Montreal restaurant owner and caterer with a sonorous voice and the girth of a Gallic gourmand, and he got himself signed up. We met at the event, Terroirs & Signatures de Bourgogne. Organized by the Beaune-based Bureau interprofessionnel des vins de Bourgogne and open to the wine trade and media (but not to the general public), the afternoon show moved from Marché Bonsecours this year to the Gare Dalhousie, a former train station on Berri Street at the east end of the old city (under the Notre-Dame Street overpass) that's home to the Cirque Éloize. After getting our badge, our tasting booklet, our burgundy-coloured pen and our Riedel tasting glass, we entered the hall where 32 producers had set up their stands. Burgundy produces 200 million bottles a year; at this event, 200 was the number of wines available to taste. In our three hours there, we were lucky to taste about 30.

Just before we arrived, there'd been a blind-tasting of Burgundy whites (a "master class" by an expert, the invite said), but registration was limited to 30 people and we missed it. We also missed the big party on Saturday night – a new event called La Paulée de Montréal – where the producers and local Burgundy lovers fêted with fancy food and live jazz at the chalet on Mount Royal. Now it was our humble turn. Where to start?

First, a bit of market context. Burgundy, like the wine industry most

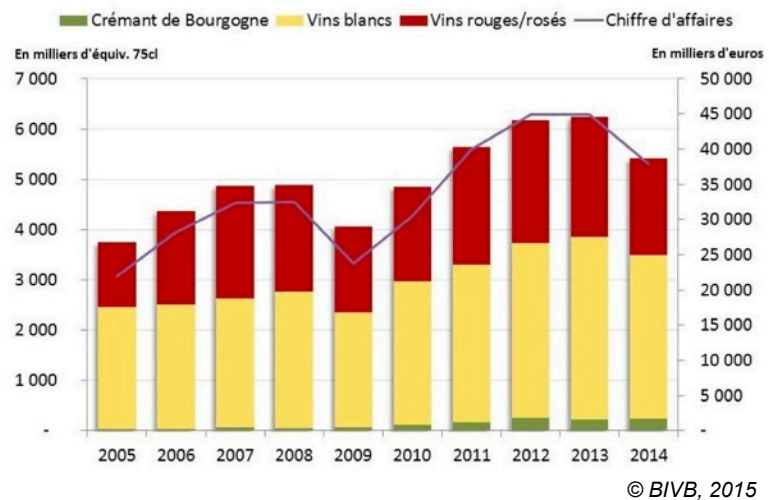


everywhere, hasn't quite recovered from the drop in demand that followed the 2008 global financial crisis. Thrice hit by low-yielding grape harvests in 2010, 2012 and 2013, the region last year exported the lowest quantity of wine by volume in 15 years. The value of exports

has remained relatively high, however: about \$900 million in 2014, one of the highest results ever. As demand for Burgundy – mostly whites sold to

the U.S., its biggest export market – has exceeded supply, so have prices risen. Fine wines, the ones sought after by collectors and sold at auction, have been doing particularly well – much better than Bordeaux’s best, according to a recent price analysis by Paris-based e-merchant iDealWine.com.

Canada is Burgundy’s fifth-largest export market, and has been growing considerably since the financial crisis, when it ranked ninth. Coming behind the U.S., the U.K., Japan and Belgium, Canada only accounts for about 7 per cent of Burgundy sales abroad, however, and sales actually slumped last year for the first time since 2009. Quebecers



are the country’s biggest fans of Burgundy; 70 per cent of the Canadian total gets drunk here – over 4 million bottles a year, although that too dropped off somewhat in 2014, part of a general trend at the SAQ, the liquor monopoly owned by the Quebec government. Hence the need for shows like the one in Old Montreal: to boost demand by targeting the hospitality industry and the media. In other words, people like Dominique and me. It’s a game we play, but a very pleasant one.



We started with a few crémants, Burgundy’s bubbly. Fizzier than champagne, less expensive and often just as good, crémant is perfect as an apéritif: light, frothy and tasty, especially the rare ones you find that are aged a few years. We found just such a vintage right off the bat at Table 27: a **2008 Vive la Joie Brut, by Caves Bailly-Lapierre**. Half-chardonnay, half-pinot noir, surprisingly toasty but with a lemony tang that keeps things fresh, this crémant retails at the

SAQ for \$30 and is a good alternative to champagne; challenge your guests to tell the difference if they can. If you want a bit of colour in your

glass, there's also a low-price (\$23) rosé by the well-known brand Blason de Bourgogne; right next to the competition at Table 20, it reminded us of spice bread, but with a slightly bitter aftertaste.

Next up, the whites. Some, we turned our nose up at:

- a 2012 Chablis Grand Cru from Domaine William Fèvre's share in the Les Preuses vineyards (too mushroomy for my taste, it might have been slightly corked);
- Maison Capitain-Gagnerot's Ladoix 1er Cru Les Hautes Mourottes 2011 ("ho-hum; sour," my notes say);
- Maison Lou Dumont's Meursault 2012 ("too rubbery and strong");
- and Domaine Michel Prunier & Fille's Auxey-Duresses 2013 ("nice nose but a bit short and acidic").

Others just blew us away:



- Maison Joseph Drouhin's Pouilly-Vinzelles 2012, with its hints of anise (\$34 via private import);
- Maison Jean Loron's Pouilly-Fuissé Les Vieux Murs 2012 ("lovely mouthfeel, very pleasant," \$40 via private import);
- **Domaine des Malandes' Chablis Vieilles Vignes Tour du Roy 2013** ("excellent, the real thing," \$32 via private import) and a treat, the Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos 2012 (\$110 via private import);
- Maison Patriarche's Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru Les Embazées 2011 ("tastes like crème caramel," noted Dom);
- and Domaine Roux Père & Fils' Rully Clos des Mollepierres 2013 ("nice! very round and fresh," \$33, but only available in ... British Columbia).

After helping ourselves to the buffet of fine cheese, charcuterie and nut breads – and downing a few glasses of bottled water to re-hydrate – we finished with some reds, aiming for the high end. In Burgundy, red is synonymous with pinot noir, a grape that's easy to mess up and hard to do well. Dom and I were familiar with Château de Chamirey, since a friend of ours is their agent here in Quebec. Travelling in France, I once stopped by the Mercurey-area château myself, just after it was nearly burnt to the



Château de Chamirey

ground by a mentally deranged tenant and was undergoing extensive renovations (but that's another story). The winery has been owned by the Devillard family since 1932, and the grandson, now co-owner, a tall, tousle-haired fellow with the picturesque name of Amaury Devillard, gave us the spiel and had us taste three reds from 2012:

- their basic Mercurey (\$29 at the SAQ)
- by private import, the Domaine des Perdrix Echézeaux Grand Cru (good but still too young, and out of my range at \$264)
- and lastly their Nuits-Saint-Georges 1er Cru "Aux Perdrix" Quasi Monopole (better, with more potential, and at less than half the price, \$114, via private import).

Dom ended up with a favourite red: a Mercurey 1er Cru Clos Tonnerre 2011 (\$38), by Domaine Michel Juillot (served too cold out of the ice bucket, I thought, by the winery's manager Laurent Juillot). My favourite came late in the afternoon at Table 21: a Santenay 1er Cru 2012 (\$49) by Domaine Roux Père & Fils, the winery whose Rully I thought was so good. Santenay, on the southern end of the Côte de Beaune, is a favourite appellation of mine, but that might just be a sentimental choice. Years ago, when my wife and I were having a romantic tête-à-tête out of the house and away from the kids, a sommelier recommended a bottle Santenay and it was perfect. I had this one with food, too – a blue cheese from the buffet – and though it was not quite the same, it was delicious anyway.

In the curtained-off press area at the back, where members of the media are allowed to step up to the wine bar and serve themselves anything they like in whatever quantity they like, I tried a few more wines and observed other journalists doing the same. One critic was so impressed with a fancy Corton Rognet Grand Cru from Domaine Taupenot-Merme, he put down his glass, paused, let out a slow "wow," stepped back, got out his point-and-shoot camera and took a picture of the bottle. So of course I had to try it, too ("earthy, meaty," I judged). On my way out, I picked up a press kit filled with a couple of complimentary guidebooks to Burgundy wine country, some maps of the region, a booklet of tasting advice and a 4G memory stick. Then I threaded my way through the crowd and met Dom at the entrance, the circle of three hours completed.

We parted ways in the afternoon sun, my friend and I. I cycled home, stopping first at the SAQ to see if I could find any good crémant. No luck, but I did pick up some quality chardonnay (Domaine François Carillon Bourgogne 2012, \$32.75). That winery wasn't represented at the show and I don't know what the wine will taste like exactly, but the agent is someone I know and whose wines I've liked before, so I think it should be pretty good.

It's in the fridge, waiting. I'll let it. That's enough for one day.

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