

Cru Beaujolais 2019

Our judges were delighted with the quality and good-value drinking they found here, with Fleurie, Chiroubles and Côte de Brouilly praised in particular. Perfect for those summer picnics – just buy, chill and enjoy

REPORT ANDY HOWARD MW

This tasting confirmed that wines from the 10 designated Cru Beaujolais appellations are well worth seeking out for their quality, value and interest. Of the 187 wines our judges tasted, the four wines rated Outstanding included two from Morgon and one each from Brouilly and Fleurie, while there were 60 others that scored 90 or above (see 'The scores', below).

Both 2018 and 2019 are fine vintages for Beaujolais, although there are some significant differences between the two. Vintage 2018 was notable for the abundant volume of high-quality grapes, which manifested itself with weighty, ripe fruit and, for the best wines, the ability to age. There was more variability in 2019, with wines displaying a more elegant, lifted and delicate style. Frost and hail were issues in many areas, with overall volumes down by 25% compared to the five-year average; 2019 wines have plenty of freshness and 'cut' – a trait revered by Beaujolais fans.

Dominique Vrigneau observed that 'overall the quality of the vintage was high' and that 'Cru Beaujolais are very consistent and reliable'. On the style of 2019, Vrigneau felt 'the best wines were very well balanced and showed a good level of vibrancy and energy'.

Rosemary George MW agreed that overall quality was good, but noted the ripeness and alcohol in some examples. George stressed the importance of serving Cru Beaujolais at the right temperature: 'Lightly chilled, the wines tasted so much more refreshing – what Beaujolais should be,' she said.

Oak usage provoked comments from all the panel members. George was 'not keen on obvious oak' in the wines, whereas Vrigneau felt 'many of the Crus tasted had some wood treatment – in most cases it was judicious and

a good support to the wines'. I felt that oak maturation, where used sympathetically, added additional structure and extra layers of complexity to the palate. The panel agreed that it was important for Cru Beaujolais to focus on its own, individual style rather than trying to mirror Bourgogne Pinot Noir wines, for example.

Among the various Crus, Fleurie proved popular with all three judges, averaging above 89 points with half of the wines in the Highly Recommended or Outstanding categories. Côte de Brouilly and Chiroubles also scored well, with George noting: 'Chiroubles was a bit of a discovery for me'. The extra altitude of this Cru (at about 410m, as opposed to 260m-340m for the nine others) appears to have added even more freshness and appeal to its wines.

There was some debate about how much one can distinguish the individual characters of the various regions, with George asking: 'Can you differentiate between the Crus, or are there differences in growers' styles?' Certain producers fared well across the board, and size was not a differentiating factor. All 13 bottles supplied by Beaujolais giant Georges Duboeuf scored well across different Crus and quality tiers, while Korean-born, US-educated and French-trained newcomer Mee Godard was a hit with every wine: a young producer well worth following.

In summary, Cru Beaujolais wines from 2019 are good buys. Vrigneau was impressed by the overall quality: 'There is a clear difference between the Crus, which are all serious wines, and between the more obvious and simple Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages. Clearly the AP system is working well here.' These are wines to buy, lightly chill and enjoy.

THE JUDGES



Andy Howard MW is a *Decanter* contributing editor and a DWWA Regional Chair. Formerly a wine buyer in retail for 30 years, he now runs his own wine consultancy *Vinetrades Ltd*, focusing on wine education, investment and sourcing



Rosemary George MW is a widely published wine writer, author and judge, with a special interest in the wines of southern France and Burgundy. The latest of her numerous books is *The Wines of Roussillon* (£30, Infinite Ideas, April 2021)



Dominique Vrigneau is the DWWA Regional Chair for Beaujolais, the Southwest & Rest of France. Formerly the long-serving buying director for UK merchant *Thierry's Wine Services*, he has been a director at *Watermill Wines* since late 2012

Outstanding 95-97pts



Château de Pierreux, Réserve, Brouilly

Individual judges' scores:
Rosemary George MW 93
Andy Howard MW 95
Dominique Vrigneau 96
 £17.25-£18.99 Exel, Grape Minds, Hay Wines, Liberty Wines, Village Vineyards, Whole Foods Market Kensington

Château de Pierreux has been shaped by several centuries of history. Vineyards are planted in shallow, well-drained pink granitic, schistous and siliceous soils which contain deposits of blue porphyry from the volcanic eruptions of Mont Brouilly. Growing methods follow the

environmentally friendly *lutte raisonnée* approach.

Rosemary George MW Rounded nose, quite a solid palate with some sturdy fruit and a firm streak of tannin. Ageing potential maybe?

Andy Howard MW Good depth and lots of flesh. Dark cherry characters with bright acidity and a hint of leafiness to the finish. Clean, bright and very appealing. Good Brouilly.

Dominique Vrigneau Ripe, rich nose, good red and black berry fruit. Balanced and moreish.

Drink 2021-2026 **Alc** 13.5%



Domaine de la Bêche, Cuvée Vieilles Vignes, Morgon

RG 93 **AH** 95 **DV** 96
 £13.50 Exel
 At this family-owned, 26ha estate, seventh generation Alexis Depardon, at just 22, is gradually assuming charge of the domaine's operations, currently overseeing the 3ha of Côte de Py in Morgon. He has a focus on terroir expression inherited from his parents. This cuvée is sourced from a rocky plot with blue schist soil.

RG Fresh red fruit aromas, and fresh on the palate with fruit and acidity in balance. Good weight and concentration.

AH Rounded and appealing style, lovely weight of dark berry and cherry fruit on the palate. Oak is subtle and well integrated. Freshness on the finish with acidity and a hint of graphite coming through. Fine, elegant Morgon.

DV Fresh on nose. Nice vibrant fruit in the mouth. Long clean finish and good balance. Pretty.

Drink 2021-2028 **Alc** 13%



Domaine des Combiers, Montgenas, Vauxrenard, Fleurie

RG 93 **AH** 96 **DV** 95
 £19.50 Private Cellar
 Domaine des Combiers is a family estate of 9ha, mostly in Beaujolais with a little down in Mâcon. The Montgenas is produced from handpicked grapes grown on vines more than 60 years old, on very pink granitic soil, facing to the east. The whole bunches undergo a semi-carbonic maceration for 8-12 days, at the end of which the cap is punched down to extract more of the colour and aromas. Finally, the wine is aged in oak for 10-12 months.

RG Quite firm, sturdy nose and palate, with fairly dominant oak but good fruit.

AH A touch of reduction on the nose, but bright, fresh fruit to taste with plenty of crisp acidity. Very appealing characters. More black fruit, rather than red. Good density and nice length to finish. A Fleurie which has some extra elements compared to many.

DV Black fruit and plenty of it along with good wood support. Very smart.

Drink 2021-2026 **Alc** 14%



Domaine Mee Godard, Passerelle 577, Morgon

RG 93 **AH** 96 **DV** 95
 £40 Raeburn Fine Wines
 Originally from South Korea, Mee Godard studied wine at Oregon State and Montpellier and worked in several regions of France before settling in Morgon in 2013, seduced by the beautiful scenery and the potential of its wines. She aims to produce complex wines that are both elegant and alive. Passerelle 577 is a characterful plot in Côte du Py from which she crafts a wine with partial destemming and a three-week long maceration in concrete

tanks, which is finished in big barrels and foudres.

RG Firm black cherry fruit on the nose. Quite a solid palate, with tannin and some fruit, fairly sturdy finish. Youthful.

AH Intriguing wine with a hint of smoke, intense dark fruit flavour, lovely acidity and some tannins. Very individual. Long, terroir-driven style. Plenty of acidity here to keep it going for many years.

DV Rich on nose with hint of wood, fleshy in mouth with sucrosity and succulent finish.

Drink 2021-2028 **Alc** 14%

THE SCORES 187 wines tasted

Exceptional 0 Outstanding 4 Highly recommended 60
 Recommended 104 Commended 14 Fair 4 Poor 0 Faulty 1

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit 2019 vintage wines from any of the 10 Cru Beaujolais appellations, with availability in the UK or US