

# A maker of Burgundy gets ready for Montreal

## Classic producer brings 1,800 bottles to a prime wine event and the SAQ

Wednesday, Nov. 25, 2009

Text & photos by: Jeff Heinrich

© Jeff Heinrich



VOLNAY, France – On an unseasonably warm day last week, Étienne de Montille drove his BMW sedan up a country lane on Burgundy's Côte de Beaune and stopped at Les Taillepieds, one of his family's premier-cru vineyards.

The view took in the village of Meursault to the south, Pommard to the east, and row upon row of pinot noir vines stretching down to the lowlands.

For wine lovers, this is hallowed ground, meriting mention in *1001 Wines You Must Taste Before You Die* (Universe, \$39.95).

The buyer's guide calls the 1985 vintage of Les Taillepieds the Domaine de Montille's "greatest wine," enthusing over its "aroma of intense pinot fruit," its "mouthfeel (of) lovely fruit," and a finish that's "long, fine and very complex."

Now you can get a taste of this classic, small-scale producer, whose eco-friendly products are to be certified organic in 2011.

Tomorrow at 10 a.m., 11 de Montille wines – 10 reds, one white – go on sale at the SAQ's downtown Signature store at Les Ailes shopping complex, the first time in nearly a decade that most of them have been retailed here.

They're not cheap, though – prices range from \$41.50 to \$148 a bottle.

Saturday, Etienne de Montille will be in Montreal to present six more of his wines – all red – at the prestigious and sold-out Montréal Passion Vin event at the Bonaventure Hilton, a fundraiser for the Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital Foundation.

Last week, in anticipation of his visit here, de Montille gave me a tour of his terroir.

At this time of year only a few stray clumps of grapes remain on the vines, too poor to use. The good stuff was hand-harvested in September and, after fermentation and pressing, is now maturing in oak casks in the de Montilles' 17th-century cellar in Meursault.

Location, location, location – that's a prerequisite for success at this level of Burgundy wine heaven, whose clay, chalk and pebbly soils the de Montilles have called their own for more than 400 years.

Too high up the hill, and the rainwater that





keeps the vines irrigated flows away too fast. Too low down the hill, and the vines stay too wet.

"The principle is simple: The more you're towards the middle, the better the quality," said de Montille, 46, who runs the family's 11 hectares of vineyards – nine Pinot noir, three Chardonnay – with his 37-year-old sister, Alix.



"These vines are about 30 years old," he said, bending down at the Volnay vineyard to show how the gnarly pinot branches have been pruned to keep the plant alive and healthy. "They'll give a nice wine – a very nice wine."

By industrial-producers' standards, the de Montilles don't make much wine. The domaine produces 70,000 bottles a year (almost all red) using grapes solely from the winery's own vineyards. Another 60,000 bottles use grapes from other Burgundy producers; they're marketed under the Maison Deux Montille Soeur-et-Frère brand, the négoce business the siblings founded in 2005.

Eighty per cent of the total production is exported, mainly to the U.S., as well as to 24 other countries.

Winemaking is in the aristocratic family's blood. The patriarch, Hubert de Montille, took over the business in

1947 and built a reputation for turning out what have been described as superbly structured, long-aging wines; he still lives in the family's villa in Volnay but has retired from running the domaine.

Father, son and daughter are all lawyers by trade but winemakers by avocation.

Hubert was a barrister, Etienne specialized in mergers and acquisitions, and Alix, less enthused by the legal profession, now is solely dedicated to making the winery's whites.

Domaine de Montille's vineyards are in Volnay, Pommard, Beaune, Vougeot, Puligny-Montrachet, Alox-Corton, Vosne-







Romanée and Nuits-Saint-Georges – all of them mythical places for anyone who loves Burgundy wines.

Quebec is new ground for the family.

"It won't be my first time in Quebec but it will be the first time I take part in an event in Quebec," Etienne de Montille said. "I met (the SAQ's top buyer) Denis Marsan in Montreal two years ago and we got along really well. He knew our wines, he knew my father, and, voilà, he said 'Yours is the kind of domaine we want to show people, because it has a history.' And I told him I was game.

"I'm coming for a nice event. It's for a good cause, it demands some effort, but it's worth it."

By effort, de Montille means he's making his wines available to the hospital foundation at a good price. Fifteen cases of 12 were ordered for the event - a total of 180 bottles. (Another 135 cases – 1,620 bottles – are going on sale at the SAQ's Signature).

"We're giving the SAQ a deal," de Montille said. "We want the foundation to make some money. It's a kind of volunteerism, but, you know, the world of wine is made for that, too. We make great wines, and it's normal that we participate in events of this kind."

Burgundy wines sell very well in Quebec: 3 million bottles last year, more than any other province by far, totalling \$64 million in revenues for the SAQ, an all-time high for wines from that region.

But de Montille doesn't expect the exposure to translate into more sales in Quebec.

"I'm not doing this for any kind of profit. That's not what this is about. We don't sell much in Quebec, anyway. It's pretty limited."

He does plan on coming back, however.

"I fell under the spell of Montreal the first time I was here - I adore the city. I think if I get back here once a year from now on, that will be good."

Good for lovers of Burgundy, too.

- - -

**Coming up:** If you're wondering who loves wine enough to spend \$1,950 for the full two days of tastings, read Jeff Heinrich's story in the days that follow the Montréal Passion Vin event. He'll be talking to a few of the 330 people signed up for the tastings and lunches. They aren't all who you might imagine them to be.

- - -

### **Your chance to buy some premium Burgundy**

A near-dozen Domaine de Montille and Maison Deux Montille wines - 10 reds, one white - will go on sale tomorrow at 10 a.m. at the SAQ's Signature store, 677 Ste. Catherine St. W. (Complexe Les Ailes). Supplies are limited. These are different wines than the ones that will be tasted at Montréal Passion Vin, the prestigious and perpetually sold-out annual wine event ([www.montrealpassionvin.ca](http://www.montrealpassionvin.ca)). This is the first time since 2000 that Domaine de Montille wines will be sold to the general public here; they've been available for the past year only through private import:



Maison Deux Montille, Rully 1er Cru Les Clous 2006, \$41.50, SAQ # 11162419

Maison Deux Montille, Auxey-Duresses 2006, \$43, SAQ # 11163526

Domaine de Montille, Beaune 1er Cru Les Sizies 2005, \$68.50, SAQ # 11161491

Maison Deux Montille, Meursault Les Tessons 2006, \$70, SAQ # 11162363

Domaine de Montille, Beaune 1er Cru Les Grèves 2006, \$70, SAQ # 11161379

Domaine de Montille, Beaune Les Aigrots 2005 (white), \$73, SAQ # 11161441

Domaine de Montille, Nuits-Saint Georges 1er Cru Aux Thorey 2005, \$85, SAQ # 11162291

Domaine de Montille, Volnay 1er Cru Les Brouillards de 2005, \$91, SAQ # 11162460

Domaine de Montille, Pommard 1er Cru Les Pézerolles 2005, \$118, SAQ # 11162339

Domaine de Montille, Corton Grand Cru Clos du Roi 2006, \$133, SAQ # 11161686

Domaine de Montille, Corton Grand Cru Clos du Roi 2005, \$148, SAQ # 11161619

© *Jeff Heinrich*