OFF-Piste BurGUNDY: Value Alternatives

The two regional appellations of Coteaux Bourguignons and Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains and the white wine-only St-Bris take Burgundy beyond the pure Pinot Noir and Chardonnay classics for which it is famed. Michael Apstein explains what lies behind these under-the-radar styles – and why they could become the more reasonably priced face of Burgundy.

Even serious fans of Burgundy may be unfamiliar with St-Bris, Coteaux Bourguignons and Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains. In a region famous for its rigid devotion to vineyard sites identified by Cistercian monks eight centuries ago, these three appellations – and the wide variety of grape varieties they allow – demonstrate Burgundy’s ability to adapt to the subtleties wrought by the passage of time.

Although they may currently be harder to find than the wines from Burgundy’s long roll call of better-known appellations, these three styles offer distinctive wines at attractive prices. It’s my belief that these wines will increasingly begin to appear on retailers’ shelves, especially as the prices of regular Burgundy continue to escalate – so their names should be in the lexicon of all Burgundy enthusiasts.

St-Bris
Taking its name from St-Bris-le-Vineux, a tiny village in the Auxerrois to the southeast of the town of Auxerre, St-Bris is doubly unique. First, it’s the only place in Burgundy that mandates Sauvignon Blanc – before 2003, when it was promoted to AC status, its wines were labelled as Sauvignon de St-Bris. Second, the wines do not taste like Sauvignon Blanc. They do not have either the pungent or tropical fruitiness characteristic of New World Sauvignon Blanc. They do not even bear much resemblance to Sancerre, which is also made exclusively from Sauvignon Blanc, lies only 128km west in the Loire Valley’s central vineyards, and whose soil has a similar mix of Kimmeridgian limestone and clay.

The wines from St-Bris have a unique minerality, some almost a lava-like quality. The tiny village of St-Bris-Le-Vineux in the Auxerrois meant to be drunk within a year or two of the vintage, they do show good development with a few additional years of bottle age. Guilhem Goisot, one of the top producers in St-Bris, believes the origins of Sauvignon Blanc here can be explained by economics: plant what grows. He explains that, unlike in the Côte d’Or, where the vineyards basically lace in one direction – east-southeast – the vineyards in the Auxerrois are planted on hillsides with varying exposures. The south-facing vineyards are warm enough for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The north side of the hills are too cool for those grapes but can support Sauvignon Blanc.

Why then does Chardonnay thrive on the north-facing slopes of Chablis, barely 16km away? Hervé Tucki, the experienced and knowledgeable director of La Chablisienne, the excellent cooperative in Chablis, thinks the difference may be attributable to the precise mixture of clay and limestone in the soils, or to a subtle temperature difference between the Yonne Valley of Auxerre and the Serein Valley of Chablis. Indeed, before phylloxera ravaged the area in the late 19th century, St-Bris grew Chardonnay and was eventually included within the Chablis appellation. Tucki offers, with a Gallic shrug: ‘The origin of Sauvignon Blanc in St-Bris is a
little mysterious.’ Whatever the reason, I predict we’ll see more of these riveting wines as climate change aids ripening in these northern climes.

Together, the 2017 and 2018 vintages of St-Bris provide something for everyone. The 2017s are racier, while the 2018s are a little bit rounder but maintain an invigorating bite.

In addition to Goisot, other domaines I recommend include Clotilde Davanne, Félix, Philippe Defrance, PL & JF Bersan, Séverine & Lionel Jacquet, Verret and the cooperative Caves Bailly Lapierre. The notable Chablis producers, William Fèvre and Simonnet-Fleury, also make lovely St-Bris.

WINES TO TRY

Guilhem and Jean-Hugues Goisot, La Ronce, St-Bris 2017 94
£18.99 Domaine Direct
La Ronce vineyard sits on a hill that has both north and south exposures, hence both Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay grow there. The soil is a mixture of Kimmerridgian limestone and clay, yet there’s more power here than in Goisot’s other St-Bris. Purty and a touch of spice complement that power, while brilliant acidity keeps it fresh and lively. It’s a big-impact wine without a trace of heaviness. Biodynamic. Drink 2020-2024 Alcohol 12.5%

Guilhem Jean-Hugues Goisot, Corps de Garde, St-Bris 2017 93
£23.47 Beckford Bottle Shop, Domaine Direct, Les Caves de Pyrene, Middle Lane Market, The Crouch End Cellars, Woodhead Shop
Goisot, a family-owned estate, makes fabulous wines across its range, and has farmed biodynamically for two decades. The lower-yielding Sauvignon Gris used for the Corps de Garde is thought to provide more substance. The wine comes from a variety of vineyards composed of Kimmerridgian limestone mixed with clay. This fresh and pure 2017 vintage delivers lava-like nuances. Crisp and cuttung, it has remarkable depth. At the same time, its refinement is apparent in its incredible finish. Drink 2020-2023 Alcohol 12.5%

Bailly Lapierre, St-Bris 2018 92
N/A UK www.bailly-lapierre.fr
This cooperative of about 450 growers is best known for its Crémant de Bourgogne, but it also makes a lovely St-Bris. The 2018 took a silver medal at the Concours des Vins du Grand Auxerrois. Delicate floral notes grab your attention; good depth, impeccable balance and an alluring minerally bite hold onto it. A persistent finish, with an attractive subtle bitterness, makes it a perfect choice for shellfish. Drink 2020-2022 Alcohol 12.5%

Domaine Séverine & Lionel Jacquet, St-Bris 2018 93
N/A UK www.domaine-jacquet.com
Founded in 2002 with 2.8ha, based in the village of Chitry, near Chablis, and now expanded to 16ha. The Jacquets started producing St-Bris in 2011, and they are clearly fast learners, since this 2018 St-Bris won a gold medal at the 29th Concours des Vins du Grand Auxerrois. Delicate floral notes grab your attention; good depth, impeccable balance and an alluring minerally bite hold onto it. A persistent finish, with an attractive subtle bitterness, makes it a perfect choice for shellfish. Drink 2020-2022 Alcohol 12.5%
Vins de Bourgogne (regional) body, shows his enthusiasm for the appellation when he
exclaims: ‘It will give the consumer a chance to drink Burgundy at a reasonable price.’ His
venerable, Beaujolais-based, family-run company, Maison Louis Latour, is taking advantage of it:
having planted Pinot Noir in the southern part of Beaujolais where there are limestone soils,
Louis Latour is making a unique wine, Les
Pierres Dorées (see right), exclusively from that
grape and labelling it under the new appellation.
Although the name sounds as though it might be the lower level of Bourgundy
appellation – and indeed some supermarkets in France sell Coteaux Bourguignons for only a
few euros a bottle – all the wines fall into that price or quality category. Coteaux
Bourguignons from Maison Louis Jadot, another top Beaujolais-based négociant, sells for
as much as 50% more than its Beaujolais-

Maison Fatien Pere & Filis, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017
N/A UK www.maison-fatien.com
In a small vineyard in the commune of Moursault, but outside the Bourgogne Blanc appellation, Fatien Pere et Fils has Chardonnay with, as Charles Fatien notes, ‘a few rogue Aligoté vines thrown in’. Previously relegated to the Bourgogne Grand Ordinaire category, it is no ordinary wine. Those rogue Aligoté grapes add vivacity and amplify the richness and delicate minerality of the Chardonnay. This energetic white is a perfect choice for simply
prepared seafood. Drink 2020-2022 Alc 12.5%

Domaine Jean & Gilles Lafoute, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017
POA Domaine Direct
This super-grower, based in Auxey-Duresses, uses the flexible regulations of Coteaux Bourguignons to tweak its usual blend of consistently winesome Passe-tout-grains. The 2017 contains 70% Gamay and 30% Pinot Noir, both from slopes around the vineyard where the limestone-rich soil imparts even more acidity to the Gamay than the granitic soil of Beaujolais. The two varieties were vinfied similarly; no cold soak, no carbonic maceration and little
punchdown. The wine’s structure frames and supports its fresh and fruity raspberry-like character beautifully. Its Beaujolais-like charm, without sweetness, makes it a good match for
steak-frites. Drink 2020-2022 Alc 12.5%

Domaine Lamarche, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017
N/A UK www.domaine-lamarche.com
In a tiny, 1.3ha estate in Bligny-lès-Beaune in 2005 and are already making notable wines. They limit yields by de-budding and bottle without fining or filtering. This 2017 Chardonnay-Aligoté blend demonstrates the virtue of that marriage. A beam of citrus-like acidity supports its fruity and minerally aspects. The freshness on the finish amplifies the wine’s charm. It would be a good choice for simply grilled fish or shellfish. Drink 2020-2024 Alc 12.5%

Pierres Dorées of Beaujolais where there are limestone soils,
to drink Burgundy at a reasonable price.’ His
young. For this broad category especially, I recommend following my time-honoured
advice for selecting Burgundy: producer, producer, producer.

**WINES OF THE WEEK**

**Domaine Fargues, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017**
N/A UK www.domaine-fargues.fr
Bénédictes and Bastien Fargues established their tiny 1.3ha estate in Bligny-lès-Beaune in 2005 and are already making notable wines. They limit yields by de-budding and bottle without fining or filtering. This 2017 Chardonnay-Aligoté blend demonstrates the virtue of that marriage. A beam of citrus-like acidity supports its fruity and minerally aspects. The freshness on the finish amplifies the wine’s charm. It would be a good choice for simply grilled fish or shellfish. Drink 2020-2024 Alc 12.5%

**Domaine Fatien Pere & Filis, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017**
N/A UK www.maison-fatien.com
In a small vineyard in the commune of Moursault, but outside the Bourgogne Blanc appellation, Fatien Pere et Fils has Chardonnay with, as Charles Fatien notes, ‘a few rogue Aligoté vines thrown in’. Previously relegated to the Bourgogne Grand Ordinaire category, it is no ordinary wine. Those rogue Aligoté grapes add vivacity and amplify the richness and delicate minerality of the Chardonnay. This energetic white is a perfect choice for simply
prepared seafood. Drink 2020-2022 Alc 12.5%

**Domaine Jean & Gilles Lafoute, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017**
POA Domaine Direct
This super-grower, based in Auxey-Duresses, uses the flexible regulations of Coteaux Bourguignons to tweak its usual blend of consistently winesome Passe-tout-grains. The 2017 contains 70% Gamay and 30% Pinot Noir, both from slopes around the vineyard where the limestone-rich soil imparts even more acidity to the Gamay than the granitic soil of Beaujolais. The two varieties were vinfied similarly; no cold soak, no carbonic maceration and little
punchdown. The wine’s structure frames and supports its fresh and fruity raspberry-like character beautifully. Its Beaujolais-like charm, without sweetness, makes it a good match for
steak-frites. Drink 2020-2022 Alc 12.5%

**Domaine Lamarche, Coteaux Bourguignons 2017**
N/A UK www.domaine-lamarche.com
In a tiny, 1.3ha estate in Bligny-lès-Beaune in 2005 and are already making notable wines. They limit yields by de-budding and bottle without fining or filtering. This 2017 Chardonnay-Aligoté blend demonstrates the virtue of that marriage. A beam of citrus-like acidity supports its fruity and minerally aspects. The freshness on the finish amplifies the wine’s charm. It would be a good choice for simply grilled fish or shellfish. Drink 2020-2024 Alc 12.5%

**Apstein’s take: the alternative Burgundies**

**ST-BRIS**
Profile Fruity and minerally; great value; weekday wine
More interesting than Varietal Sauvignon Blanc
Food pairing Seafood, though its mineral-infused edginess also allows it to balance more substantial fare, such as roast pork or Asian-spiced dishes

**COTE AUXBOURGIGNON BLANC**
Profile Fruity and zesty; great value; weekday wine
More interesting than Comparedly priced New World Chardonnay
Food pairing Seafood, chicken in a cream sauce

**COTE AUXBOURGIGNON ROUGE & PASSE-TOUT-GRAINS**
Profile Fruity and savoury; great value; weekday wine
More interesting than Comparably priced New World Pinot Noir
Food pairing Quintessential roast chicken wine

**Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains**
One of the first appellations established in Burgundy, Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains (also frequently seen on labels as ‘Passe-tout-grains’) received its status in 1937. Regulations require a blend of Pinot Noir (one-third minimum) and Gamay, which must be combined in the vat before fermentation, making it a blend of grapes, not of wines. The Pinot Noir comes from anywhere in Burgundy, while the Gamay usually, but not always, comes from the granitic soils of Beaujolais.

Through Philippe the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, banished Gamay from the Côte d’Or in 1415, some producers have taken a different approach. Domaine Louis Latour was an important grape in Morey-St-Denis, where Stéphane Magnié, a small grower, has consistently makes a winosome Passe-tout-grains. Domaine Lamarche in Vosne-Romanée has plots of 45- and 50-year-old Gamay vines and is planting new ones. And in the Côte de Beaune, Domaine Lalarge has old Gamay vines that add complexity to its Passe-tout-grains.

Passe-tout-grains presents at least three hurdles for producers: winemaking, marketing and a disappointing name. Harvesting and then fermenting two different varieties together in mandated proportions is challenging. Pinot Noir and Gamay grown in different vineyards ripen at different times. Getting the harvest date(s) correct takes enormous experience. Jeanne-Marie de Champs, one of Burgundy’s top brokers, thinks that these wines offer good value, especially from top growers. ‘We just need to explain the name and the wine to consumers.’

**Burgundy value**

**ST-BRIS**
Profile Fruity and minerally; great value; weekday wine
More interesting than Varietal Sauvignon Blanc
Food pairing Seafood, though its mineral-infused edginess also allows it to balance more substantial fare, such as roast pork or Asian-spiced dishes

**COTE AUXBOURGIGNON BLANC**
Profile Fruity and zesty; great value; weekday wine
More interesting than Comparedly priced New World Chardonnay
Food pairing Seafood, chicken in a cream sauce

**COTE AUXBOURGIGNON ROUGE & PASSE-TOUT-GRAINS**
Profile Fruity and savoury; great value; weekday wine
More interesting than Comparably priced New World Pinot Noir
Food pairing Quintessential roast chicken wine

**Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains**
One of the first appellations established in Burgundy, Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains (also frequently seen on labels as ‘Passe-tout-grains’) received its status in 1937. Regulations require a blend of Pinot Noir (one-third minimum) and Gamay, which must be combined in the vat before fermentation, making it a blend of grapes, not of wines. The Pinot Noir comes from anywhere in Burgundy, while the Gamay usually, but not always, comes from the granitic soils of Beaujolais.

Through Philippe the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, banished Gamay from the Côte d’Or in 1415, some producers have taken a different approach. Domaine Louis Latour was an important grape in Morey-St-Denis, where Stéphane Magnié, a small grower, has consistently makes a winosome Passe-tout-grains. Domaine Lamarche in Vosne-Romanée has plots of 45- and 50-year-old Gamay vines and is planting new ones. And in the Côte de Beaune, Domaine Lalarge has old Gamay vines that add complexity to its Passe-tout-grains.

Passe-tout-grains presents at least three hurdles for producers: winemaking, marketing and a disappointing name. Harvesting and then fermenting two different varieties together in mandated proportions is challenging. Pinot Noir and Gamay grown in different vineyards ripen at different times. Getting the harvest date(s) correct takes enormous experience. Jeanne-Marie de Champs, one of Burgundy’s top brokers, thinks that these wines offer good value, especially from top growers. ‘We just need to explain the name and the wine to consumers.’

**Burgundy value**
Unintentionally, Coteaux Bourguignons may be replacing Passe-tout-grains. Louis Jadot ceased production of Passe-tout-grains in 2011 with the introduction of the flexible regulations of Coteaux Bourguignons. With the 2017 vintage, Magnien began doing the same for the same reason. Gilles Lafouge, a top Auxey-Duresse-based grower with an excellent track record for Passe-tout-grains, says he has stopped using the appellation because it’s ‘from the 1950s’, whereas Coteaux Bourguignons is ‘au courant’.

Others push on enthusiastically. Bernard Retornaz, president of Louis Latour, notes that the company has been making Passe-tout-grains ‘forever’, and intends to keep doing so.

Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains, similar to red Coteaux Bourguignons, can seamlessly combine the upfront fruity aspect of Gamay with a backbone provided by Pinot Noir. Either will transform a take-out rotisserie chicken.

**WINES TO TRY**

6. Domaine Michel Lafarge, L’Exception, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2017 93

£13 (1b)–£21.75 Bowes, Corney & Barrow, Hic

Aptly named, as this leading Volnay-based estate has 1/ha of vines, almost 10% of its estate, planted to Passe-tout-grains, some older than 90 years. This organic, biodynamic domaine typically uses equal amounts of Pinot Noir and Gamay with wild yeast to make this truly exceptional wine. More substantial and complex than you’d expect of this appellation, it delivers raspberry-like nuances with spicy savoury notes. It fits my definition of Burgundy: flavour without weight. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 12.5%**

7. Robert Chevillon, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2016 93

£16.68 Justerini & Brooks

Chevillon, one of the top producers in Nuits-St-Georges, has a little more than half a hectare planted to Bourgogne Passe-tout-grains (two-thirds Gamay, one-third Pinot Noir) in three lieux-dits nearby. It takes as much care with it as with the far nobler, and more expensive, premiers crus. Suave and seamless, black fruit-like flavours meld with savoury, almost peppery notes. Lively acidity keeps it fresh. Fine tannins permit immediate enjoyment. A great introduction to the talents of this producer. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 12.5%**

8. Domaine Trapet, A Minima, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2017 91

£18.50 (2014) Corney & Barrow

Trapet Père et Fils, a stellar producer based in Gevrey-Chambertin, blends equal parts Pinot Noir and Gamay grown in Grand Champs, a vineyard in that village, for its Passe-tout-grains. It takes its name from the philosophy of minimal intervention, which in this case means biodynamic farming, indigenous yeasts and the addition of only a hint of sulphur at bottling. The result is a delicious blend of juicy red fruit and spicy, herbal, earthy notes. Tannins are suave, which makes it fine for drinking now. Its acidity keeps it fresh and lively throughout a meal. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 13%**

9. Domaine Bernard Moreau, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2017 89

N/A UK domainebernardmoreau@gmail.com

Brothers Alexandre and Benôit Moreau have run this top-notch Chassagne-Montrachet-based estate since 1999. Through their diligence in the vineyards and care in the winery, all of their wines – even from this lowly appellation – shine. A lighter-weight, forward wine that reflects the vintage, this conveys bright red fruit flavours with a perfect balance of tannins providing structure without astringency. Its finesse shows how this appellation can punch above its weight. **Drink 2020-2022 Alc 12.5%**

Louis Latour, Bourgogne Passetoutgrain 2017 88

POA Louis Latour Agencies

The traditional blend of two-thirds Gamay, one-third Pinot Noir makes this classically framed and easy-to-like Passe-tout-grains. The Pinot Noir comes from the Mâconnais and provides backbone, while Gamay from Beaujolais delivers upfront fruitiness. The lack of oak allows the fruit to shine, resulting in a ready-to-drink, mid-weight wine with charming rusticity and vivacity. It’s the French version of a pizza wine. **Drink 2020-2021 Alc 13%**