WINK LORCH

WINES OF THE FRENCH ALPS

Savoie, Bugey and beyond with local food and travel tips

After years hidden away in the craggy mountains, wines from Savoie and Bugey are now offered in restaurants and wine stores worldwide. This book tells the story of the men and women who make these characterful wines, how they have tamed the steep hillsides to grow the vines and mastered their unusual grape varieties.

Until now, there has been a dearth of information on the wines from these mountain regions. Alongside 120 producer profiles, *Wines of the French Alps* summarizes the appellations, terroir, grapes, winegrowing and winemaking, and looks into the history that has brought these wines to the finest tables.

Wink Lorch, award-winning author of *Jura Wine*, has driven across numerous Alpine passes and climbed countless steep vineyards to explore Savoie and its neighbouring wine regions – Bugey and Isère, and, further south, Hautes-Alpes and the Diois, home of Clairette de Die. From her travels she shares tips on places to stay, eat and shop,

and offers a taste of the most distinctive French Alpine cheeses, local foods and drinks.

An essential handbook for wine lovers and professionals wishing to learn more about the wines and explore the vineyards of Savoie, Bugey and beyond.

Cover photo: vineyards in Apremont and Mont Granier;
photo above of Mondeuse at Domaine Belluard, both by Mick Rock/Cephas

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Savoie, Bugey and beyond with local food and travel tips

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Wine Travel Media

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For my darling Brett, who supported me in so many ways, and was an important part of the conception and production of this book. I would have liked nothing better than to have presented him with a finished, personally dedicated copy, but it was not to be.

You made the vignerons smile with your humour and your 'English gentleman' ways – the French Alps vineyards are a little duller without you, but we toast your memory with their wines.

Brett Jones 1944 – 2018

Photo by Mick Rock

In the vineyards of Domaine des Ardoisières, Cevins

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The end of the day in the vineyards of Apremont, Savoie, looking over to the Belledonne mountains.

INTRODUCTION

Alpine wines have been on my radar for many decades for the simple reason that I have been an avid skier all my life. Intrigued by vineyards close to mountains and already working in the wine trade, in the mid-1980s, on my way back from a spring ski trip, I visited Pierre Boniface, who was exporting his Apremont to England at the time. It was my first, memorable glimpse of the picture-postcard scene of Lac St-André surrounded by vines, with Mont Granier looming behind. In 1989 I discovered good Mondeuse. Close to where now I am lucky enough to live part-time, I was choosing wine in a restaurant for a group of friends, who were confirmed red wine drinkers. At the time no one thought Savoie reds were worth

considering, but I had just read a tasting report on Mondeuse in *La Revue du Vin de France* magazine. The wine list included a magnum of 1983 Mondeuse from the magazine's top-selected producer, Domaine Louis Magnin, and we were all blown away by it. By the mid-1990s I was regularly visiting Savoie vignerons, dipping into Bugey too, and by the end of that decade I was beginning to write about them. Always drawn to vineyards on mountain foothills, the wine region of Clairette de Die, further south in the Diois, came next.

Following on from my first book, *Jura Wine*, it would have been neat to call this book 'Savoie Wine', but for a long time I have known that Bugey, especially, was often wrongly subsumed into Savoie. 'The Wines of Savoie, Bugey and beyond' was never going to make a good book title, hence the more flexible *Wines of the French Alps*. But which regions to include or exclude was a challenge. Savoie and Bugey are the focus of this book. However, Isère and Hautes-Alpes are included too, because their tiny vineyard areas produce Alpine wines of increasing interest. On the same latitude as Hautes-Alpes, with its vineyards on the Prealpine foothills, the Diois is dominated by one wine style, the *méthode ancestrale* Clairette de Die and here there is another connection, since Cerdon from Bugey is also a *méthode ancestrale* sparkling wine. All these wines share the Alpine characteristics of lightness and freshness, born from steep slopes, limestone-based soils, mountain climate and relatively high altitude.

Most of all, it is the unusual grape varieties that exist in the French Alps that have attracted the interest of wine lovers around the world in recent years. Wine geeks in New York, London, Tokyo and elsewhere now seek out Mondeuse in their trendy neighbourhood wine shops, bars and restaurants. I've heard wine lovers gasp when I have mentioned that there are only about 20ha of Persan in the world. Altesse is becoming better known, even with the somewhat confusing Roussette designations. And new wine drinkers love the purity and steeliness of wines made with the sometimes maligned Jacquère grape, grown on the chaotic stony soils of Mont Granier's collapse or beneath the fortified towers of Chignin. And, if they

display Alpine freshness too, Bergeron (better known as Roussanne), Chardonnay, Gamay and other classic grapes also have their place in the Alpine wine offering. No fewer than 52 grapes are mentioned in the book.

Navigating the book

The book is divided into four main parts, starting with 'Setting the scene'. The first chapter, 'The wine regions in context' gives a snapshot of the five wine regions and the wines each one produces. The second chapter of Part 1 delves into a little history, and the third chapter looks very specifically at people and movements that have shaped today's wine regions.

Part 2 is very much the textbook part of the book: it should serve as a useful reference for anyone interested in learning why a wine from the French Alps tastes like it does. Whereas the chapters on terroir, growing the grapes and making the wines are necessarily generalizations, the appellations provide the nitty gritty of the rules for each wine region – and in Savoie and Bugey these are very complicated. And perhaps the chapter I am most proud of in this part, and the one you will probably consult most often, is the chapter on the grape varieties, as so many of these grapes do not exist anywhere else in the world.

The sheer numbers of producers in Savoie and Bugey is staggering for such small regions and increasing numbers of them are exporting. Part 3 includes profiles of almost 120 producers from across the French Alps, and several others are mentioned briefly in the preamble to each area. Do read the introduction to this part as it explains how I chose who to include (and what a difficult choice that was). I hope you enjoy the human nature of the stories behind the French Alpine wines you drink. These chapters also summarize the characteristics of each area, especially useful for the visitor.

Wine and cheese, anyone? Those people who regularly visit the French Alps – indeed anywhere in the Alps – know that that the

locals appear to live on a diet of cheese, pork and potatoes. Well, it's not true. Amazing lake fish, excellent vegetables and plenty of fruit are on the menu too, with a good choice of gourmet restaurants. However, cheese matters in the French Alps – the quality is considered to be the best in France, and cooked cheese dishes have their own traditions. The other chapters in Part 4, 'Enjoying the local food and wines', look at the other foods and some typical regional dishes, give a brief overview of Chartreuse and other locally produced spirits, and list a small selection of recommended places to stay, eat, shop and visit. The appendices include some more details on AOCs and a useful glossary, as well as my attempt to help you pronounce the names of wines and places – hint: that well-known Savoie red grape is not pronounced 'Mondooze'.

The photographs in the book give a flavour of the beauty of these Alpine wine regions and help to introduce you to the people as well. And the maps are simply unique and invaluable. I feel that both help to bring my words to life.

Wines of the French Alps is a more complete documentation on Savoie, Bugey and beyond than anything ever published, even in French. Yet even with 32 more pages than first planned, my editor and I had to make many tough decisions as to what to omit. There is so much to discover in these up-and-coming little wine regions, and I hope this book goes some way into making the discovery more rewarding. Every factual book is out of date by the time it is printed, so forgive me if things have changed, or if there is a glaring omission or a mistake. Any errors are my responsibility.

From top: Mick Rock photographs Gringet grapes in Ayze; Wink and Brett working hard at Domaine Monin in Bugey; in Chignin, Wink visits cousins Gilles

and Adrien Berlioz.

Author's acknowledgements

This book has been a long time coming for many reasons, not least the gruelling illness and sad death of my partner, Brett. I am immensely grateful for the understanding and patience of family, friends, colleagues and all who have worked in connection with this book or even just had to put up with listening to my regular anxieties. Some specific thanks follow, and I apologize to anyone I have omitted.

First, to all who supported the Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign to help finance this project. You have been the most patient of all and the fact that you committed ahead of time kept motivating me to keep on going and finish the book. Kickstarter supporters are listed here.

To those who answered my many questions or checked text: For Part 1 (Setting the scene): the Allemand family, Dominique Belluard, the Dupraz family, Michel Grisard, André and Michel Quenard, Olivier Pasquet, Claude Paul, Franck Peillot, the Perrier family, Charles-Henri Tavernier, Françoise Vaisse of the Musée de la Vigne et du Vin at Montmélian, and Jean Vullien. For Part 2 (All about the wines): Eric Angelot, Jean-Louis Bergès of Jaillance, Claire Blackler, Maxime Dancoine, Nicolas Gonin, Patrice Jacquin, Isabelle Letessier of Sigales, Fabien Lombard, Alex Maltman, Pierre Renau of CalcEre, Nils Sergent of the environmental department of Savoie, Olivier Turlais of Oeno Conseil and José Vouillamoz. For Part 3 (Places and people): all the producers profiled and mentioned. For Part 4 (Enjoying the local food and wines): Wendy Rowe.

To the following people from the official regional syndicates, who helped with my research and also paid some of my

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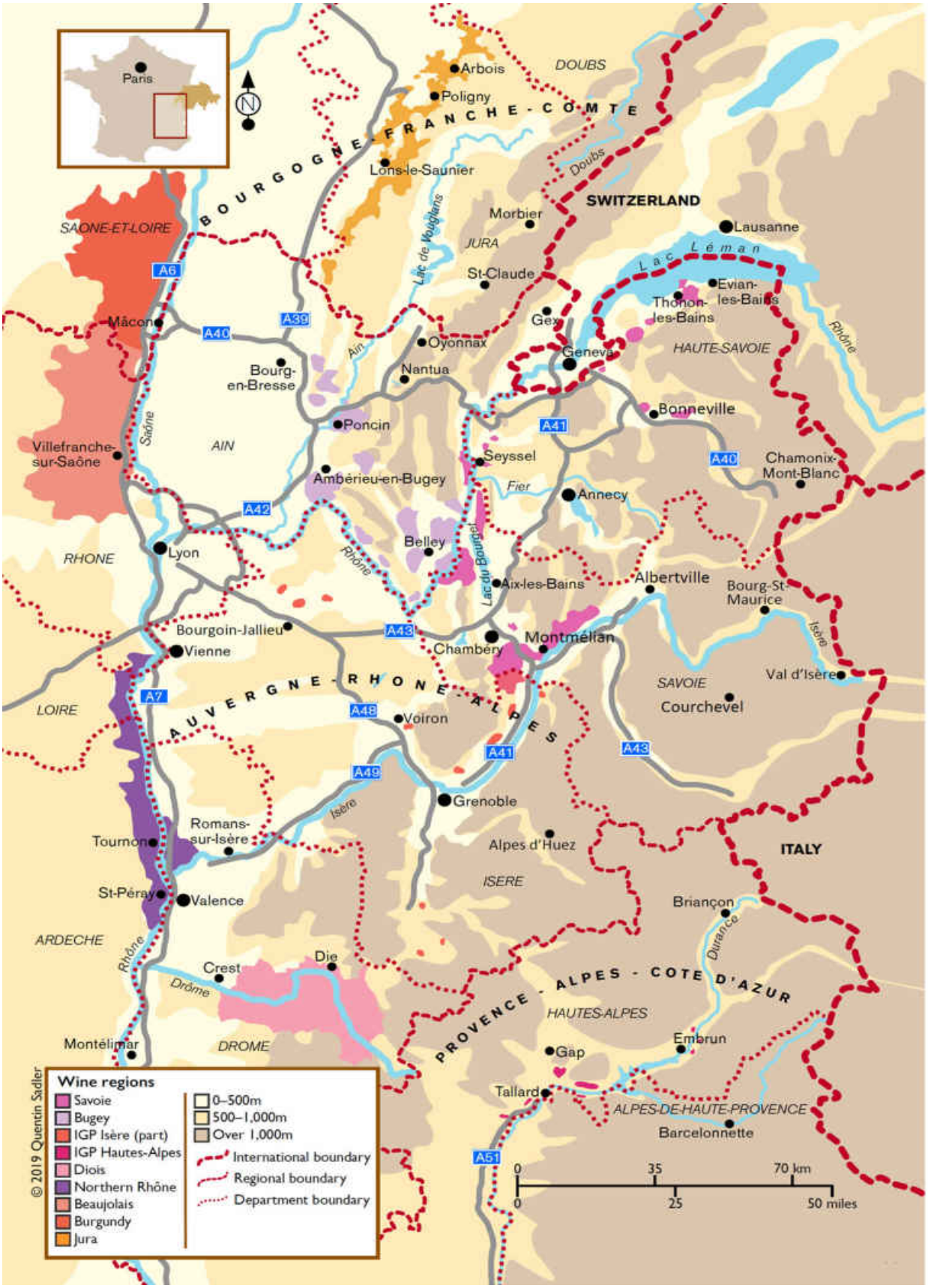
To various people who have helped on this book: all the photographers, both professionals and those who donated Images – they are listed here; Liz Sagues and Anne Burchett, who stepped in at the very last minute to respectively proofread text and index; Richard Chalmers of Dolman Scott and my brother, Rob Lorch, who have both been extremely helpful on the logistical side of printing and despatch.

Finally, this book would not exist without my main team, which has worked with me so assiduously and so long on this stop-start, immensely complicated, self-published book. Editor Maggie Ramsay, designer Jane Dixon-Smith, cartographer Quentin Sadler, and my main photographer Mick Rock have all gone over and above the course of duty to make this a great book. Thank you so much.

SETTING THE SCENE

A secret Mondeuse vineyard high above Lac du Bourget in Savoie.


Paris
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BOURGOGNE-FRANCHE-COMTE
AUVERGNE-RHONE-ALPES
PROVENCE-ALPES-COTE D'AZUR
SWITZERLAND
ITALY
DOUBS
SAONE-ET-LOIRE
JURA
AIN
RHONE
LOIRE
ARDECHE
DROME
ISERE
SAVOIE
HAUTE-SAVOIE
HAUTES-ALPES
ALPES-DE-HAUTE-PROVENCE
Arbois
Poligny
Lons-le-Saunier
Morbier
Lausanne
St-Claude
Evian-les-Bains
Thonon-les-Bains
Gex
Geneva
Oyonnax
Nantua
Bourg-en-Bresse
Mâcon
Bonneville
Poncin
Villefranche-sur-Saône
Seyssel
Chamonix-Mont-Blanc
Ambérieu-en-Bugey
Annecy
Belley
Lyon
Aix-les-Bains
Albertville
Bourg-St-Maurice
Bourgoin-Jallieu
Vienne
Chambéry
Montmélian
Val d'Isère
Courchevel
Voiron
Grenoble
Romans-sur-Isère
Tournon
Alpes d'Huez
St-Péray
Valence
Briançon
Crest
Die
Gap
Embrun
Montélimar
Tallard
Barcelonnette
A6
A39
A40
A41
A42
A43
A48
A49
A7
A51
Saône
Ain
Rhône
Fier
Lac du Bourget
Isère
Drôme
Durance
Lac de Vouglans
Doubs
Lac Léman
Wine regions
Savoie
Bugey
IGP Isère (part)
IGP Hautes-Alpes
Diois
Northern Rhône
Beaujolais
Burgundy
Jura
0–500m
500–1,000m
Over 1,000m
International boundary
Regional boundary
Department boundary
0
35
70 km
0
25
50 miles
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The French Alpine wine regions lie south of the Jura and east of Beaujolais and the Rhône Valley wine regions, to the west of the Alps.

THE WINE REGIONS IN CONTEXT

The French Alps begin south of Lac Léman (Lake Geneva) on the Swiss border and continue south until they disappear into the Mediterranean near Nice. The wine regions covered in this book begin in the west with Bugey, which lies southwest of Geneva, and end with the areas of the Diois and Hautes-Alpes, bordering on Provence. The most important wine region is Savoie, which stretches from Thonon-les-Bains on Lac Léman to south of Chambéry.

These Alpine regions are in the southern half of France, south of the watershed, where rivers run into the Mediterranean, rather than the North Sea. They are close to the magic latitude of 45°N, on which so many famous European wine regions lie.

In wine terms (and in food and tourist terms too), Savoie encompasses the two French departments of **Savoie** and **Haute-Savoie**. The administrative capital of Haute-Savoie (literally Upper Savoie) is Annecy and that of Savoie is Chambéry. By far the greatest concentration of Savoie vineyards is within 35km of Chambéry.

The **Bugey** wine region lies between Lyon and Geneva in the department of **Ain**, east of its capital Bourg-en-Bresse. To the south, **Isère** is a large department whose capital is Grenoble – in this book, only the scattered, mainly recently revived, Alpine vineyard areas are addressed.

South of Grenoble, the **Diois**, where Clairette de Die comes from, is in the **Drôme** department. And on roughly the same latitude over the mountains to the east is the **Hautes-Alpes** wine region, which is in the department of the same name, south and east of its capital town, Gap.

The Diois and Hautes-Alpes mark the beginning of the southern French Alps. I decided that this should be the southerly limit of this book, as beyond this latitude, the Provençal flavours in both food and wine begin to dominate over the Alpine ones.

The departments of Savoie, Haute-Savoie, Ain, Isère and Drôme are all within the wealthy and tourist-frequented French political region of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, whose regional capital is Lyon. Hautes-Alpes is the northernmost and most remote department of the PACA region – Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur – whose capital is Marseille.

The Chignin vineyards in Savoie lie on the foothills of the Bauges, part of the Prealps; in the background is the considerably higher Belledonne Alpine range of mountains.

Vineyards in Cerdon are among the highest in Bugey at nearly 500m, located in the southern Jura mountains.

The French Alpine vineyard regions

The total planted vineyard area in these Alpine regions is approximately 4,600ha; for comparison, less than one-third of that for the Alsace region. From these vineyards, a few hundred producers make about 35 million bottles of wine, which is less than 0.5% of the wine produced in France.

In terms of vineyard area, the region is split is as follows:

Savoie AOC: 46%

Bugey AOC: 10%

Diois AOC: 35%

IGPs of Savoie, Ain, Isère and Hautes-Alpes combined: 9%

These Alpine regions all share an important aspect – they lie on limestone-based slopes that form the foothills of the mountains. These are the foothills of the Prealps – the lower-altitude mountain ranges that lie below the Alps themselves. In the case of Bugey and the western parts of Savoie, geographically the vineyards are on the slopes of the southern Jura mountains which, geologically, are also termed as Prealps. Bugey has much more in common with Savoie than it does with Jura, sharing with Savoie many of its grape varieties, as well as its more recent history of fine wine development. However, those wine traders and wine lists that incorporate Bugey into Savoie do a disservice to both.

It is no surprise that there are many variations in climate, soil and aspect between these vineyard areas, but proximity to high mountains, the weather systems they create and the soils that they form provide the connection. Not only is the scenery dramatic, but the weather is too: high rainfall with a significant risk of storms, sometimes hailstorms; surprisingly strong sunshine and extreme changeability at times. But mountain slopes can also offer protection from the worst of the storms and provide rocky soils in which only the vine can thrive. Other geographical influences that are important here include broad glacial valleys and beautiful Alpine lakes, a feature of both Savoie and Hautes-Alpes. The Rhône river is never far away, and many of its tributaries, including the Isère, the Drôme and the Durance, run close to the vineyards.

Altitude: How high do grapes grow?

The highest vineyards in the French Alps are not in Savoie, but in the Hautes-Alpes (the name means the Upper Alps). Here there are a very few vineyards that touch 1,000m; the majority are between 600m and 700m. In the Diois, the vineyards stretch from 250m up to 700m, the highest being in the small

still wine appellation and village of Châtillon-en-Diois. In Savoie and Bugey there are very few vineyards above 500m, with the top of most vineyard slopes at about 400m. This altitude is similar to the Jura and indeed Alsace, and is only slightly higher than the best vineyards of the Côte d'Or in Burgundy. To write that Savoie vineyards are particularly high altitude is thus a myth. To write that they are in a mountain area, however, is completely correct and the mountain influence on the terroir is important.

A snapshot of the wines

Below are the main appellation and grape names that appear on labels of wines of the French Alps; these should help you navigate the rest of the book. Part 2 of the book covers these in more detail for each region, along with the terroir, the grapes and how they are grown, and how the wines are made. Part 3 delves into each individual area and profiles the main producers.

Savoie appellations and wine styles: The regional appellation AOC Savoie covers white, red, rosé and sparkling wines and there are 16 cru names for wines from specific geographical areas, the best known being Apremont, Chignin, Chignin-Bergeron, Arbin, Chautagne, Jongieux, Crépy and Ayze. AOC Roussette de Savoie is for still white wines from the Altesse variety and may be followed by one of four crus, including Frangy and Marestel. About two-thirds of the still wines are whites. AOC Seyssel is for still white wines and Méthode Traditionnelle sparkling wines. Sparkling wines are also made under the more recent AOC Crémant de Savoie. The IGP Vin des Allobroges covers the departments of Savoie and Haute-Savoie, the wines often coming from historic vineyard areas not covered by the Savoie AOC.

The landscape and buildings are almost Provençal in the Hautes-Alpes wine region, which lies in the foothills of the Ecrins mountains.

Main Savoie grapes: For whites – Jacquère, Altesse, Bergeron (a synonym for Roussanne), Chardonnay, Chasselas and Gringet. For reds – Mondeuse, Gamay, Pinot Noir and Persan. There are many more, mainly rare and indigenous, varieties.

Bugey appellations and wine styles: The regional appellation AOC Bugey covers white, red, rosé and sparkling wines with three crus, the most important of which is Cerdon, restricted to Méthode Ancestrale rosé sparkling wines. AOC Roussette du Bugey is for still white wines from the Altesse variety with two crus. Over 60% of Bugey's production is sparkling wine (including Cerdon). About two-thirds of the still wines are whites. The IGP Coteaux de l'Ain covers mainly wines from historic vineyard areas not covered by the Bugey AOC.

Main Bugey grapes: For whites – Chardonnay, Altesse and Aligoté. For reds – Gamay, Pinot Noir and Mondeuse. For Bugey Cerdon – Gamay and Poulsard.

Isère appellations, wine styles and grapes: The IGP Isère covers two main vineyard zones: Balmes Dauphinoises and Coteaux du Grésivaudan. A large variety of grapes from Savoie, Burgundy and Rhône are grown, along with several rare varieties, to produce mainly still wines of all three colours.

The Diois appellations, wine styles and main grapes: Two sparkling AOCs cover the whole area and represent more than 95% of production: by far the largest is AOC Clairette de Die, based on the Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains grape, with some Aligoté and Clairette, most of it made using the Méthode Ancestrale; the second is AOC Crémant de Die (Clairette, Aligoté and Muscat), made using the Méthode Traditionnelle. AOC Coteaux de Die is a tiny regional appellation for Clairette still whites and AOC Châtillon-en-Diois covers red, rosé and white still wines for that specific area.

Hautes-Alpes appellation and grapes: A single IGP Hautes-Alpes covers the scattered vineyards of the department. Internationally known varieties are grown, along with some rare indigenous varieties, notably the red Mollard grape. Mainly still wines of all three colours are made, along with some sparkling.

How to get there and around

The main air travel hubs for the French Alps are Lyon in France, and Geneva in Switzerland. There are also small airports with international flights, mainly in the winter ski season, in Grenoble and Chambéry. These four cities, along with Bourg-en-Bresse (for Bugey), Annecy (for Savoie), Valence (for the Diois) and Gap (for Hautes-Alpes) also have good train connections throughout France and internationally.

If you want to visit these vineyards independently, then a car is essential, with snow tyres fitted in winter. However, be aware that the extent of these French Alpine regions is more

than 300km driving distance north to south and 100–150km west to east. With so many scattered vineyard areas, even just within the Savoie wine region, the driving distances between wine producers can be substantial. And, off the motorway, be prepared to drive on slow, twisty and sometimes challenging mountain roads.

Bugey, Savoie and Isère wine regions are well served by motorways. On the A40, which runs from Mâcon to the Mont Blanc tunnel at Chamonix, you drive close to Bugey's Cerdon vineyards. The A40 links to various motorways: the A42 towards Lyon allows easier access to the Bugey vineyards further south; the A41 runs from Geneva south to Annecy, Chambéry, and then to Grenoble. Near Chambéry, the A43 runs west to Lyon and east towards Albertville, along the Combe de Savoie valley, past some of the principal Savoie vineyards.

The A7 or Autoroute du Soleil, a key French motorway to access the Mediterranean, goes past Valence, from where main roads take you southeast to the Diois vineyards. To visit the Hautes-Alpes from the north, the best way is from Grenoble, driving along the famous Route Napoléon main road.

Most of the French Alps regions have some sort of wine route with signage in place.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FRENCH ALPINE WINE REGIONS

The French Alps form a barrier that until modern times was challenging to traverse at any time and impassable in winter. However, their location was also a crossroads for people travelling both north to south and east to west, helping to explain why the French Alps ended up with such diverse grape varieties. The art of survival has always been a crucial skill for mountain dwellers; more recently wine has given them a chance to express their individuality.

The challenge in writing any history of the French Alps is that much of the area has been French for only a relatively short time. The province of Savoie (today's departments of Savoie and Haute-Savoie) was formerly ruled by the House of Savoy – for history purposes the term seems best in the anglicized form. Savoy's territory included, at various times, parts of Vaud in Switzerland, Aosta and Piedmont in Italy, and later became part of the Kingdom of Sardinia. Savoie, as we know it today, became definitively French only in 1860. Bugey was also for centuries part of the Duchy of Savoy, coming under French rule from 1601. The regions to the south – in today's Isère, Drôme and Hautes-Alpes departments – formed the province known as the Dauphiné and came under French rule from 1457.

Harvesters in Ayze gathered by a vineyard hut in the early 20th century. Although the village name is cut off their sign, you can read 'vins mousseux' or 'sparkling wine'.

The history begins with the pre-Roman establishment of the vine and subsequent Roman cultivation of vines to make wine for everyday consumption. Thereafter, the biggest influence on wine production became the Christian Church, with centuries of cohabitation of church, nobility and peasants. Democratization of the vineyards and increased plantings, linked with population growth, came in the 18th and 19th centuries, at the same time as advances in agriculture and science to make better wines. But this period also witnessed the great wine blights of the 19th century and ensuing disaster for the wine industry. These Alpine wine regions were at risk of disappearing into oblivion; survival of the vineyards here was in the balance right up until the 1970s.

Although Roman authors Pliny and Columella attested to the quality of the *allobrogica* vine, there are few mentions of wines from the French Alps as being truly memorable in quality. Travellers and writers through the ages have been simply overawed by the spectacular scenery in which vines thrived… an early 1611

travelogue, *Coryat's Crudities*, by the British writer Thomas Coryat, waxes lyrical on seeing so many vineyards between Chambéry and Albertville:

'I admired one thing very much in those vineyards, that they should be planted in such wonderfull steepe places underneath the hils, where a man would thinke it were almost impossible for a labourer to worke, such is the praecipitium [steepness] of the hill towards the descent.'

Old texts relate how noble travellers were sustained by the wines hospitably offered by monasteries and abbeys; in the 16th century, philosopher Michel Montaigne travelled through the Maurienne Valley and enjoyed wine probably from the Persan grape. Frangy's virtues were proclaimed in the 18th century by another philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. But the wines did not reach the French courts, as, for example, Jura's wines did; nor did they have a long-standing reputation like wines from Bordeaux, Burgundy or Champagne.

Thus until recently, wines from the French Alps were exclusively imbibed by the locals and the tourists. Only in the 21st century have wines from these mountainsides crossed borders and become properly valued locally too.

The Roman period and earlier

The French Alpine regions share a very ancient history of vine-growing. The Allobroges were the Gallic tribe living in a large area roughly between Geneva and the Rhône river, with their capital at Vienne, south of Lyon. The Allobroges were thus the first Savoyards and in wine terms are commemorated in the name IGP Vin des Allobroges. In the first century AD, Pliny and the agronomist Columella mentioned a red grape vine grown in the area, which Pliny baptized *Vitis allobrogica* and which may be a genetic forerunner of Mondeuse. Unlike the Mediterranean varieties brought by the Romans, the *allobrogica* vine resisted low temperatures and thus

appears to have originated in the area. Archaeological finds in the French Alps have revealed evidence of winemaking and various references to the vine, such as an inscribed stone found near Aix-les-Bains, dating from the second or third century AD, and elsewhere amphorae and grape pips from that era.

Medieval times: influence of the Church and nobility

Christianity was established across the French Alps in Roman times, and following the collapse of the Roman Empire there was a succession of rulers, including the Burgundians and the Franks. During the late eighth and early ninth centuries, Charlemagne was an all-powerful emperor in western Europe. A devout Christian, his influence on agriculture was important and he ordered lands to be given to monasteries to grow crops, including vines to make wine for daily drinking. Monasteries became places where weary Alpine travellers could rest or sit out the vagaries of mountain weather; providing their guests with good wine was part of the Christian hospitality.

From the tenth century there is much evidence of vineyards established by the Church, often on donated land. The Augustinian Abbaye de Filly had vineyards in Marignan and Crépy by Lac Léman; the Benedictine priory of St-Philippe owned prized vineyards in the Combe de Savoie, and that of Ambronay was bequeathed vineyard lands in Bugey; the Carthusian monks of Arvières had vineyards in Seyssel and Bugey; and the Cistercian Abbaye de Hautecombe, on Lac du Bourget, established vineyards in Chautagne and Brison-St-Innocent. In this early period, bishops of Belley in Bugey, Embrun in Hautes-Alpes and Grenoble in Isère all took an interest in winemaking – the latter transported wine from the Combe de Savoie vineyards down the Isère river to Grenoble.

Pliny and the origins of Clairette de Die

Before the Romans, the Diois was occupied by the Gallic tribe called the Voconces (Vocontii), whose important towns included Die and Luc-en-Diois. The region has several archaeological finds proving that vines were cultivated, and in his *Natural History* Pliny described how the Voconces made wine. He wrote that grapes were harvested late and the must was chilled by plunging the jars into the Drôme river and leaving them there through the winter until the spring frosts. Undoubtedly the wine that emerged would have been cloudy and semi-sparkling from an incomplete fermentation, and the grapes could easily have been the very ancient, late-ripening Muscat variety used today. The description is certainly a forerunner of the Méthode Ancestrale, or Méthode Dioise, as it is called locally. It does not take much for the region to conclude that its sparkling wine predates Champagne… or any other sparkling wine.

The House of Savoy, founded at the beginning of the 11th century, has left its mark on the landscape in the many defensive forts built on hills overlooking important thoroughfares in the Aosta Valley and Switzerland's Valais as well as in Savoie; ruins can be seen today close to vineyard areas, notably the towers of Chignin and the Château de Miolans. The Counts of Savoy also needed wine and this was often made for them by the Church. During the relatively prosperous period between the 12th and 14th centuries, vineyards expanded greatly, and historical documents mention many of those we know today; vineyards in Ayze, for example, are mentioned in Bonneville's archives of 1279.

It was the Church that furthered the skills of farming vines and making wines, sometimes supported by nobility. The book *Les Vignobles de l'Ain* (2018) gives an account of wine production in Bugey's Poncin between 1338 and 1350, provided by the vigneron who worked for the Sire of Thoire et Villars, a local family: it includes details of when to plant, how to tie up vines *sur échalas*, maintaining barrels and preventing the wine from turning to vinegar – and even

how to sell the wine. By the 14th century, some nobles would designate different vineyard plots as being suitable either for noble or peasant land, and taxation on wine reared its head.

In the Diois, vine parcels in the village of Aurel were donated by various dignitaries to the cathedral in Die and its bishop.

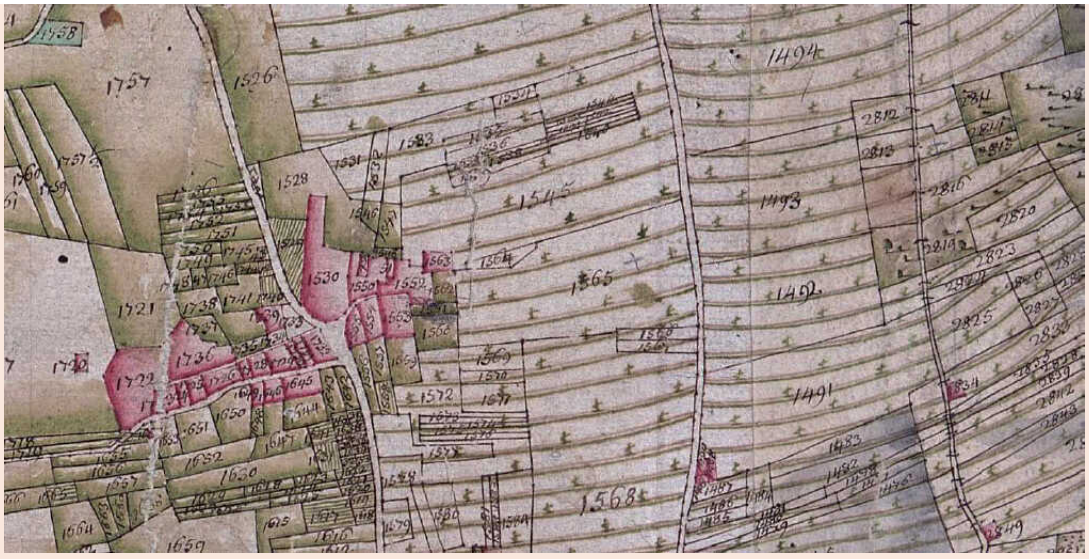
It would be wrong to end the account of this period without mentioning two important stories from Savoie. The first concerns the collapse and landslide of Mont Granier in 1248, with tragic loss of life; it explains why today's most-planted Savoie vineyards in Abymes and Apremont are not mentioned until some centuries later, when vineyards were planted on the rockfall. The second is the delightful story of the arrival in the early 15th century of the Altesse grape. It is said to have come from Cyprus through marriage with the Dukes of Savoy and subsequent planting near Jongieux – modern ampelographers insist this story is a myth.

Quality challenges in the post-medieval period

By the end of medieval times, vineyards had been established in most of today's French Alps vineyard areas and far beyond, for example, all around Lake Annecy. But there was a growing problem with overproduction. Ahead of his time, in 1559 the Duke of Savoy, Emmanuel Philibert, implemented a *Ban de Vendanges*, which forbids vine-growers from harvesting before a decreed date, to ensure proper grape ripeness. But the Duke moved the capital of the Duchy of Savoy from Chambéry to Turin, which historians believe marginalized Savoie itself, and this affected the development of wine quality. Texts reveal that there were good wines to be found in good vintages, but there was a distinct lack of knowledge. In 1774, the Savoie noble and wine connoisseur Marquis Costa de Beauregard wrote an impassioned text about overproduction, urging the profession to take winemaking more seriously.

'*La mappe Sarde'* of 1730

The aim of the ambitious agricultural mapping of Savoie, conducted under the Kingdom of Sardinia, was to organize an efficient method of taxation. *La mappe Sarde* is a series of cadastral maps, which was saved from destruction and is now partly digitized. The map showed in incredible detail, plot by plot, the buildings and roads and it even differentiated the crops. These maps, which also show topography, are considered way ahead of their time and are both beautiful and fascinating for those who love maps, and invaluable for historians. In his 1998 book *Les Vignobles des Pays du Mont-Blanc*, Maurice Messiez devotes several pages to analysis of the Savoie vineyard areas at the time of *la mappe Sarde*. Here's an example of his findings, translated and abbreviated:



This small extract of the mappe Sarde is of Jongieux and shows the Marestel hillside covered in vines.

> 'In the case of Saint-Julien de Maurienne, whose 315ha of vineyards stretch along 6km of an alluvial cone situated between 600m and 800m, the breakdown of the plots was … [that] … 954 [peasant] owners came from 21 communes and about 250 of them came from more than 20km away to prune, weed, harvest and then sometimes take back the harvest in cow hides attached to the back of mules…'

Messiez's book includes a chart for Savoie wine communes summarizing ownership (split between church, nobility and commoners/peasants). All the vineyard areas were far bigger than today and often their relative importance is reversed: Aiton and Ayze had more vineyards than Apremont or Jongieux, for example. For the fate of the vineyards of St-Julien de Maurienne, see here.

Although remaining mainly rural, industries developed in the French Alps, such as mining, watchmaking and others reliant on abundant water and wood resources. Consequently, vineyard areas

expanded to supply the increasing population's needs. The peak for vineyard plantings occurred in the middle of the 19th century and it is estimated that there were 22,000ha in Savoie/Haute-Savoie, 20,000ha in Ain (Bugey and elsewhere), 33,000ha in Isère, 6,000ha in Hautes-Alpes and 6,000ha in the Diois (part of Drôme). Almost all of the vineyards were used to make very ordinary red wine. Depending on the region, today's planted areas are as low as 0.2–25% of these figures.

Two registers list the many Savoie grape varieties that were grown in the 19th century. The 1887 grape variety register was by Pierre Tochon (1819–1892), the president of the Savoie society of agriculture. He was prolific in his agricultural reports, which included one written in 1874 with a detailed chapter on wine production – his diligence helped to push up the quality of local wines. Another person of influence was Jean Fleury Lacoste (1803–1871), a Savoie vigneron who had been a Paris politician before returning to Montmélian – he founded and was president of the Chambéry agricultural society. Lacoste experimented with different vine training systems and after meeting Jules Guyot introduced his new Guyot system.

These vines, photographed in 2005 in Marin near Lac Léman, are trained in the style named 'crosses'.

Dr Jules Guyot, in his 1868 report on the vineyards of France, *Etudes des Vignobles de France,* describes and illustrates the two families of vine training in Savoie. High training – as traditionally seen also in Italy and other Mediterranean areas – sometimes used trees for support and vines trained in this way would live for centuries, becoming huge in Savoie's humid climate. Local high training styles included the *hautains* of Chautagnes and the *crosses* of Marin. Guyot noted that there was a plethora of training systems, including, especially around Montmélian, the form of Gobelet training we today refer to as *sur échalas*. He advocated low training for improved quantity and quality.

Sartot… Grangeon… Cellier… Cabane…

The vineyards in the French Alps are dotted with little houses or cabins, each region having its own style. The back cover of this book illustrates a *grangeon* in southern Bugey, and the photo below shows a cluster of these houses – almost a mini-hamlet – in the middle of the Monthoux cru in St-Jean-de-Chevelu, Savoie. These buildings – which the Savoyards call '*sartots*' – had a serious function until at least the Second World War. '*Sartot*' derives from the patois for a place 'where you keep everything safe' or '*serre tout*'.

Families who lived higher in the mountains, above where the vine could flourish, needed wine too. Those with enough money would purchase land to plant a few rows of vines in the closest vineyard area. The 'Baujus', the local name for those living in the Bauges mountains, farmed vineyards in the Combe de Savoie; villagers from Entremont-le-Vieux came across the Col du Granier to work vineyards in Apremont or Abymes; this is repeated across the French Alpine regions. Given that they needed to work their vineyards – in winter to prune and in summer to plough or fight disease, and then

eventually to harvest – they needed somewhere not only to store their tools, but also to rest, eat, and possibly stay the night. The roofs were constructed to collect rainwater for mixing up vineyard sprays and for drinking. Some cabins were substantial, with a few rooms to live in and perhaps even to make and store the wine (a *cellier*); others were no more than the size of a large shed. Today, many are being restored to preserve the beauty of the vineyard landscape.

A century of upheaval

The century from 1850 to 1950 was difficult everywhere in the French wine world. For the French Alps the most significant threats to survival were:

- fungal diseases: oidium (powdery mildew), then later downy mildew and in some places black rot, arrived between 1850 and 1890 and caused serious crop reductions.
- establishment of the railways: this allowed wines from the south of France, and later from French-controlled North Africa, to be easily transported to main towns – the wines were stronger in alcohol and cheaper in price, hitting the market for local wines hard.
- phylloxera: known in France since 1865, the louse was identified in the vineyards of Hautes-Alpes in 1868 and reached Savoie by

1878. Phylloxera steadily wiped out the vineyards in its path, but once grafting vines onto American rootstocks was discovered, it gave a chance to replant vineyards using newly learned methods. On the brighter side, Savoie developed a good reputation for its for vine nurseries, which specialized in grafting.

- the huge loss of human life in the First World War: following a decline of rural, and especially mountain, populations who had left to find jobs in the cities, after the war, depopulation increased further. Many high-quality vineyards that had been replanted after phylloxera were abandoned, particularly those on the higher and steeper slopes, which were hardest to work.

After phylloxera only those grape varieties that were known to give a reliable crop were replanted in any quantity; and many vineyards were replanted with lesser-quality hybrid varieties, which did not require expensive grafting. This legacy had a long-lasting effect on the diversity and quality potential of French Alpine vineyards.

In the early decades of the 20th century, as elsewhere in France, there were various attempts at delimiting vineyard areas, setting down in law local production methods and wine styles, with the main aim of protecting the names against fraud (which had been rife since the end of the 19th century). To this end, syndicates of growers in each area were set up, with the Diois and Seyssel among the first to do this. Producers of Seyssel and Clairette de Die sparkling wines were also almost certainly the earliest in the French Alps to adopt bottles rather than barrels. Whereas Clairette de Die conquered local markets, Royal Seyssel, a sparkling wine brand created by Monsieur Varichon and Monsieur Clerc early in the 20th century, was perhaps the first local wine to cross the seas, notably to the UK and to the US.

The Royal Seyssel label has remained largely unchanged for a century.

The first AOCs in France were established in 1936. In the French Alps, Clairette de Die and Seyssel were the first AOCs in 1942, followed by Crépy in 1948. For Savoie as a whole, quality was much less homogenized. In the 1950s, the first step was to achieve the lesser VDQS designation, also obtained by Bugey in the department of Ain, where the concept of using the term Vins du Bugey had only just appeared.

Until as late as the 1970s there were hardly any vine-growers who lived solely from their vines: either they had another job or they were mixed farmers. Largely uneducated, making and selling wines was beyond most of them. The establishment of wine co-operatives saved the day for many. The first to be established here were in the wine areas of Isère's Coteaux du Grésivaudan (none survives) and in the Gap/Tallard area of Hautes-Alpes, with only the Cave des Hautes Vignes surviving. The Cave des Vins Fins de Cruet (today's Cave de Cruet) was established in the Combe de Savoie in 1939; a rival co-operative in Montmélian, set up in 1947, bottled and sold wines from all over Savoie, but closed in the 1990s. Two more have survived from the 1950s: the Cave de Chautagne in Savoie, renamed Le Vigneron Savoyard (after merging with the smaller Apremont co-

operative of that name), and the very successful Cave de Die, which as Jaillance today controls 70% of the output of Clairette de Die.

Louis Allemand, grandfather of Laetitia Allemand, proudly driving a tractor in his Hautes-Alpes vineyards in the 1960s.

Finding new markets and making modern wine

In the post-war period, the AOC Clairette de Die developed hugely thanks to the advent of refrigeration and pressure tanks, which meant the ancestral method could be used to make a consistent and stable sparkling wine. Cerdon in Bugey benefited from the same technology. The Diois, in particular, used the simple offer of their speciality sparkling wines, allied with good distribution, to develop new markets across France via supermarkets, which were emerging as wine suppliers.

An important turning point for Alpine viticulture came in the 1960s and 1970s. The challenges of working the steep hillsides had gradually pushed the vineyards down onto the flatlands, many of them not ideal for quality winemaking. Being able to mechanize vineyards with tractors, combined with the use of chemical fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides and anti-fungal sprays, led to more cost-effective yields. Many vignerons I have spoken to who were born before the 1950s are clear that without the advent of chemical treatments, the Alpine vineyards would not have survived.

The rise of the ski tourism industry was hugely significant for Savoie and was linked with a need to achieve the AOC – a badge of

approval much appreciated in France. Countless well-established Savoie vignerons told me how the arrival of the AOC in 1973 encouraged them to move from polyculture to a focus on vines. Youngsters wanting to become vignerons were encouraged to study wine, most going to wine schools such as Beaune or Mâcon in Burgundy, or Belleville in Beaujolais, although there were courses closer to home in La Motte Servolex in Savoie, and Belley in Bugey. In the 1970s Bugey too set out its stall for local markets, vignerons encouraging visitors to their tasting rooms. And everywhere, increased prosperity brought more local restaurants to supply.

The Savoie AOC was a good marketing tool, and encouraged better and more consistent wines – for one thing, yields, which had sometimes reached over 100hl/ha for Jacquère, were reduced. But not everything was good about it. The list of permitted grape varieties excluded many historically important grapes, such as Douce Noire, and this has led to a long battle to rehabilitate these grapes. The Savoie AOCs remain complicated, with a high number of crus for such a small vineyard area. Over the years, just two have been dropped, where only privately owned vineyards remained – Charpignat, near Lac du Bourget, known for the rare Cacaboué grape, and Ste-Marie d'Alloix in Isère, known for Verdesse.

By the end of the 1980s Savoie wines had gained their (now unwanted) image as wines ideal to drink on a ski slope – preferably within one year of vintage. Yet from this period emerged some strong characters, insisting on doing things differently. Noël Dupasquier in Jongieux stuck to making wines that were bottled late and made to age, especially his Roussette de Savoie Marestel; Michel Grisard, Louis Magnin and the late Charles Trosset in the Combe de Savoie proved that Mondeuse could be a serious red wine; Jean Masson and his son Jean-Claude developed a good reputation for their Apremont wines by reducing yields and harvesting Jacquère later; Albert Belluard effectively saved the Gringet grape in Ayze and his son Dominique proved it could be used to make fine still as well as sparkling whites. And in Chignin, André and Michel Quenard, alongside several others, planted more

Bergeron (Roussanne) on the best, steepest slopes to offer a serious white alongside their usual Jacquère.

Bugey also had some key vignerons bucking the trend for making cheap, ordinary wine. In the northern part, Philippe Balivet, Alain Renardat-Fâche and Raphaël Bartucci, among others, were making real Cerdon rather than a carbonated copy; in the south, the Peillot family, Patrick Charlin and Fabrice Gros championed Altesse and also Mondeuse, while Caveau Bugiste and Domaine Monin revived the Manicle cru. In Hautes-Alpes, Marc Allemand was insisting there was a quality future for his region's wines and helped achieve its Vin de Pays designation.

French Alps vignerons in the 21st century

The first two decades of the 21st century have again provided challenge and opportunity in equal measure. In wine production the concerns are climate change and the need to focus more on the environment. A decline in traditional markets and the availability of increasingly good quality wine from around the world have pushed sales down for some producers and profits have been squeezed. But most vignerons realize that making better quality wine is the answer. And the growing interest in obscure grapes and wine regions, as well as lighter wines, present opportunities for French Alpine producers. Better-educated, well-travelled vignerons are gradually taking over, determined to shake up ideas.

Bugey finally obtained the AOC in 2009 and in Isère and Hautes-Alpes, once both important wine regions, a handful of vignerons are reviving the reputation of the wines through the IGP system. Meantime, the Diois is battling a decline in interest for Clairette de Die, but trying to launch new products, like rosé, not always successfully – see here. And in Savoie, while some established producers revitalize their range with a new AOC for Crémant de Savoie, it is the organic vignerons who are creating a buzz outside the region. A handful of young organic vignerons across the French Alps follow the French natural wine trend, shunning AOC. For Savoie,

as well as Bugey and Isère, demand from export markets is on the increase.

The next chapter covers in more detail a few of the movements and people that have specifically influenced the French Alps wines we drink today. And I explore the 21st-century challenges and opportunities in the last chapter of Part 3.

Noël Dupasquier with his centenarian Altesse vines on the Marestel slope in Jongieux.

This cartoon by Glen Baxter was commissioned in the mid-2000s by Yapp Brothers, UK importers for Savoie's Domaine de l'Idylle.

MOVEMENTS AND PEOPLE THAT HAVE INFLUENCED THE WINES TODAY

Events in the wine world since the mid-19th century impacted on the vignerons and the wines from the French Alps in a different way to elsewhere, due to the isolation of these mountain areas. This chapter follows the movements – and the people behind them – that have had a profound influence on the wines we enjoy from the French Alps today.

After phylloxera took its toll, as it did everywhere, the rise of Savoie as one of the most important regions in France for specialized vine nurseries is a key part of the wine region's story. The vines from those nurseries are not only international names but also less familiar indigenous varieties, and one man crucial to their modern survival is Michel Grisard. Born into a family who made their living from a vine nursery, he is best known as a vigneron who, alongside championing organics, was the first to command higher prices for wines from Mondeuse and Altesse. Michel is also a founder and current president of the CAAPG, an organization dedicated to rescuing, preserving and making the world aware of rare grape varieties from the Alps.

In the hard, commercial world of wine in the 1960s all wine regions of France were looking for new markets as domestic consumption began to decline. Exports beckoned for many. However, in Savoie, it was the rise of ski tourism that provided both a huge market and the impetus the region needed to work on improving the quality of its wines. But the vignerons could not manage this on their own: they needed help to produce quality wines. Regional wine technicians and consultant oenologists have been very influential across the regions of the French Alps.

Today, the worldwide trend in wine to seek quality rather than quantity leads the story of Savoie and other French Alps regions full

circle. Whereas the highest, steepest vineyard slopes were once deserted because they were just too hard to work, since the 1990s the high ground is slowly being reclaimed. New vineyards are shooting up again on abandoned slopes and these vineyards may well provide some of the most exciting wines of the French Alps in the future.

Savoie's vine nurseries

Out of the phylloxera crisis was born an important local trade. Honing skills first learned in that difficult period of the 19th century, since the 1950s Savoie has been an important French department for vine nurseries. For decades, the small commune of Fréterive, in the Combe de Savoie, was second only to Montpellier in the south of France for the number of grafted vines sold each year. Not only have some of these nurseries had an important influence on the wines made in Savoie today, but their expertise has also helped to preserve rare local grape varieties, on the brink of extinction.

A few years after phylloxera reached Savoie in 1878, the solution of grafting *Vitis vinifera* (the European vine) onto American rootstocks was discovered. But for growers to replant, they had to learn the technique of grafting. The lead in this was taken by the departmental plant nursery and by a commercial horticultural nursery in Chambéry, created by Martin Burdin (1740–1820), which was already reputed for its expertise in growing fruit trees. Other horticultural nurseries turned to propagating vine plants and grafting, and entrepreneurs took advantage of the crisis to set up nurseries.

The south-facing Bauges mountain foothills above the marshes by the Isère river, which had been dammed and canalized in 1860, were considered ideal to propagate the baby vines. The area around Fréterive especially had light, easily worked soils with plenty of underground water, and the slopes were aerated by the wind and therefore not too prone to humidity and disease. This was not work for the faint-hearted: by 1920 the success rate for establishing viable

grafts was still only 30%. Technical improvements brought this figure up to 50% by the 1950s and gradually the Savoie vine nurseries built a reputation for quality, which created a demand from other wine regions, especially Champagne. Over 100 nurseries were established and by 1955 they were supplying about 11 million baby grafted vines each year, peaking at over 33 million in 1990. The vast majority of grafted vines were sent to other French regions and some were exported.

In the 1970s technical changes in grafting took place, making the process more effective. These included changing the graft itself from the so-called '*greffe anglaise*' (English graft) to the omega graft; using treated paraffin to protect the grafts from botrytis; and laying down plastic protection on the ground. From the 1960s the plantations moved from the slopes to the plain, making them easier to mechanize, but more prone to disease, and therefore requiring a higher level of treatments. The success rate for grafts today is about 60% unless it's a particularly wet year with high levels of mildew. Savoie now produces about 20% of France's total grafted vines, with 30 million planted each year by around a score of nurseries.

Grafted Persan vines awaiting planting in Philippe Grisard's vineyard.

Whereas some commercial vine nurseries in Savoie focused on mainstream grape varieties that outside markets wanted, such as Chardonnay or Cabernet Sauvignon, others made sure to preserve the Savoie varieties. And over the decades several nursery owners have turned to wine production themselves – notably the late Gilbert Bouvet (one of the first in modern times to use Persan in a blend), the Vullien family, the Grisards and most recently the Vendange family. Champions of preserving the local varieties are the Grisard family, not only Michel, but also his brother Jean-Pierre, who runs the family vine nursery with his son Benoît, alongside their wine estate Domaine Grisard, and Michel's youngest brother Philippe with his estate Maison Philippe Grisard. As well as providing significant seasonal local employment, the vine nurseries prepared the ground for the revival of rare Alpine varieties in Savoie and the French Alps.

The CAAPG: Saving the Alpine grapes

Although Savoie has so many vine nurseries, official regional wine organizations had done surprisingly little research into the main local grape varieties. Those with historical significance, but which had been dropped once the AOC designation was adopted, had disappeared almost into oblivion. The situation was no better in neighbouring Bugey, although in Isère and Hautes-Alpes, with no appellation constraints, some ancient varieties had survived. This century, across Europe, organizations to save almost extinct grape varieties have sprung up, run voluntarily by determined individuals: vignerons, agricultural or scientific specialists, and amateur wine lovers. One of the earliest was created in Savoie in 2007 under the name of the Centre d'Ampélographie Alpine Pierre Galet (CAAPG) and it thrives today under the presidency of Michel Grisard.

Born in 1921, Pierre Galet (see also here) is described in Jancis Robinson's *Oxford Companion to Wine* as 'the father of modern ampelography' and is the author of around 50 books, notably several editions of his dictionary of grapes, translated into many languages. In the early part of this century he was distressed that the archives of his vast body of research notes and papers was inaccessible for others' research, languishing in the basement of a university building in Montpellier. Gilbert Nicaise (died 2014) tried to find a solution. He was a retired tree and vine specialist and had done much to rehabilitate Viognier in Condrieu. In 2004 Gilbert helped move the archives to a château in the Ardèche, in the hope of founding a centre for ampelography, but two years later the project fell through. Gilbert was friends with Roger Raffin, another retired agricultural specialist. Roger had a long-term interest in obscure grape varieties and is credited with being the first to ferret out plants of Mondeuse Blanche to replant in Savoie in the mid-1980s. He also knew the Grisard family. Ever the ideas man, Michel Grisard suggested to Gilbert and Roger that Pierre Galet's archives be brought to Savoie to create an ampelographical centre at Cevins, where he had established Domaine des Ardoisières. Pierre, who knew and loved Savoie, was enchanted by the idea.

The CAAPG was born, with its first official meeting in December 2007; Pierre Galet was a speaker and the much younger ampelographer, then relatively unknown, José Vouillamoz from Switzerland, agreed to offer technical help. Roger Raffin worked tirelessly as president of the CAAPG until December 2010, including overseeing a move of the archives and CAAPG office from Cevins to Montmélian's wine museum. Michel Grisard devoted more and more time to the association too. He inspired younger vignerons to become involved, not only from Savoie but also from across the French Alps and over the borders into Switzerland and Italy. The Isère vigneron Nicolas Gonin has been a key player too and one of the CAAPG's vice-presidents.

The role of the CAAPG

The main aim of the CAAPG is to save the genetic heritage of grapes and encourage diversity in the Alpine vineyard environment, partly to be able to meet the future needs of a changing climate. Among the CAAPG's activities are the following:

- Each summer before harvest, trained groups make inspection and identification visits, looking for very rare or completely unknown grape varieties, growing, for example, in private gardens.
- Cuttings of rare varieties are propagated. In its first decade, the CAAPG rehabilitated several Alpine grape varieties, achieving listings on the French register of grape varieties to allow them to be officially planted in France. These include Douce Noire, Onchette and Mècle reds, and Blanc de Maurienne or Rèze white.

Michel Grisard looking at a new edition of Pierre Galet's dictionary of grape varieties; the CAAPG supported its publication.

- The CAAPG oversees several experimental vineyards: in Myans, near Apremont, looked after by Philippe and Sylvain Ravier, with different clones of Jacquère; in Montmélian, growing various clones of Altesse, Mondeuse and Persan; and three in the Maurienne Valley. Certain individual vignerons and vineyard associations have been charged with growing and reporting on specific varieties, such as Nicolas Gonin with Mècle and the Trièves association for Onchette.
- Each year at the annual meeting in Montmélian, members gather for a conference on rare grapes. The day includes a walk-around tasting where members bring wines from sometimes extremely rare grapes, which might include some made for the first time, in demi-johns.

There is more detail about the varieties that have been saved by the CAAPG in the Grape Varieties chapter in Part 2.

Technicians and consultants

After the Second World War, technical help was essential as vineyard holdings and wineries grew, farmers gave up polyculture to become dedicated vine-growers, and VDQS/AOC designations demanded specific requirements. Until the 1970s, most farmers were largely uneducated and once they made the decision to give up their cows and crops, they had little time to take wine courses. From the 1950s, the regional wine-growers' associations or syndicates employed technicians, usually with a degree in agronomy or agricultural science, to advise in the vineyards. Even with little oenology experience, these technicians became involved in the wineries too. From the 1980s, independent companies set up to provide technical assistance, which ranges from filtration and mobile bottling services to wine analysis and comprehensive oenology consultancy. The influence of these companies on wine styles became extremely important.

Gaëlle Defour, in Oeno Conseil's laboratory in Apremont, is testing red grape juice – harvest is the busiest time for the laboratories.

A roll call of characters

The following have all played their part in the development of French Alps wines since the middle of the 20th century.

Pierre Galet is a world-renowned vineyard consultant, author and ampelographer (see also here). His knowledge was profound and remained so at the age of 96 when I met him in 2017. Although he travelled the world, he had a soft spot for Savoie and in the 1950s he worked with André Goddard in delimiting the Savoie appellation for the VDQS and then later the AOC designation. He was also involved in the same work for Bugey. He conducted detailed inventories of grape varieties in most French Alpine wine regions.

André Goddard worked early on as a technician for the Syndicat Régional des Vins de Savoie, and Pierre Galet, in his biography, pays tribute to the work he did in calming the conflicts between négociants and vignerons in the 1950s in order to achieve the Savoie VDQS designation. Vigneron André Quenard related how, along with giving technical advice, André Goddard helped these inexperienced vignerons with their administrative paperwork and arranged trips for them to visit other wine regions.

Claude Paul was the first director of the Bugey wine syndicate, from 1968 to 1995. He set up the first wine analysis laboratory in Belley and was instrumental in improving quality in the region. In 2017 (in his late eighties) he told me of the commercial reality of helping wine producers make a living in the 1970s. Due to their erratic production levels, he felt local grapes such as Mondeuse or Altesse should not be replanted and instead the focus had to be on Chardonnay for sparkling and still wines, and on Gamay and Pinot for reds, a legacy for Bugey that is not applauded by everyone.

Claude Marandon (died 2015) was an early technical advisor for the Savoie syndicate. Later he became a sommelier, bon viveur and weekend vigneron in Monterminod. He advised many vignerons on their wine-making and is honoured by a plaque in Chignin's

churchyard for having suggested the solution to the black rot fungal disease.

Jules Chauvet (died 1989) was a Beaujolais-based négociant and widely respected taster. Several natural wine producers in the French Alps cite his influence on the way they make their wines, alongside his colleague and disciple, the oenological consultant **Jacques Néauport**, who advocates making wine without added sulphur dioxide.

Pierre Masson (died 2018) is the most widely cited biodynamic consultant, teacher and supplier of biodynamic preparations. He has influenced every vigneron in this book who practises biodynamics. His business is continued by his son Vincent Masson.

CMC Station Oenologique de Savoie and Oeno Conseil

CMC, as it is known today, was founded in 1986 by oenologist Jean-François Thomassin, who was joined for a short time by Olivier Turlais. They created the first dedicated wine laboratory in St-Baldoph, near Chambéry, primarily for wine analysis. The Station Oenologique de Savoie expanded, offering filtration and bottling services, and was bought by Eric Petitjean, also the director general of the Institut d'Oenologique de Champagne. The Savoie company began to offer sparkling wine services of riddling and disgorgement and the name CMC, standing for Le Centre de Méthode Champenoise, was born; since 2003 CMC has been managed by Pierre Dusserre Bresson, now a well-known figure in the area. CMC, with branches in southern Bugey and in Provence, provides sparkling services for the vast majority of producers in Savoie, southern Bugey and Isère, and also offers still wine services, winemaking consultancy and analysis.

Oeno Conseil was founded in 1988 by Olivier Turlais, who qualified as an oenologist in Dijon in 1983. Initially he offered mobile bottling services and in 1992, together with Michelle Saugy, created a laboratory for wine analysis in Apremont. Today Oeno Conseil

works closely with all the major Savoie négociants, Cave de Cruet (the largest Savoie co-operative), and around 70% of independent vignerons in Savoie – as well as in Bugey, Isère and beyond. Oeno Conseil offers winemaking consultancy, filtration, bottling and analysis services in any combination. Olivier's son, Ulysse Turlais, joined the business in 2017.

Although a few are self-sufficient, most producers in Savoie, Bugey and Isère use Oeno Conseil and CMC for some services, hence their influence on the wines is important.

Olivier Turlais – the yeast whisperer

I am convinced that Olivier Turlais of Oeno Conseil is the most hard-working person in the wine world of the French Alps. Across the spectrum of wine producers from large to small, young to old, biodynamic to conventional, Olivier garners huge respect. Over the two-month period of harvest and subsequent wine fermentations, Olivier works from 8am to 2am every day and he tells me it is because he has to talk to the yeasts. He is a circus trainer of yeasts, he said in a documentary on the history of Savoie wine. Controversially, Olivier differentiates little between cultured and indigenous yeasts; he is happy to talk with any of them. In many ways Olivier is cut of the same cloth as the famous Bordeaux-based world-travelling wine consultants Michel Rolland or Denis Dubourdieu – he is known for speaking his mind: 'The story of Savoie is not very pretty; it was too easy in the past to simply sell wine to the négociants.' He forbade me to take photos of him.

Olivier can take a large amount of credit for raising the overall standard of Savoie wines over three decades, crusading to reduce residual sugar levels in white wines, teaching growers how to control malolactic fermentation and advising on how

to improve Mondeuse wines by encouraging producers to use gentle pump-overs, with short maceration periods, unless the year is really good. Overall, he tries to persuade producers to do little in the winery and to practise what he calls the '*cuisine de grand-mère*' (grandmother's cooking), a common-sense approach.

There are two other aspects in which Olivier is second to none. Firstly, he is highly respected as a top-class taster, writing meticulous notes, which many producers have told me really help them. Secondly, he has nurtured and encouraged several vignerons, by employing them part- or full-time in Oeno Conseil, while allowing them time off to establish their own vineyards and estates. David Giachino worked for him for many years; among others, Adrien Berlioz, Romain Chamiot and Julien Viana have had spells working for him, and at the time of writing, Maxime Dancoine, an oenologist and experienced vineyard consultant, is viewed in many ways as Olivier's right-hand man. Maxime works part-time for Oeno Conseil, having set up his own estate, L'Aitonnement, and is also a partner in the négociant Des Vins d'Envie. Fabrice Bouché, who also works as winemaker for Raphaël St-Germain, has been in charge of filtration at Oeno Conseil for over 20 years.

Thomas Finot told me that Olivier is 'someone who understands where the vigneron wants to go' and Franck Peillot said that he 'has the sensitivity of a vigneron and loves wine'. Even natural wine producers respect him, observing that his attitude towards lowering SO_2 levels has changed greatly in the past few years. The young vigneron Julien Viana told me firmly: 'It is thanks to Olivier that since the 1990s the quality in Savoie has risen,' and Jean-François Quenard summarizes: 'It's important to have an outside view, Olivier has helped raise the game.'

Le Boum: how spas and snow saved Savoie wine

Even back in the 18th and early 19th centuries, tourism in the French Alps helped boost the reputation of Savoie wines. First it was intrepid travellers passing through France to Italy; later there were wealthy summer tourists searching for health cures and clean mountain air. In the 1840s the prolific British author Frances Trollope travelled in Savoie, at a time when it was part of the Kingdom of Sardinia. In her *Travels and Travellers: A Series of Sketches* (published in 1846) she wrote an account of an incident during a hair-raising carriage ride from Yenne to Aix-les-Bains in the sketch titled 'Midnight passage of the Mont du Chat'. The story involves a bottle of sparkling Altesse and a driver who finishes the bottle and falls asleep, dead drunk, while Mrs Trollope is out of the carriage looking at the views down to the Lac du Bourget.

The spa town of Aix-les-Bains, with its stunning location on Lac du Bourget, drew those taking the curative spring waters. Britain's Queen Victoria visited more than once and is said to have enjoyed the local sparkling wines. This inspired the producer Varichon et Clerc (see Gérard Lambert) to create the brand Royal Seyssel, which led also to the creation of the Seyssel AOC in 1942.

Up until the Second World War, tourism in the French Alps was mainly restricted to summer, with visitors coming for the spas, for hiking or simply to admire the mountain views. Even in the 1960s, summer tourism was more important than winter and vignerons would deliver their wines in barrel to the hotels and restaurants in tourist centres such as Aix-les-Bains, Annecy and Chamonix.

The white stuff: a golden opportunity

Following the example of the Swiss, who embraced ski tourism much earlier, in the 1930s the Savoie mountain villages of Megève, La Clusaz and Courchevel, already welcoming summer tourists, began to install ski lifts and encourage holidaymakers to visit in winter to try out winter sports. At the foot of Mont Blanc, Chamonix is an all-year-round resort encouraging both winter sports and summer mountaineering enthusiasts. But in the past, these tended to be serious mountaineers, less likely to indulge in the pleasures of eating and drinking.

By the late 1950s, it was realized that the high-altitude (above 1,000m) Alpine communities were under threat. The local populations were shrinking fast as younger generations shunned the hard-working agricultural mountain life for less demanding and more secure jobs in the cities. Fears grew that local customs, traditions and produce (cheeses especially) would disappear too. Developing winter sports tourism became a priority for the French government from the mid-1960s. The beneficiaries turned out not only to be the residents in these mountain communities, but also a whole range of ancillary industries. And Savoie wine was one.

The French ski industry became huge, with ski areas and resorts literally carved out of the mountainsides. The French school terms were changed to allow a two-week February holiday especially for skiing. Staggered regionally so that the peak time stretched over four weeks, the period became known as '*le boum*' and snow tourism was referred to as *l'or blanc*, 'white gold' – potentially a licence to print money. Restaurants proliferated and, along with the shops supplying the self-catering tourists, they needed wine. More than anything else it was this that encouraged more vineyards to be planted from the 1960s and for Savoie to seek AOC status. Once the Vin de Savoie AOC was achieved in 1973, the region put all its energy into making wine to supply to the *stations* (ski resorts) and this meant the latest vintage had to be ready to deliver in mid-December, with a top-up before the peak February season. This had a major influence on the type of wines produced in Savoie, made to be drunk within just a few months of harvest. Momentum built and the Savoie wine-growers decided to make a big publicity splash for the Winter Olympics of 1992, which took place in Albertville, close to the vineyard area. Unfortunately, their enthusiasm was not backed up by quality at the time and both the local public and the tourists recognized this all too well. Things came close to being not *boum* but bust.

It has taken a generation to change the perception of wines from Savoie being fit only for the ski slopes. Many Savoie wine producers still sell more than half of their production to the *stations*. Today climate change threatens the survival of ski resorts, and some newly established Savoie vignerons, who work organically and seek higher prices for the fruits of their labours, deliberately look to sell in different markets, not even offering their wines in the ski resorts. Domaine Saint-Germain's Crac Boum'Bu (shown above) bucks this trend.

As a négociant supplying shops and restaurants in all the major ski resorts of Savoie and Haute-Savoie, the Perrier family did much to help the Savoie wine region's quality reputation.

Reconquering the slopes

From the late 1990s there has been a movement to replant some of the old hillside vineyards, abandoned decades, or sometimes longer, before. The land is usually laborious to clear, requiring expensive machinery, the upper slopes often having been invaded by the forest, and lower slopes, if not taken over as building land, left barren or used for animal grazing. This renaissance is gaining even more traction in the second decade of the 21st century, with some projects destined to provide a whole new range of wines from 2020 onwards. The reasons that make these initiatives viable are varied, but they include the availability of better machinery to work on steep slopes, climate change allowing more reliable ripening, and the commercial possibilities of obtaining a good price for the wines.

Within the established Savoie AOC vineyard areas, vines are once again carpeting higher and steeper slopes above Chignin, St-Jean-de-la-Porte and Jongieux, for example. In Bugey, the same thing happened on the slopes of the crus Montagnieu and Manicle, and more recently other less well-known historic slopes are being revived. Vineyards have also been (re)planted higher on the slopes of the Coteaux du Grésivaudan in Isère and in various parts of Hautes-Alpes.

But some of the most exciting projects are outside the AOC limits on reclaimed vineyard slopes that had been almost completely neglected, save for a few privately owned vines for family use. The only sour note is that many of these projects in Savoie have been actively opposed by the Syndicat des Vins de Savoie, which feels it needs to protect members from these developments.

Replanted from 1998 to become Domaine des Ardoisières, a century earlier this hillside above Cevins in the Tarentaise Valley had been covered with vines, but since had been almost completely abandoned.

Cevins becomes a phoenix

The first and arguably most ambitious project was that of Domaine des Ardoisières, the vision of now-retired vigneron Michel Grisard. He took up the idea of a local association, Vivre en Tarentaise, who from the mid-1990s were looking for a vigneron interested in replanting abandoned vineyard slopes. With their support and that of the mayor and villagers of Cevins, he created a plan that was bigger than anyone else could have envisaged. Located roughly halfway between Albertville and Moutiers, the Cevins vineyard slope is steep, south-facing, with poor, mainly mica-schist soils, and – like all the Tarentaise Valley – it was left out of the VDQS and thereafter AOC Savoie delimitations. The slopes receive less sun than the main Savoie areas and by the time the delimitations were made, there was no wine of repute from the Tarentaise vineyards.

The project involved creating a company to buy or lease around 400 plots of land. Some of the terraces and stone walls were in reasonable condition and the project included a plan to restore these as well as some of the *sartots* or vineyard cabins, built in the typical Tarentaise style. The estate is named for the slate (*ardoise*) roofs of the *sartots* and the slate-stone walls supporting the slope. Michel, whose own vineyard in Fréterive was run biodynamically, aimed to farm biodynamically at Cevins too.

A small plot of 0.2ha Altesse was planted in 1998. After significant land clearing, more vines were planted from 2000–2002 to reach about 5.5ha, with a further 0.5ha in 2010. The varieties chosen were all local, including the then virtually unknown Mondeuse Blanche for whites and Persan for reds, and Michel's vision was to make blends, to differentiate these wines from the single varietal Savoie AOC wines. Michel had always planned to find a young vigneron to work with on the project and in 2003 he took on Brice Omont. The two worked together until 2010, when a difficult split took place and Michel stood back, leaving Brice to run the estate, which he still does (see here). From the beginning, these wines attracted attention as Michel already had a good following from top French and export buyers for the wines from his own

estate. The wines proved that with the right terroir, combined with the right people, a phoenix could rise from the ashes.

Other projects across the French Alps

Across the French Alps, since the turn of the century, associations have formed to revive or preserve vineyard slopes, known historically through records, photographs, memories or the fact that private individuals still owned a few vines. Some of these small vineyards simply provide an enjoyable hobby for the participants. However, the aims of other projects are more serious, including an element of protecting the environment, so most are farmed organically. Often there is a social aspect too, such as offering work to the economically, physically or mentally disadvantaged, or creating work to attract younger people to live in areas with an ageing population. Two important projects are described in Part 3, namely the revival of vineyards in Savoie's Maurienne Valley and in Isère's Trièves area. Even the city of Grenoble has a newly revived vineyard.

In the Tarentaise Valley, there is a thriving vineyard association in Aime, further up the valley from Cevins, incorporating cider-making too. And in Haute-Savoie, vineyards are being revived near Annecy.

Vineyards sprout on Lake Annecy's slopes

Until the phylloxera epidemic the slopes above Lake Annecy were covered in vineyards, but it would be impossible for this area ever to regain even 10% of the vineyard area; for many decades, the slopes have been covered with smart villas. Since the easing of planting restrictions in France, following an EU directive, the possibility to replant vines arose and interest grew. The motivation in this wealthy area is mainly to recreate the heritage of local vineyards. There are currently three notable projects and I hear there may be others to

come. All the wines will be classified as Vin de France, as even the IGP Vin des Allobroges does not cover this area at present.

Clos du Château

Below the fairy-tale, family-owned Château de Menthon-St-Bernard is a beautiful, well-exposed site. The *mappe Sarde* shows there were vineyards on this slope in the 18th century and they were replanted following the phylloxera devastation, but disappeared in the 1930s. Financed by an association that includes the owners of the château, the vineyard is managed by vigneron Florent Héritier of Frangy, who works biodynamically. In 2018 1.2ha of vines were planted with Altesse, Viognier, Mondeuse and Gamaret. The plan is to plant a further 1.5ha in 2020, with the potential of a total 4.5ha of vineyards.

Coteaux des Girondales

With a mountain rather than lake view, Francis Rousset's vineyard is in the village of Villaz, near an old Roman road, in the hamlet of Les Vignes, on the Route des Vignes…. The last known harvest in Villaz was in 1892 and wines were made simply for local consumption. Francis wonders if the Romans planted vines here first, and he has found vineyards marked in the exact same spot on the *mappe Sarde*, also finding mention of the red César grape variety (from northern Burgundy). Francis had many jobs, including running a bistro in Canada; he returned to study wine at Beaune, with work experience at Savoie's organic Domaine Saint-Germain. He currently works full time at a winery in Geneva, but in 2016, part-financed with a grant from the Fondation Alpes Contrôles (an organic certification company), he planted 3ha in Villaz, where his wife's family live. He works organically, with help from his father-in-law and friends, and plans to build a winery

in 2020. He grows Jacquère, Altesse, Chardonnay and Roussanne for whites; Gamaret, Mondeuse, Persan and a few César vines for red. This is the closest vineyard to my home in the Alps, and I confess to being very excited about its future.

Vignes du Lac

Supported by an association in Véyrier, Frangy vigneron Bruno Lupin planted a 0.36ha plot above the town of Véyrier in 2015, farmed organically. The first vintage in 2018 produced 590 bottles, which were launched in spring 2019 to great local fanfare in the presence of Laurent Petit of the three-star Michelin restaurant Clos des Sens and Bruno Bozzer of La Java des Flacons in Annecy, who has been involved in the project from the start. The plan is to plant Mondeuse in 2020 and reach 1ha eventually.

This new vineyard below Château de Menthon-St-Bernard faces directly south, overlooking beautiful Lake Annecy.

Francis Rousset's young Coteaux des Girondales vineyards lie at around 600m altitude near the Aravis mountains.

ALL ABOUT THE WINES

The densely planted vineyards below the ruined châteaux in Chignin, Savoie, are steep and hard to mechanize.

THE APPELLATIONS

The oldest Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) in Savoie is that of Seyssel, accorded for both still and sparkling white wines in 1942. The main Savoie AOC, the most important appellation covered in this book in terms of geographic scope, was not ratified until 1973, although the wines of the area had been accorded the lesser (now obsolete) designation of Vin Délimité de Qualité Supérieur (VDQS) since the 1950s. The separate Roussette de Savoie AOC was created at the same time. Both have gone through some changes since. The most recent Savoie appellation is Crémant de Savoie AOC, made official in 2015.

Despite having a very small area of *Vitis vinifera* plantings at the time (hybrids not being allowed in any French wine quality designation), Bugey was accorded the VDQS category in 1958. In the decades that followed, as the vineyards expanded, the region fought long and hard to become elevated to AOC. Eventually, in 2009, it succeeded, at a time when the VDQS category was about to become extinct, risking Bugey being demoted to IGP. A separate AOC Roussette du Bugey was accorded at the same time.

Clairette de Die in the Diois region received its AOC for sparkling wines in 1942. This accounts for over 90% of the production of the Diois, but there are three further AOCs here.

Note that AOCs are known also as Appellation d'Origine Protégée (AOP), the French version of the European Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) system for food and drink. Wine producers are permitted to use either AOP or AOC: the rules are identical. In this book I will refer only to AOC.

Detailed rules for Savoie and Bugey AOCs are included in Appendix 1, but the essentials are outlined here.

The IGP concept

There are many isolated vineyards situated outside the geographically defined AOC areas. Some are defined geographic areas for viticulture and until 2009 the wines were labelled as Vin de Pays. The European protection of origin standard that replaced Vin de Pays is Indication Géographique Protégée (IGP).

The steep Domaine des Ardoisières vineyards in Cevins are classified as IGP Vin des Allobroges; when the AOC Savoie was created, commercial winegrowing had virtually ceased on this hillside.

IGPs are becoming increasingly significant in the French Alps regions, in particular because many formerly important vineyard areas are being resurrected. In addition, some grape varieties not included in the AOC rules may be allowed in the IGP rules. In the Savoie and Haute-Savoie departments the designation is IGP Vin des Allobroges. In Isère, IGP Isère is accorded to two Alpine districts, Balmes Dauphinoises and Coteaux du Grésivaudan. The IGP Coteaux de l'Ain covers the areas outside the AOC Bugey, some of it adjoining the Swiss vineyards of the canton of Geneva.

All the vineyards in the Hautes-Alpes are covered by the IGP Hautes-Alpes. The producers are discussing applying for AOC, but realize that this would hamper experimentation. Don't expect an AOC any time soon. IGP Drôme is used for still wines in the Diois.

There is a set of rules for each IGP, defining geographic area, wine styles, grape varieties, vineyard yield restrictions, along with certain analytical criteria for the wines, but these are not as detailed or as strict as those for AOCs.

Vin de France

Because some wines are made from grape varieties or wine styles not permitted even for the IGP category, in all regions some wines are made under the Vin de France label that has no such restrictions. In addition, some areas are not included in the IGPs because there have been no vineyards there for a very long time. Finally, a few natural wine producers produce wines so regularly outside the AOC/IGP norms that they choose this designation instead.

Savoie

AOC Savoie or AOC Vin de Savoie

This regional appellation includes widely scattered vineyard areas in the two departments of Savoie and Haute-Savoie, along with Seyssel and Corbonod across the Rhône river in the department of Ain, and the village of Chapareillan in Isère, a natural extension of the vineyards of Apremont and Abymes (see map here). Still white, red and rosé wines are allowed, as well as sparkling wines. Residual sugar levels in the finished wine must not exceed 8g/l for white wines and 5g/l for rosés.

The AOC Crémant de Savoie was introduced for white sparkling wines in 2015, with the term Méthode Traditionnelle not allowed from 2020. Rosé sparkling wines labelled Méthode Traditionnelle are also

allowed and the region hopes that eventually the INAO (which controls appellations nationally) will allow rosé Crémant de Savoie.

The permitted grape varieties are as follows:

- For reds and rosés: Gamay, Mondeuse and Pinot Noir may be used anywhere. In the Savoie department Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Persan are also permitted; in Isère Persan, Etraire de la Dui, Servanin and Joubertin are also permitted.
- For whites: Aligoté, Altesse, Chardonnay, Jacquère, Mondeuse Blanche and Velteliner Rouge Précoce may be used anywhere. In Haute-Savoie, Chasselas, Gringet and Roussette d'Ayze are also permitted; in Isère Marsanne and Verdesse are also permitted.

Strange restrictions for Savoie's rare grapes

The revival of varieties that had become almost extinct in Savoie should have been applauded by the powers that be at the INAO. These include varieties such as Verdesse for white wines, and Persan and Etraire de la Dui for reds. However, their use is restricted under AOC rules – these varieties are permitted only in certain departments within the AOC and are considered 'accessory' rather than 'principal' varieties.

Effectively, producers with an interest in growing rare grapes are penalized. They are not allowed more than a proportion of 10% of plantings in their vineyards, or at least those designated for making AOC wines. In other words, if a producer has 10ha of AOC vineyards, a maximum of 1ha may be of unusual varieties. If the varieties are authorized under IGP rules, then the vineyards can be effectively demoted for IGP use, and if not authorized for IGP (for example, some of the newly replanted rare grapes), then the wines must be labelled Vin de France instead. The law is an ass indeed, for

these rare grapes potentially add to the excitement and interest of Savoie wines around the world and without the Savoie name on the label the region misses out.

The following 16 sub-appellations, or geographic denominations, designating a local name or village, may be appended for specific styles. When other wine styles are made or other grapes used in these areas, the wines are labelled simply AOC Savoie. Geographic denomination is the official term (AOC rules may include neighbouring villages): the term 'cru' is widely used instead and will be adopted in this book. I have grouped them into geographic areas.

Around Chambéry:

- Abymes or Les Abymes – white, at least 80% from Jacquère
- Apremont – white, at least 80% from Jacquère
- St-Jeoire-Prieuré – white, at least 80% from Jacquère
- Chignin – white, at least 80% from Jacquère; red and rosé, at least 90% from Gamay, Mondeuse or Pinot Noir
- Chignin Bergeron – white, exclusively from Bergeron (Roussanne)

In the Combe de Savoie:

- Montmélian – white, at least 80% from Jacquère
- Arbin – red, exclusively from Mondeuse
- Cruet – white, at least 80% from Jacquère
- St-Jean-de-la-Porte – red, exclusively from Mondeuse

North and west of Lac du Bourget:

- Chautagne – white, at least 80% from Jacquère; red and rosé at least 90% from Gamay, Mondeuse or Pinot Noir
- Jongieux – white, at least 80% from Jacquère; red and rosé at least 90% from Gamay, Mondeuse or Pinot Noir

In Haute-Savoie:

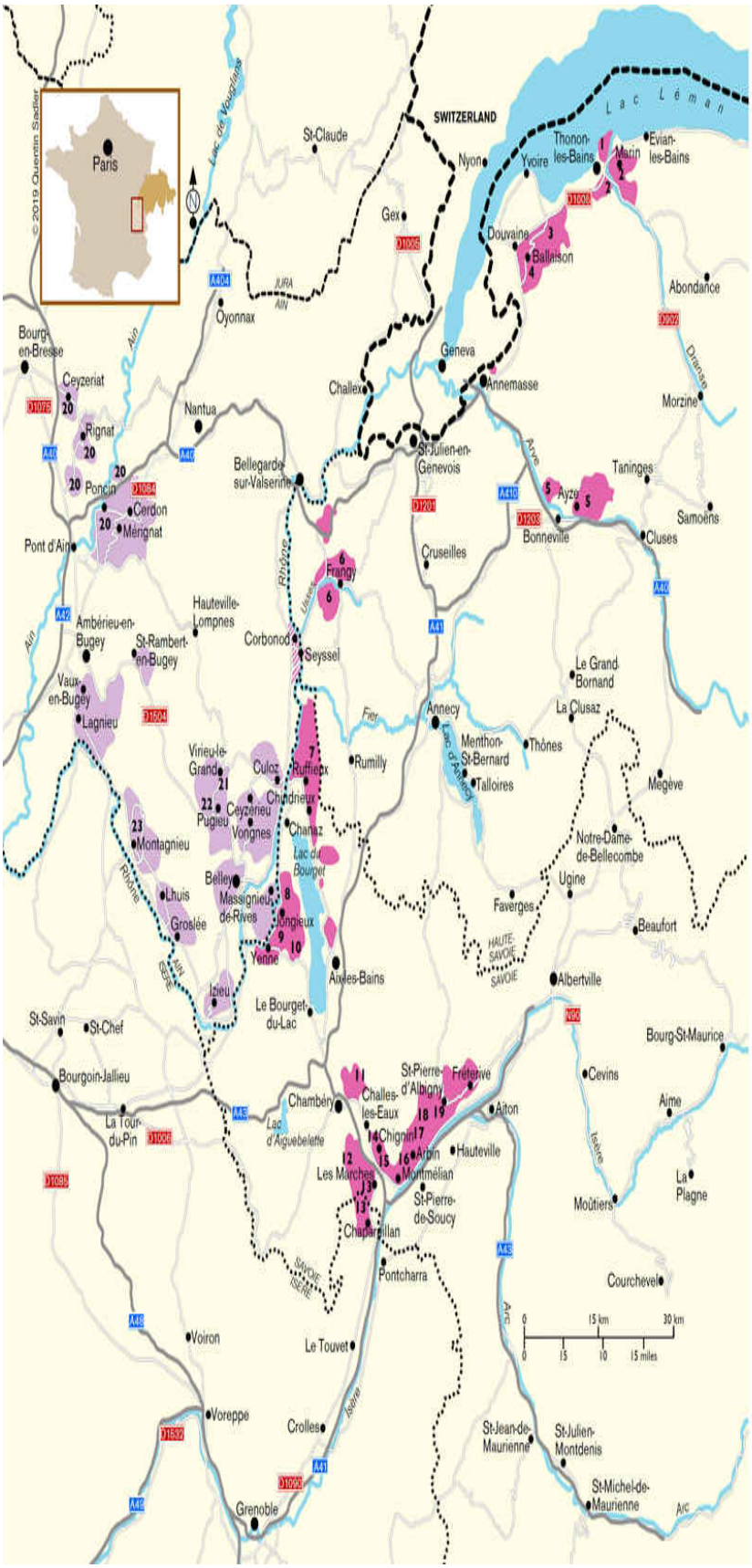
- Ayze – white and sparkling, at least 50% from Gringet and no more than 30% of each of the accessory varieties
- Crépy – white, at least 80% from Chasselas (until 2008 Crépy was an AOC in its own right)
- Marignan, Marin and Ripaille - white, at least 80% from Chasselas

Special rules for Crémant de Savoie

The Crémant appellation was authorized in late 2015 to sell sparkling wines made from base wines from the 2014 vintage. It became the eighth Crémant AOC in France and in general follows the same rules as the other Crémants. Notably these include hand-harvesting, regulations for the types of press used, use of the traditional method with a minimum of nine months in contact with the second fermentation lees before disgorgement, and no sales allowed before 12 months after bottling.

Any of the main authorized Savoie white or red grape varieties may be used for the base wine, but a minimum of 40% Jacquère is required, which forms part of a minimum 60% Jacquère and/or Altesse; red grapes are limited to a maximum of 20% of the blend.

Whereas the traditional sparkling wines of Seyssel AOC and also those from Ayze are allowed to continue as before, little consideration has been given to other areas of Savoie where Jacquère is not traditionally grown, apart from a temporary derogation (see box here). No white AOC Savoie Méthode Traditionnelle wines may be sold made from base wine of the 2020 vintage onwards – it's Crémant or simply Vin de France in future.



Wine regions

AOC Savoie | AOC Seyssel | AOC Bugey

The crus of Savoie

1 Ripaille
2 Marin
3 Marignan
4 Crépy
5 Ayze
6 Frangy – Roussette de Savoie
7 Chautagne
8 Marestel – Roussette de Savoie
9 Jongieux
10 Monthoux – Roussette de Savoie
11 Monterminod – Roussette de Savoie
12 Apremont
13 Abymes
14 St-Jeoire-Prieuré
15 Chignin/Chignin Bergeron
16 Montmélian
17 Arbin
18 Cruet
19 St-Jean-de-la-Porte

The crus of Bugey

20 Cerdon
21 Virieu-le-Grand – Roussette du Bugey
22 Manicle
23 Montagnieu/Montagnieu – Roussette du Bugey

The vineyard areas of Savoie (including Seyssel) and Bugey AOC vineyards are shown on the map with their individual crus numbered as shown in the key below. The AOCs of Roussette de Savoie and Crémant de Savoie cover the same area as AOC Savoie; Roussette du Bugey AOC covers the same area as AOC Bugey. The actual appellation extent is much larger than the shaded areas on this map, but we have attempted to show the areas where vineyards actually exist.

Crazy Crémant rule

The grape variety blend for Crémant de Savoie was subject to much debate, and tests and tastings took place over a period of a few years. The INAO was keen that not too much Chardonnay should be permitted in the blend to avoid the sparkling wine aping other regions and thus to maintain its individuality.

The necessity for Jacquère to be a significant part of the blend of the AOC Crémant de Savoie makes sense for the vast majority of Savoie producers. However, the ruling disrespects the traditions of the growers in Haute-Savoie, where Jacquère is not traditionally grown, although it is permitted. As in most of Savoie, sparkling wine is not a major part of the production, but many winemakers make a small amount of traditional method sparkling wine.

Frangy is almost exclusively planted with Altesse and the denominated areas around Lac Léman – Crépy, Marin, Marignan and Ripaille – grow Chasselas almost exclusively. However, in order to sell under the AOC Crémant de Savoie, the only permitted sparkling appellation from vintage 2020, growers are obliged to plant Jacquère. This makes a complete mockery of the INAO supposedly upholding local traditions with its rules. Instead, many vignerons have elected in future

to sell their traditional method sparkling wine under the Vin de France label.

Customers are unlikely to care one way or the other, but it means the AOC administration and promotion of the region as a whole loses out financially – growers pay a small amount into the local AOC for every litre of AOC wine sold; if they are selling wines as Vin de France, then that money is lost to the region.

AOC Roussette de Savoie

This separate appellation was granted in 1973 specifically for still white wines made from the Altesse grape variety. There are four sub-appellations, or crus, that may be appended to the name: Frangy (in Haute-Savoie); Marestel, Monthoux (west of Lac du Bourget) and Monterminod (close to Chambéry), all historically are associated with the Altesse variety. Until 1999 Roussette de Savoie AOC wines without a specific designated area were able to blend Chardonnay (and theoretically Mondeuse Blanche, but in practice there was almost none planted) with Altesse, provided there was 50% of the latter. Today all Roussette de Savoie must be 100% Altesse with residual sugar in the finished wine limited to 8g/l.

The Lupin family have this image of their old label hanging on the door outside their Frangy cellars. This is an historic area for Altesse, the only grape permitted for the AOC Roussette de Savoie.

AOC Seyssel

The Seyssel appellation covers vineyards close to the town of Seyssel, one part of the town being in Haute-Savoie and the other in Ain, on the western side of the Rhône river. Vineyards in the village of Corbonod in Ain are also within the appellation. Only white wines (still or sparkling) may be made.

Still wines may be *sec* (dry) or *demi-sec* from 100% Altesse, or dry from 100% Molette – the latter is much rarer and must be stated on the label. Seyssel from Altesse may have up to 8g/l residual sugar for the dry style or 15g/l for *demi-sec;* Seyssel Molette may have up to 4g/l residual sugar.

Sparkling Seyssel is made from a blend of Molette and Altesse. Until 2014 the requirement was for a minimum 10% Altesse and the Molette content was not stated, but when the Crémant AOC was introduced the INAO wanted the Molette to be higher to differentiate Seyssel from Crémant and the minimum of 75% was set. There is a derogation for seven years, but producers are fighting to reduce the proportion of Molette required. Chasselas is also permitted, but none is planted – this is a historical legacy from when the AOC was first created. Made using the traditional method, the wine must spend at least nine months on the second fermentation lees after bottling.

IGP Vin des Allobroges

Between 1981 and 2009 these Savoie wines were labelled as Vin de Pays d'Allobrogie or Vin de Pays des Allobroges. Still white, red and rosé wines may be produced. The geographic area covered is an extended version of that covered by AOC Savoie; the grape varieties include all those permitted for the AOC plus the following:

White grapes: Petite Arvine, Chasselas Rosé, Muscat à Petits Grains, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, Savagnin and Viognier.

Red grapes: Corbeau (Douce Noire), Gamaret, Gamay de Bouze, Gamay de Chaudenay, Mècle, Merlot and Poulsard.

Following a decision taken by the Conseil d'Etat in December 2016 after an intervention by the Crémant association, sparkling wines may no longer be made under this designation.

Isère

IGP Isère

This departmental IGP includes two Alpine sub-regions: Balmes Dauphinoises, situated between Lyon and Chambéry; and Coteaux du Grésivaudan, along the valley of the Isère river south of Chambéry and beyond Grenoble. Only still wines may be produced, of all three colours, and the following grape varieties are permitted:

White grapes: Altesse, Petite Arvine, Chardonnay, Jacquère, Mondeuse Blanche, Pinot Gris, Roussanne, Velteliner Rouge Précoce, Verdesse and Viognier.

Red grapes: Corbeau (Douce Noire), Etraire de la Dui, Gamay, Joubertin, Mècle, Mondeuse, Pinot Noir, Persan, Servanin and Syrah.

In addition, the following grape varieties are allowed for a period of time limited to 25 years if they were already planted before the IGP was created in 2011: Aligoté, Cabernet Sauvignon, Gamay de Chaudenay, Gamay de Bouze and Merlot.

Bugey/Ain

AOC Bugey

The appellation covers various designated areas within the Ain department, which tend to be divided into two geographically: the area around Poncin and Cerdon between Bourg-en-Bresse and Nantua; and the area south of Ambérieu-en-Bugey to Belley, to the west of the Jongieux area of Savoie, and known as southern Bugey.

For the overall AOC all three colours of still wine may be made as well as white and rosé Méthode Traditionnelle sparkling wines. Permitted grapes are as follows:

- For still whites: principally Chardonnay; in addition: Aligoté, Altesse, Jacquère, Mondeuse Blanche and Pinot Gris. Residual sugar in the finished wine must not exceed 6g/l.
- For reds: Gamay, Mondeuse or Pinot Noir – blends are not allowed and the name of the grape variety must appear on the label.
- For still rosés: principally Gamay and/or Pinot Noir; in addition: Mondeuse, Pinot Gris and Poulsard. Residual sugar in the finished wine must not exceed 5g/l.
- For sparkling whites: principally Chardonnay, Jacquère and/or Molette; in addition: Aligoté, Altesse, Gamay, Mondeuse Blanche, Mondeuse, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir and Poulsard.
- For sparkling rosés: principally Gamay and/or Pinot Noir; in addition: Mondeuse, Pinot Gris and Poulsard.

In all of the above, the principal varieties must make up 70% of a wine estate's vineyards, which are designated for that colour or style, unless the estate is smaller than 1.5ha. The wines must also reflect this proportion.

The following three sub-appellations or crus, representing a village and sometimes covering neighbouring villages, may be appended for the specific styles shown. When any other wine styles are made or other grapes used in these areas, the wines are labelled simply AOC Bugey.

- Cerdon – medium-sweet, low-alcohol (usually 7–8.5%) rosé sparkling wine made using a single bottle fermentation in the

ancestral method. The name Cerdon on the label must be followed by 'Méthode Ancestrale' (see here for production details). Gamay and Poulsard are the authorized grape varieties, but Poulsard is not allowed to be used exclusively (yes, this means 99.9% Poulsard and 0.1% Gamay is OK). Manual harvest is mandatory. Residual sugar in the final sparkling wine must be between 22g/l and 80g/l.

Montagnieu is the only denomination that can be used for both red and sparkling Bugey, as well as for Roussette du Bugey. Franck Peillot's family were pioneers here.

- Manicle – white, exclusively from Chardonnay; red, exclusively from Pinot Noir.
- Montagnieu – red, exclusively from Mondeuse; sparkling traditional method white from manually harvested grapes, principally Altesse, Chardonnay and Mondeuse.

AOC Roussette du Bugey

This separate appellation is for still white wines made from 100% Altesse. There are two sub-appellations or crus: Montagnieu and Virieu-le-Grand. Residual sugar in the final wines is limited to 8g/l.

IGP Coteaux de l'Ain

Formerly Vin de Pays de l'Ain, IGP Coteaux de l'Ain covers vineyards in the whole of the department. The following sub-regions may be added to the name, depending where the vineyards are: Val de Saône, which is close to the Beaujolais region; Revermont, just south of the Jura; Valromey, just outside the AOC Bugey; and Pays de Gex, on the borders of the Geneva canton of Switzerland. Only the last two areas are within the scope of this book. All colours and styles of wines may be produced from a long list of grape varieties, which include internationally recognized varieties plus those used in Bugey, Savoie, Jura and Switzerland.

The Diois

Located southeast of Valence and technically considered part of the Rhône Valley wine region, the Diois forms a lozenge shape running either side of the Drôme river and surrounded by mountains, with the town of Die almost in the middle. Sparkling wines dominate and there are two main regional appellations for them: the most important is AOC Clairette de Die, whose rules have been revised substantially since its beginnings in 1942 and now includes two entirely different sparkling wine styles; and AOC Crémant de Die. There are two small appellations for still wines.

Note that the villages entitled to the AOCs below are specifically excluded from making sparkling wines under the IGP Drôme designation.

AOC Clairette de Die

This appellation could be considered a regional wine appellation for the Diois region and includes 31 villages, all of which are also entitled to the AOCs Crémant de Die and Coteaux de Die, outlined overleaf. The 31 include 12 entitled also to the AOC Châtillon-en-Diois. The two styles of sparkling wine made are as follows:

Clairette de Die followed by the term 'Méthode Ancestrale', denoting the local 'ancestral' method using a single fermentation in bottle, is a low-alcohol (7–9%) medium-sweet sparkling white. It must be made from a minimum of 75% Muscat à Petits Grains Blanc and may include up to 25% Clairette and/or Muscat à Petits Grains Rouge. The wine must remain in contact with the lees in bottle for at least four months. Residual sugar in the final sparkling wine must be at least 35g/l. (See here for production details.)

Clairette de Die, normally followed by the word 'Brut' (but this is not stated in the rule book), is a dry white sparkling wine made with the second fermentation in bottle from 100% Clairette grapes. The wine must remain in contact with the lees in bottle for at least nine months. Most producers are replacing Clairette de Die Brut with Crémant de Die.

Rosé Clairette de Die Méthode Ancestrale was authorized for the 2016 and 2017 vintages, before being outlawed following a court case brought by Bugey Cerdon. With a minimum of 75% Muscat à Petits Grains Blanc or Rouge, it could also include Clairette and up to a maximum of 10% Gamay. At the time of writing the situation is at stalemate: producers were holding the part-fermented wine in tanks, hoping for a legal way to label and sell it.

Only around half a million bottles of Crémant de Die are made annually, compared with 12 million of Clairette de Die.

AOC Crémant de Die

Die was given the Crémant appellation from 1993 for white sparkling wines only, made in the traditional method. These have to follow all the rules for Crémant as outlined for Crémant de Savoie.

Clairette is the principal variety and must make up at least 55% of the blend, with some Aligoté; Muscat à Petits Grains is also allowed, up to 10% maximum. Crémant de Die must have a maximum residual sugar of 15g/l after the addition of *dosage*.

AOC Châtillon-en-Diois

This appellation, created in 1975, is for still white, red and rosé wines from specific villages around Châtillon-en-Diois, to the southeast of the town of Die.

Dry white wines may be from Aligoté and/or Chardonnay. Reds and rosés must come only from Châtillon-en-Diois and Menglon. They must include Gamay (minimum 75%) and may be blends with Pinot Noir and/or Syrah.

AOC Coteaux de Die

Very few producers use this appellation, created in 1993; it applies to still white wines made from 100% Clairette.

IGP Drôme

Still white, red and rosé wines may be made in the Diois under the departmental designation, from a very large range of authorized grape varieties, including those found elsewhere in the Alpine regions, international varieties and typical southern French varieties.

Hautes-Alpes

IGP Hautes-Alpes

Still and sparkling white, red and rosé wines may be made in the Hautes-Alpes under this designation from a very large range of

authorized grape varieties, including those found elsewhere in the Alpine regions, international varieties and typical southern French varieties.

Looking across the Isère river plain to the high Alps, the vineyards of Cruet in the Combe de Savoie are dominated by the Dent d'Arclusaz. The next chapter explores how mountains influence the terroir of French Alpine vineyards.

THE TERROIR
– GEOLOGY, SOIL TYPES AND CLIMATE

The geology stares at you right in the face in the vineyards of the French Alps. And, because the higher mountains are snow-capped all year round, there is often a misapprehension that these wines are somehow miraculously born from a bitterly cold, snowy climate. Spend a little time here, even in winter, feeling the strength of the sun beating down on the rocky vineyards, and you begin to understand why vines can thrive.

Even in the northernmost parts of the Savoie and Bugey wine regions you can find almond, fig and apricot trees, and in summer you can hear the distinctive buzzing of crickets or cicadas. Once you arrive in the Diois or Hautes-Alpes, olive trees appear, along with Mediterranean-style scrubland.

Savoie and Bugey are south of France's watershed, meaning the rivers all head south to the Mediterranean. They lie at a latitude halfway between the north pole and the equator, near the magic parallel of 45°N, known by wine enthusiasts for running through the vineyards of Bordeaux, the Rhône Valley and Piemonte.

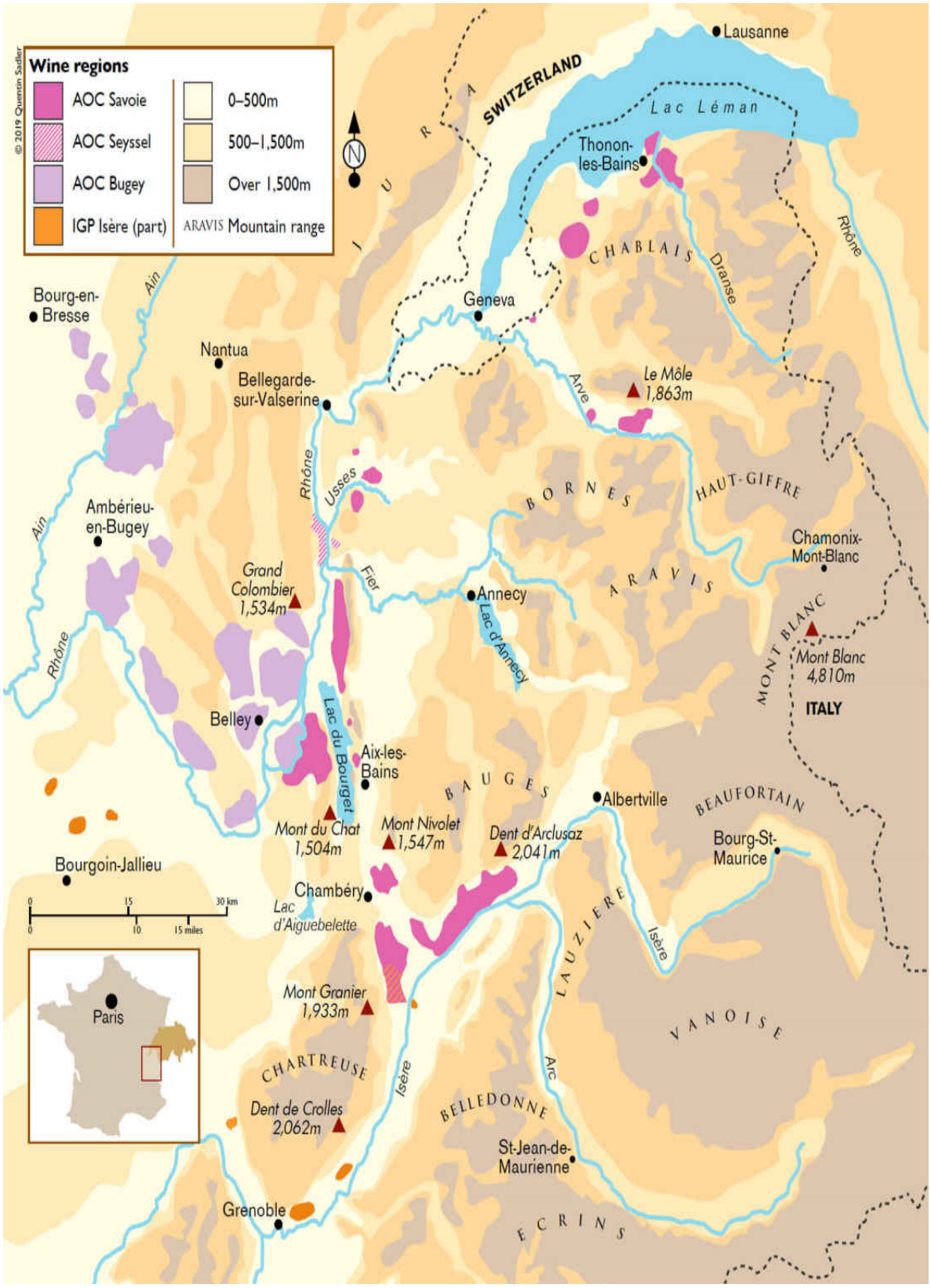
From the map that follows it becomes clear that the French Alpine vineyards are located in between the mountains, often near the waterways, and indeed this is essentially where there is habitation and agriculture in general. In terms of geology and vineyard soils it is the limestone-dominated Prealps (whose peaks culminate below 3,000m above sea level) that interest us, rather than the tougher, more varied rocks of the main Alps. The high Alps, though, have a big influence on the weather systems, notably in bringing regular precipitation and wind. Mountain areas tend to be the focus of dramatic weather systems as well as dramatic landscapes.

The diverse rocks of the Alps and the Prealps and the effects of the recent ice age when the glaciers formed are responsible for the

incredibly varied soils in the French Alps wine regions, soils which frequently erode with the vagaries of man and the weather. Most of the vineyards are on hillsides, some of them extremely steep and challenging to work.

Legacy of the glaciers

Rising above the internationally famous ski resort of Val d'Isère, the Isère river, regularly filled with snow-melt, runs close to many of the Savoie and Isère vineyards along the valley of a former glacier. Like the Arve river in Haute-Savoie, the Ain in Bugey, the Drôme in the Diois and the Durance in Hautes-Alpes, the Isère is a tributary of the Rhône. One could say all rivers lead to Rhône. The Rhône itself runs through many vineyards on its journey from the Valais in Switzerland to the Mediterranean near Marseille, passing Seyssel, Bugey and Jongieux en route. The original glaciers that became rivers created the large Alpine lakes – pretty Lake Annecy, the larger Lac du Bourget and also Lac Léman (formed by the Rhône, for example). The proximity of these waterways has a profound influence on both the climate and the soils.


Wine regions
AOC Savoie
AOC Seyssel
AOC Bugey
IGP Isère (part)
0–500m
500–1,500m
Over 1,500m
ARAVIS Mountain range
© 2019 Quentin Sadler
JURA
SWITZERLAND
Lausanne
Lac Léman
Thonon-les-Bains
CHABLAIS
Dranse
Rhône
Geneva
Bourg-en-Bresse
Ain
Nantua
Bellegarde-sur-Valserine
Arve
Le Môle 1,863m
Rhône
Usses
BORNES
HAUT-GIFFRE
Ambérieu-en-Bugey
Ain
Chamonix-Mont-Blanc
Grand Colombier 1,534m
Fier
Annecy
ARAVIS
Lac d'Annecy
MONT BLANC
Mont Blanc 4,810m
ITALY
Rhône
Belley
Lac du Bourget
Aix-les-Bains
BAUGES
Albertville
BEAUFORTAIN
Mont du Chat 1,504m
Mont Nivolet 1,547m
Dent d'Arclusaz 2,041m
Bourg-St-Maurice
Bourgoin-Jallieu
Chambéry
Lac d'Aiguebelette
LAUZIERE
Isère
Mont Granier 1,933m
VANOISE
CHARTREUSE
Isère
Arc
Dent de Crolles 2,062m
BELLEDONNE
St-Jean-de-Maurienne
Grenoble
ECRINS
Paris
0 15 30 km
0 10 15 miles

At altitudes below 500m vineyards lie in the forelands and foothills of the Prealps. The map, covering Savoie, Bugey and Isère wine regions, indicates the main Prealps and Alpine ranges, along with important mountain peaks.

Skating through Alpine geology

Soil diversity: a large rounded pebble from glacial deposits and a limestone rock in a vineyard of Domaine des Plantaz, southern Bugey.

On clear days the highest peak in the Alps, Mont Blanc (4,810m or 15,780 feet), can be seen in the distance from the upper slopes of many of the Savoie and Bugey vineyards. Geologically speaking, the Alps are a young mountain range, formed by the collision of the Afro-Arabian and Euro-Asian tectonic plates during Cretaceous times, roughly 65 million years ago.

There were three important stages in the development of the Prealps. Firstly, between around 245 and 65 million years ago, that is, in the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods, the Tethys Ocean covered the whole area and far beyond; sedimentary rock, specifically limestone, formed at the bottom of these oceans; some of the sea life is today found as fossils. Secondly, starting at the end of the Cretaceous period, the Alps underwent a major uplift, when limestone from the bottom of the ocean was thrust up and pushed westwards to the edge of the high Alps to form what we now call the Prealps, which adjoin the Jura mountains, formed much earlier. Thirdly, since that time erosion has changed the landform of the Prealps and continues to do so. The landscape has been altered:

- by the scouring action of glaciers over the last two million years
- in association with chemical weathering, which over time has degraded some rocks into soft, easily eroded clays

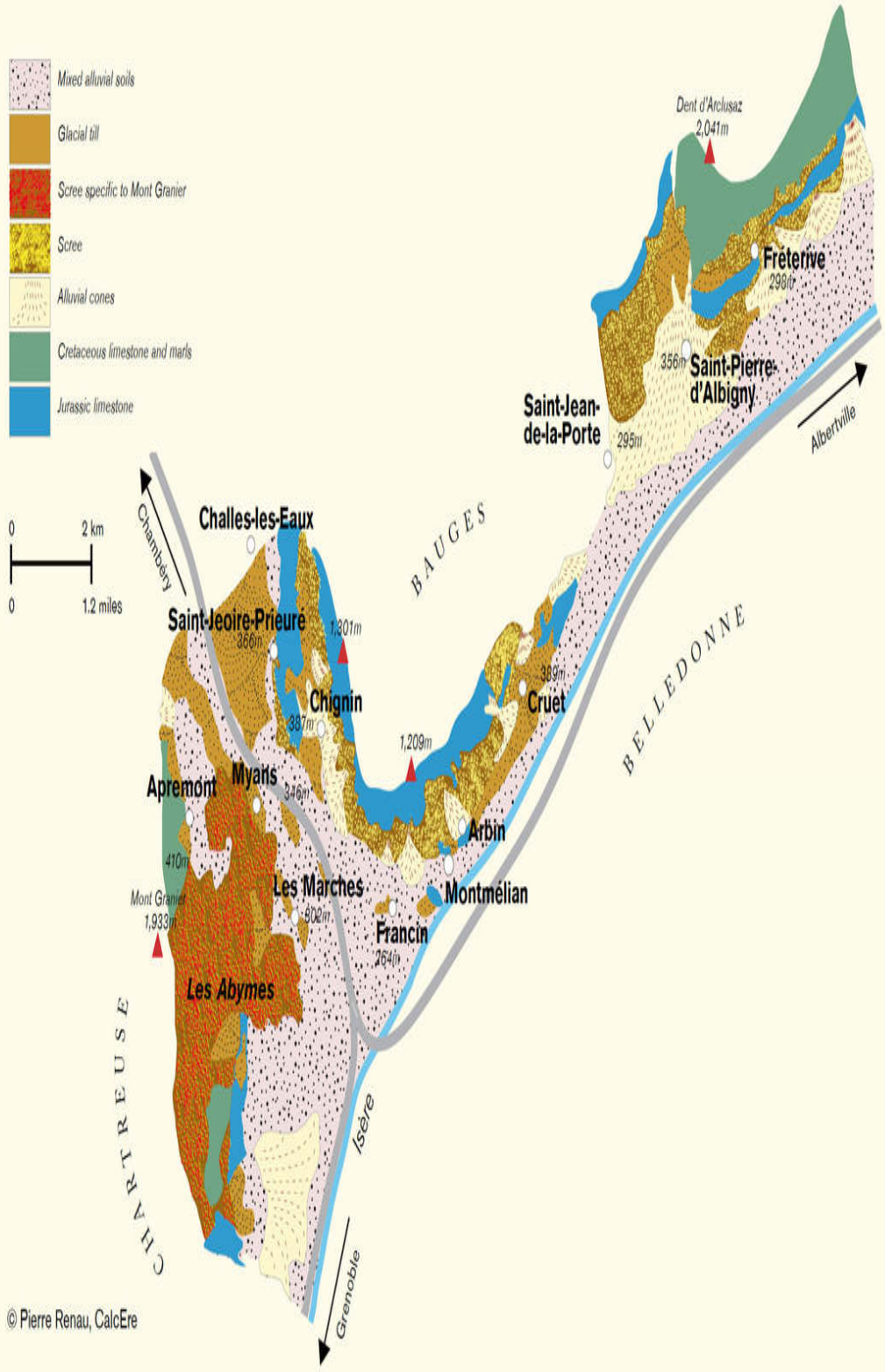
- by gelifraction: repeated freezing and thawing, which breaks up the rocks
- by human activity such as extensive deforestation to provide firewood for an increased population in the 19th century – this later caused instability on the slopes.

The vineyard slopes throughout French Alpine wine regions owe their terroir to these different and ancient geological processes.

Soil types

The soils formed by this mountain geology are thus derived from sedimentary rocks, principally limestone (*calcaire* in French). As can be seen by the geological map of the heart of the Savoie wine region (opposite), above this limestone are incredibly varied soils and this is repeated throughout the French Alps. Many soils are very rocky, with scree (*éboulis*) a common feature. Other typical soil types include those developed from limestone: limestone scree mixed with clay, marls (*marnes* – a fine-grained mixture of clay and limestone), glacial till (principally clay but with disorganised bodies of sand, gravel, pebbles and boulders), *molasse* (clayey calcareous sandstone) and the sands and gravels of alluvial fans (*cônes de déjection*). These alluvial fans are formed from rivers depositing their sediments in a fan-like shape and the resulting good drainage makes them very desirable for vineyards. Most soils derived from sedimentary rocks are well-drained, and also their relative softness allows the vine roots to stretch deep for water in times of drought. A summary of soils in each area is shown here.

The geology of the Combe de Savoie



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Around 80 per cent of Savoie's vineyards are on the foothills of the Chartreuse and Bauges Prealpine ranges, above the Isère river and opposite the Belledonne range. The geological map shows that on the lower slopes of the mountains, limestones and occasional marls give way to scree or in places glacial till, along with alluvial cones, all of which provide well-drained slopes ideal for vineyards, planted with a range of grape varieties. The annotation for Les Abymes, which is the name of a cru, indicates the area where the Mont Granier landslide extended. The alluvial soils closer to the river are less suitable for vineyards.

The biggest terroir change of all – Mont Granier

The dramatic history of Mont Granier is arguably our cover story. Mont Granier, at 1,933m altitude, lies at the northern end of the Chartreuse range. During the night of 24 November 1248, a catastrophic collapse of the mountain peak took place, which set off a massive landslide, unleashing an estimated 500 million cubic metres of rock, burying five villages across an area of about 25km^2. Old texts wrote that 5,000 people lost their lives, along with their livestock, but more recently this number has been estimated at around 1,000 people: it's still a huge number.

The collapse created the distinctive 700m-high vertical cliff face we see today and is supposed to have been caused by a period of excessive rainfall that destabilized the mountain, which had many inner caves and waterways. The rockfall then slid across the marl layers below, causing mud to build up and carry down yet more rocks, before being stopped by the high glacial moraine of the villages of Myans and Les Marches. Part of the Apremont and all of the Abymes vineyards lie on the residue of Mont Granier's landslide, known as the Abîmes/Abymes de Myans – *abymes* meaning abyss.

Although vineyards probably existed before the landslide, the difficulties of clearing the land were immense. Huge boulders littered the area, some of which can be seen today across the

vineyards; most notable is the Pierre Hachée in Apremont, pictured below. The land began to be cleared properly from the 1730s, but vineyards were not extensively planted until the end of that century. Jacquère became the grape variety of choice on the rocky soil of marls and limestone, possibly because it ripened the most easily in this cool spot and possibly because white grapes were in demand.

Mont Granier remains unstable and there were two major landslides (*éboulements*) in January and May 2016, videos of which can be found on YouTube. This time the debris did not reach the vineyards, although dust was noticeable and the road to the Col du Mont Granier was cut off for some time.

Climate and weather

Overall, the climate is continental, characterized by very cold winters and very warm summers. In Savoie and Bugey, however, the climate is also said to have Atlantic influences. Given that the ocean is about 500km away as the crow flies, this seems incredible, but the weather is indeed driven by the damp westerly winds from the Atlantic. As you move towards the southern Alps, the Mediterranean influence becomes more important, bringing warmer weather and drier winds with slightly lower rainfall. However, it is the proximity of the high Alps that make the

weather systems so complicated and sometimes both unpredictable and challenging in these vineyards, creating a multitude of macro- and meso-climates. A rough summary for each area is shown here.

The difference between day and night temperatures becomes more significant for the higher altitude vineyards. Most vineyards are on slopes and one plot may vary in altitude by 100m or more from its highest to its lowest point. Ignoring wind chill, there is an average decrease in temperature of 0.6°C per 100m and this influences everything from what grape varieties are grown to picking times between the top and bottom of a vineyard. In Savoie and Bugey AOC areas, vines are not planted above 500m – higher than this and ripening is considered risky. Higher slopes also tend to be steeper and more solid rock, rather than soil.

The French Alps vineyards are warm in summer, with abundant and intense sunshine, around 2,000 hours per annum in Savoie, Bugey and Isère, and a greater number further south. However, an important characteristic of mountain weather is regular precipitation – it is very rare to have a completely dry month. Most regions receive between 900mm and 1200mm per year. And what about snow? The higher the altitude the more likely winter precipitation falls as snow, but it occurs no more often than, say, in Burgundy. When snow does fall, it may be somewhat deeper and it may stick around for longer on certain cool sites. The hardy vignerons in these mountain areas just carry on with the pruning and when the sun does come out, the views blow everyone away, hence the classic Savoie snowy vineyard photos, which lead to that misapprehension I mentioned earlier!

Temperature inversions are a common feature of mountain weather systems – mist or cloud may lurk on the lower vineyards, while clear skies reign above. The dampness created by the mists gives greater risk of spring frosts or, later in the season, fungal diseases.

Adret and *ubac*: whose side are you on?

The aspect of the slopes dictates not only the intensity of the sun, but also how many sunshine hours a vineyard receives and whether it arrives in the cool mornings or the warm afternoons. While this applies to any slope, in the Alps the difference between north-facing (*ubac*) and south-facing (*adret*) slopes is extremely stark. This can be a major factor in accounting for style differences, for example between the Jacquère

wines of Apremont (more *ubac* slopes) and Chignin (more *adret*). For other grape varieties in Chignin such as Roussanne (for Chignin Bergeron) on rocky soils, which reflect the heat, some vines on *adret* slopes are at risk of sunburn and grapes may lose acidity quickly in their final ripening period.

Also important is the steepness of the vineyard slopes. The average slope in many French Alps vineyard areas varies from 45% to 60% (or 31°), the latter in Chignin, for example. Some vineyard slopes may reach up to 75% or even 100% (45°) at the very top – this is likely to be the maximum angle where it remains feasible to work the vineyards.

Regional winds

Mountain areas are particularly prone to wind, which can have a big effect on the vines – sometimes negative, sometimes positive. Although most areas here experience a prevalent damp westerly wind the following are a regular feature:

- Foehn – a very warm, dry wind first studied in the Alps, but now known to exist in all mountain areas under different names, such as chinook in the US. Usually occurring in winter and early spring, it can cause rapid snow melt (thus hated by skiers), dramatic temperature rises and alleged mood changes. It may contribute to early bud break, leaving vineyards exposed to spring frost.
- Bise – a cold dry northerly wind that occurs at any time of the year in the northwestern Alps, affecting most Savoie and Bugey vineyards. It is welcome if it arrives in summer after a rainy period, because it will dry off any rot on the grapes, but it can be bitter in winter, especially when it appears as a *bise noire*, which is a damp, rainy or even icy version.

Looking towards the Belledonne from Chignin. Snow often falls on the vineyards between January and March, but rarely hangs around for long.

- Lombarde – a very strong wind coming from northern Italy, especially affecting Hautes-Alpes and southeastern Savoie or Isère. It tends to bring very heavy rainfall.

Weather hazards

Hazards that affect many of the world's vineyards hit the Alpine regions with unusual ferocity and help explain why these areas have always been considered marginal. What has changed in modern times is that today the result is rarely a poor harvest in terms of quality (and ripeness is easily achieved) but is all too frequently a poor harvest in terms of quantity, putting smaller producers' livelihoods at risk. One issue that

never changes is the risk of severe fungal disease due to high humidity and this is covered in more detail here. Extreme heat is a growing problem, a result of climate change. The two big hazards, which growers are almost powerless to control, are spring frost and hail.

The spring frost of April 2017 was brutal in the French Alps. Following a very mild March and early April leading to advanced vine growth, there were two nights, two weeks apart, of severely low temperatures, giving air as well as ground frost. Whereas ground frost tends to hit lower-lying, flatter vineyards, air frost can affect hillside ones too. Cerdon lost about 70% of its potential crop; several other sections of Bugey, Savoie and the Diois had 50% loss. Recently, spring frost has occurred more frequently than before.

Hail too appears with worrying regularity and affects larger areas than previously. The risk period is essentially the whole growing season. Parts of both Montagnieu and Cerdon in the Bugey were devastated by hail in 2018 and in 2017, when both had also suffered frost damage. Ayze in Savoie was another victim later in the 2018 season following bad frost in 2017. Parts of the Combe de Savoie have been hit several times in recent years.

Climate change: a double-edged sword

Along with overall warming, climate change equals weather uncertainty and increasingly common extraordinary weather events, such as frost and hail. Climate statistics show rising temperatures over the past 30 years. What is perhaps more alarming – especially in the Montmélian area in the heart of the Savoie vineyards – is the increased volume of rainfall in late spring and early summer, giving added disease pressure. The worst scenario for fungal diseases is greater warmth allied with higher rainfall, an example being the particularly wet May and June in 2018, which led to severe outbreaks of mildew. In the end, the very dry later months resulted in a splendid harvest.

On the bright side, the extra warmth is welcomed by marginal areas such as these, especially for red grapes. A much-quoted

saying in France is 'September makes the harvest' and with frequent warmer and drier Septembers this is of particular benefit to late-ripening varieties such as Mondeuse and Jacquère.

The warming climate

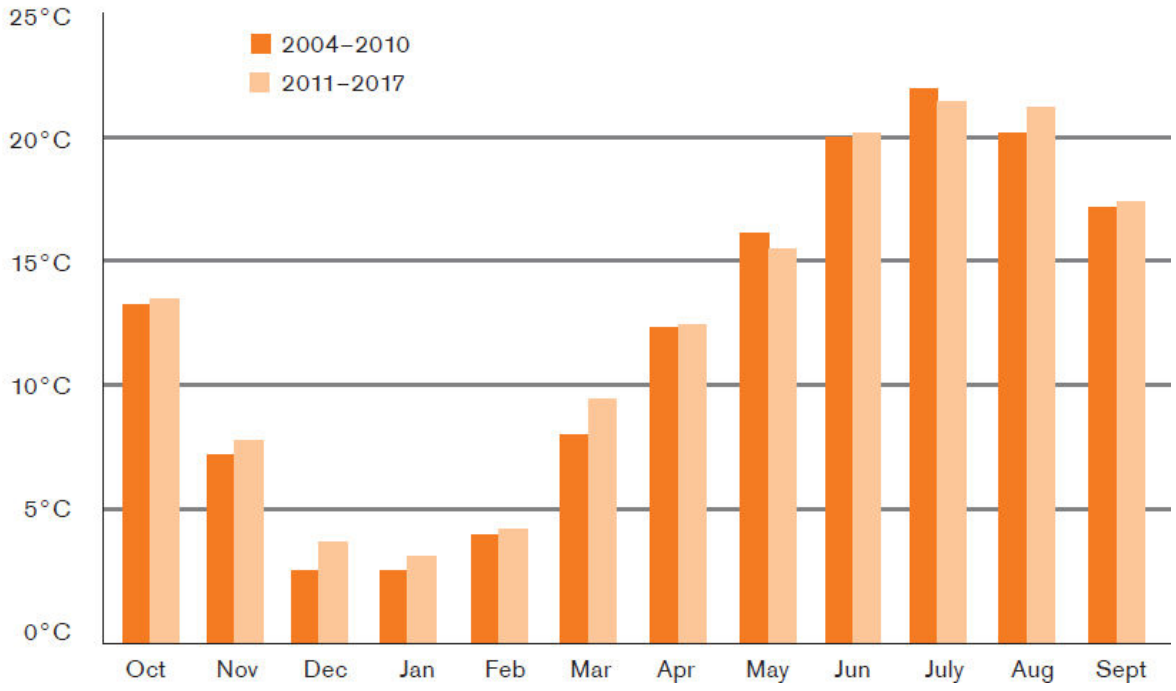
All over the French Alps, vignerons have noticed significantly warmer springs and summers; harvest dates regularly occur as much as three weeks earlier than for previous generations.

Statistics for the temperature graph below were provided by the French meteorological service. Unfortunately, comparative statistics that exactly matched over a longer period were impossible to obtain as the locations for official weather stations have changed.

Average annual temperature for the seven years to 2017 in Montmélian in the Combe de Savoie was 12.41°C, up from 12.0°C for the preceding seven years. The 1992 book *Les Vins des Terroirs de Savoie* by André Combaz included graphs indicating the average temperature over 30 years: for Montmélian this was 10.2°C – thus an increase of two degrees in recent decades. The higher temperatures in March especially mean the vine's growth begins sooner, raising the risk of frost damage if the temperatures suddenly drop to freezing or below in April or May. The fear is that the devastating frosts of April 2017 will become a regular occurrence.

The lowest temperature recorded in the 14 years to 2017 was -14.5°C in November 2005. The highest was 39.8°C in July 2015. In 2018, the French Alpine regions experienced the hottest summer since the abnormally hot 2003, around 1.5–2°C hotter than the average from 1981–2010. In Grenoble, 2018 saw 126 days with maximum temperatures above 25°C, compared to 120 days in 2003 and an average of just 95 in the years 1981–2010. This has led to much concern considering that this was the fourth very hot summer in a row. One way vignerons are trying to address the warming climate is by planting rare grape varieties, such as Bia Blanc or Joubertin, which previously struggled to ripen.

Average monthly temperature in Montmélian 2004–2017 (°Celsius)



Main terroir variations

Considering the intricate geological, soil and climate variations in the French Alps, the following is but a snapshot. When appropriate, more specifics will be found in the introductions to each area in Part 3, and within producer profiles. Altitude is mentioned below only when it is outside the normal 250–450m range.

Savoie – Lac Léman and Ayze On relatively gentle slopes close to the lake, with alluvial soils along with clay-limestone, Lac Léman vineyards are some of the highest in Savoie, reaching up to 500m, and some of the wettest, but the weather is tempered by the proximity to the lake. The Ayze vineyards in the Arve Valley are high too, with soils of limestone scree, *molasse* and some red clays.

Savoie – around the Rhône and Lac du Bourget Much of this area is known as the *avant-pays* or foreland. Seyssel and Jongieux

lie on the southernmost foothills of the Jura mountains, whereas Frangy and Chautagne are between the Jura and the Prealps and are somewhat warmer than areas near Chambéry. Chautagne, close to Lac du Bourget, has the warmest overall climate of Savoie, though is somewhat wetter. This whole area has much influence from glacial till, but also limestone screes, marls and *molasse*.

Savoie – around Chambéry and the Combe de Savoie The diagram here indicates the wide variations of soil types in the heart of the Savoie vineyards. The Montmélian climate graph opposite shows the temperature trends.

Isère The Grésivaudan valley below the Chartreuse range is an extension of Savoie's southern vineyards with mainly limestone scree soils. Its climate is similar too. The hilly Balmes Dauphinoises are somewhat wetter, with soils including *molasse*, sandy loam and limestone.

Northern Bugey An extension of the Revermont in the southern Jura wine region, but higher, with many vineyards climbing up to 500m on limestone scree, as shown in the photo below. Cerdon's climate can be extreme in terms of rainfall and other weather hazards.

Southern Bugey Close to the Rhône and on the lower Jura foothills, with varied aspects. The climate and soils on the eastern side, near Belley, are similar to Jongieux, west of Lac du Bourget. On the western side, which includes Montagnieu, the vineyards are more exposed to dramatic weather and on very rocky slopes.

The Diois The vineyards lie mainly on both sides of the Drôme river at altitudes between 300m and 700m. On the southern foothills of the Vercors mountains, they are on limestone scree, white marls and clay-rich black marls, with some alluvial soils. The Mediterranean influence is obvious, with intense sunshine and warm days in summer, which allows Muscat to ripen fully.

However, the Alpine influence makes itself felt with cool nights and regular rainfall.

Hautes-Alpes It is difficult to generalize about the scattered vineyards here, which are located between 600m and 1,000m altitude. The main vineyards are above the Durance river and its tributaries, on very stony diverse soils, principally clay-limestone scree, on the foothills of the Ecrins mountains. The region has low rainfall and plenty of sun; however, it is the stark differences between day and night temperatures that mark the particularity of the Hautes-Alpes.

GRAPE VARIETIES AND THEIR WINES

The Alpine arc is considered to be a cradle for grapevine diversity: DNA studies have shown that the French Alps wine regions are home to some of the ancestors of internationally famous grape varieties. In the past two decades, researchers, vignerons and wine enthusiasts around the world have realized the need to conserve this grapevine diversity. In the French Alps, the CAAPG continues to 'rescue' almost extinct grape varieties.

Philippe Grisard's tasting room highlights the wines he makes from rare Savoie grapes.

Ampelography, the study of grape varieties, does not only use DNA testing and traditional grapevine identification techniques, it also uses historical research to help determine where a grape variety

originated. In 1803, which fell in the period when Savoie was first annexed by France, Napoleon I required all the regional officials to list their grape varieties, with their synonyms, in order to create a national grape inventory. No easy task. The document drawn up in Savoie lists about 30 white and 30 red grape varieties and serves as a useful resource for confirming technical studies and for understanding the confusing synonyms once used in each locality. A further inventory was written in 1887 as a monograph by Pierre Tochon, Savoie's regional agricultural director.

The DNA identification in 1998 of the parents of the Rhône Valley's Syrah variety as Dureza (from the Ardèche department) and Mondeuse Blanche, believed to be a Savoie grape variety, was a breakthrough to understanding other local varieties. Further testing has shown that many grapes grown in Savoie, Ain and Isère have a close relationship with varieties from the Rhône Valley.

Many other French Alpine varieties are descendants of the almost extinct Gouais Blanc variety, which is a parent of – among numerous other offspring – Gamay and Chardonnay (in these cases the other parent was Pinot). There are also family connections to indigenous Jura grape varieties, most notably Savagnin.

In France today no one may grow a grape variety to make wine for commercial use, even under the Vin de France label, unless that grape is listed on an official government register of grape varieties – many historic varieties are not (or were not until recently) listed. In order to rehabilitate Alpine grape varieties, the CAAPG works with French official bodies such as INRA (the National Research Institute for Agronomy), which looks after the world's largest vine conservatory at Domaine de Vassal in Montpellier, and the IFV (the French Vine and Wine Institute), which manages the conservatory of registered varieties and approved clones. The many organizations involved in this work and in the work of developing suitable clones are described on the home page of the Plant Grape website, which catalogues all varieties on the official French register. I am indebted

to this website, which is available in the English language at http://plantgrape.plantnet-project.org/en/, as well as to Dr José Vouillamoz, grape geneticist and co-author of the book *Wine Grapes*.

Savoie

By the time that Savoie aspired to become an Appellation Contrôlée wine region, it had already shunned many traditional varieties that were known to give poor yields or that failed to ripen regularly due to diseases. Some of these were left out of the list of authorized varieties. Nevertheless, the approved white varieties Jacquère, Altesse, Gringet and Molette along with the red Mondeuse and Persan bear testimony to the diversity of unusual grapes here – except anecdotally, these remain grapes that grow only in the French Alps. Between them these unusual varieties represent two-thirds of Savoie's plantings.

It is thanks to the Centre d'Ampélographie Alpine that many grape varieties are being saved from extinction.

Bugey and beyond

When the Bugey region became VDQS in 1958, it had so few plantings of *Vitis vinifera*, having planted mainly hybrid varieties after phylloxera, it was as if the region had a blank slate. There was, however, a history of growing Savoie vinifera varieties including

Jacquère, Altesse and Mondeuse. Local agricultural advisors, notably Claude Paul, who helped to pull the wine region into the modern age, believed traditional varieties were too difficult both to grow and to market and recommended Gamay and Chardonnay in particular and also Pinot Noir. Between them, these three varieties represented over 80% of Bugey's plantings in 2016, meaning only 90ha are planted of all the other varieties between them. In Cerdon, Gamay was adopted as the principal variety, along with a small amount of Jura's Poulsard, both having been recategorized officially as 'aromatic varieties' and thus suitable for making ancestral method wines.

Isère and Hautes-Alpes, struggling to survive at all in these past few decades and enjoying the more flexible IGP regime, pursued mainly international varieties until a few pioneers decided to rescue some traditional varieties. As for the Diois, home to sparkling Clairette de Die, its main grape of Muscat à Petits Grains eclipses the Clairette grape, although there are healthy amounts of the latter.

Obscure grapes

Among wine lovers worldwide, almost exaggerated excitement is accorded to the revival of the more obscure French Alpine varieties. Some, such as Persan and Mondeuse Blanche in Savoie, Verdesse and Etraire de la Dui in Isère and Mollard in Hautes-Alpes, are suddenly considered almost mainstream despite occupying, at the time of writing, tiny areas of less than 20ha each. Others are so obscure that I have yet to taste a wine from them apart from occasionally those made in demi-johns as micro-vinification experiments – see box, here. However, the importance of the revival of these obscure varieties, which often have long growing seasons and relatively low natural sugar levels, becomes increasingly evident with climate change leading to ever-warming summers in the French Alps.

How this chapter works

White grapes are shown first, divided into main white grape varieties, rare local grape varieties and other grape varieties (mainly international). Reds follow with the same breakdown. The heading also names the French Alpine regions where the grape is grown in order of importance.

For the main varieties I give an indication of how wines from these grapes are typically made and taste. For rare varieties, and the less planted international varieties whose characteristics are well known, the wines are described in the relevant producer profiles. The tasting characteristics of the many French Alpine sparkling wines are included in the chapter on sparkling wines.

The vast majority of wines covered in this book are single-varietal wines. Blended wines are described individually within the producer profiles.

MAIN WHITE VARIETIES

Altesse

Savoie, Bugey, Isère

Altesse has historically been known as Roussette, which derives from the French word roux ('russet') – these bunches on the Marestel slope in Jongieux are ready to pick.

Altesse is the finest indigenous white grape variety of Savoie. It is the only grape permitted for AOC Roussette de Savoie and it is also the principal variety in Seyssel; it is grown in neighbouring Bugey for AOC Roussette du Bugey. Small areas have been replanted in Isère, where it was also a traditional variety. The history of Altesse is full of fables, but DNA testing has shown that the variety is genetically similar to Chasselas, making it highly likely that it originated somewhere in the area between Lac Léman and the Rhône river. It is believed that in the early 16th century the Duc de Mareste planted Altesse in the vineyards of Château de Lucey, where there is a vineyard slope named Les Altesses, and possibly also at Château de la Mar in nearby Jongieux on the Marestel slope. Seyssel makes an even earlier claim – that it was planted on the hillsides of Corbonod by the Arvières monks from the 12th century.

Today on the increase, Altesse represents about 14% of Savoie's plantings, with just under 300ha, of which a little more than 50ha are in AOC Seyssel. In Seyssel it is the grape for its main still wine AOC and is the minority part of the sparkling blend with Molette. The

largest concentration of Altesse is grown near Jongieux, in particular on the Marestel slope. Marestel is one of four crus for Roussette de Savoie, the others being the small Monthoux area nearby, Frangy to the north in Haute-Savoie and Monterminod, close to Chambéry. Altesse is also planted in the vineyards of Apremont, Abymes and Chignin (these names are not used on the labels: they must state simply Roussette de Savoie) and along the Combe de Savoie valley. There are tiny amounts in Ayze (Domaine Belluard) and Dominique Lucas of Les Vignes de Paradis has planted some in the Lac Léman area.

In Bugey, despite some very good-quality wines, it struggles for recognition, with about 20ha used for Roussette du Bugey and another estimated 10–12ha as part of the blend for Montagnieu and Bugey sparkling wines. There are two Roussette du Bugey crus: the tiny Virieu and further to the west Montagnieu, where most of Bugey's Altesse is grown. There is also some in Isère and in scattered vineyards in Savoie outside the AOC regime, either for Vin de France or IGP Vin des Allobroges.

The grape variety was for many years referred to as Roussette and it still is in Seyssel and Bugey, although in Seyssel they are no longer allowed to state Roussette de Seyssel on their labels, much to their chagrin – it has to be simply AOC Seyssel. The name Roussette ('russet') comes from the fact that the grapes when ripe take on a reddish hue – and earlier in the season, so do the tips of the new shoots. There are three approved clones.

Altesse is a tricky grape to grow, requiring a lot of work in terms of canopy management and it is prone to both mildews, as well as budding early, so it is very susceptible to frost damage. It ripens fairly late and can benefit from warm autumns, giving moderate yields. As harvest approaches there is some risk of grey rot, but – especially in Marestel above the Rhône river – noble rot usually appears and most growers there prefer to pick it when bunches are 10–30% affected.

Tall stories of Altesse

Everyone loves a good ancestry story, then along comes DNA testing and destroys it all. The Savoyard tale, proudly told, is that Altesse was introduced from Cyprus. Most stories relate that it was brought over in the early 1430s by the daughter of the King of Cyprus, Anne of Cyprus, also called Anne de Lusignan, who was to marry Louis of Savoie, later Louis I, Duke of Savoy. Another version states that it came over a century later via Charlotte de Lusignan, who married a later Savoie Louis. Considering the power of the House of Savoy and its inter-relationships with the courts of Europe, these stories appear feasible, and were handed down through the ages as received wisdom. In the late 18th century they appeared in the writings of an important local nobleman, the Marquis Costa de Beauregard, and the story was picked up by Pierre Tochon in his 1887 monograph.

The name Altesse in French means 'Highness' and this conferred nobility on the grape. The fact that it was known for centuries to produce very fine wine in the Jongieux area must have helped.

Confusingly, as interest grew in Savoie wines in the 1980s, the ampelographer Pierre Galet, having found no resemblances between Altesse and any other French varieties or those of Cyprus, and having recently visited Hungary, determined that it was the same as the Furmint grape of Tokaj. As well as similarities in the grapes' conformity, the fact that Tokaji wines were known in royal households lent credence to the Altesse name, he thought.

DNA testing has proved both the Hungarian and Cyprus connections to be tall stories, but they are often repeated in the region. My personal theory is that vines probably were brought from Cyprus as a gift, but I cannot imagine that they thrived in the very different climate of Savoie. They were probably replaced by a local grape, the one we now call

Altesse. In 1998 some Altesse cuttings were taken from Savoie to the KEO winery in Cyprus in the belief that this was rehabilitating an ancient Cyprus grape. It is planted on a southeast-facing limestone slope at 700m altitude, but the wine is a rather simple dry white, devoid of much character.

Altesse wines

Altesse gives relatively high potential alcohol levels and crisp acidity, which has long been considered by many vignerons to require balancing with (often excessive) residual sugar. AOC rules have been tightened up to restrict residual sugar to 8g/l for Roussette de Savoie, Seyssel and Roussette du Bugey. Most wines are made in neutral tanks although there are a few excellent top-end Altesse wines made with oak fermentation and ageing. The jury is out about malolactic fermentation: some vignerons encourage it, others don't.

The best Altesse wines seem dry (even with levels of sugar up to about 6g/l), balanced with real mountain freshness and full-flavoured too. The steep Marestel slope gives especially high sugars – growers often wait for some noble rot to form and this may confer a honeyed character, with stony, yellow fruit flavours and some exotic floral character. Other areas may give vegetal (not always unpleasant), herbal, citrus, pear and/or quince flavours, and from some terroirs, including Montagnieu in Bugey, the stony character can show particularly well. Wines from Altesse are frequently bottled and released much too early; even simple examples take several months to evolve. Nearly all well-made Altesse wines can age for five years easily, and I have tasted top Altesse wines from Domaine Dupasquier and Domaine Prieuré St-Christophe of 20 years and more, which have aged beautifully. Beeswax and truffles are very prevalent notes in older Altesse, and if judicious old oak-ageing is used, it adds another dimension and complexity. Most Altesse wines are supremely food-friendly.

In certain vintages a few vignerons will make excellent late-harvest examples, with slight sweetness offset by fresh acidity. There

is no official Vendange Tardive category and they must therefore be labelled Vin de France. Increasingly Altesse is used in sparkling wines, where it can provide finesse and length to a blend, including for Crémant de Savoie where up to 60% is allowed. Some fine 100% Altesse sparkling wines are made, such as in Frangy and Jongieux. In Seyssel sparkling the current limit is 25% but in practice more is used. It is typically part of the Montagnieu Brut blend in Bugey. Outside of the French Alps, a tiny amount is grown in Switzerland.

Bergeron/Roussanne

Savoie, Hautes-Alpes

Many people consider Bergeron, the local synonym for Roussanne, to be the finest white grape grown in Savoie, although it has a rival in Altesse. Savoie has just over 90ha of Roussanne planted in Chignin and the neighbouring vineyards of Francin and Montmélian to make Chignin Bergeron, which must be 100% Roussanne. A few hectares are grown outside the Chignin Bergeron delimited zone in Savoie – the wines are not entitled to AOC, so are IGP Vin des Allobroges. I know of no plantings in Isère, but it certainly was grown in the past, usually under the synonym of Fromenteau. There is a little grown in Hautes-Alpes.

Roussanne's origins are in the Rhône Valley and DNA testing suggests it is either an offspring or a parent of Marsanne. It is not known for certain when it first arrived in the Savoie vineyards or when it was given the name of Bergeron, the synonym Barbin or the more poetic name Prince de Chignin. French texts disagree as to whether it could have been present in the 11th century, when white wines of Chignin were first mentioned, or whether it was a more recent arrival in the 18th or 19th century. By the end of the latter it was highly prized, but then almost disappeared after phylloxera, with very little being replanted – in 1957 less than 2ha was grown. The revival came slowly from the 1970s, with vignerons André Quenard, Jacky Quenard (see Philippe Viallet) and René Girard-Madoux (father of Yves) being among those championing the grape.

Roussanne is known locally as Bergeron and has its own AOC designation, Chignin Bergeron. The wines are some of the most prized in Savoie.

In the Chignin appellation, the steepest, south-facing rocky limestone slopes are reserved for Bergeron plantings and here it thrives, although in warm vintages it can suffer from heat stress and/or gain too much sugar too fast. In the days when reliable high production was desired, it would not have fitted the bill because it produces modest yields and is prone to oidium and to botrytis bunch rot (bad or, sometimes, noble).

The Bergeron synonym is considered useful to differentiate Roussanne from Roussette. It probably got its name from a delicious late-ripening variety of apricot, also from the Rhône region, but grown in Savoie too. No surprise that apricot aromas are prevalent in many Bergeron wines.

Bergeron wines

When farmed correctly, especially with warm and sunny early autumns, Bergeron produces very ripe, golden grapes, sometimes

with a certain amount of noble rot. Chaptalization is rarely required and the great attraction of Savoie Roussanne is that there is usually more natural acidity than when it is grown in the Rhône Valley. This acidity offsets the sometimes blowsy, exotic fruit flavours of a ripe year. A decade or two ago, in the days of higher yields and poor farming, there was a trend for sweeter Bergerons and when malolactic fermentation was used as well, the wines could be very flabby. Today, there are more dry Bergerons, although the ripe flavours and alcohol levels of 13% or more may give an impression of residual sugar.

Fine Bergeron has a pale gold colour, with notes of apricot or even more exotic, sometimes dried, fruits along with flowers such as acacia or jasmine, particularly attractive if honeyed from a touch of botrytis. On the palate the best achieve a balance of richness, weight and acidity, along with flavours similar to the nose. These are wines that ought to be able to age for five years and more. For vignerons in Chignin, Bergeron is their pièce de resistance and several produce two, three or more cuvées, with some using oak fermentation and ageing, providing great depth of spice and complexity. There are some very classy examples.

Chardonnay

All regions

Chardonnay was not traditionally grown in Savoie or in Bugey prior to phylloxera. Today, however, it is by far the most important white variety in Bugey, used for still and sparkling wines, with about 160ha, about one-third of the planted area there. It is the only permitted variety for white Bugey Manicle and it is on this classic clay-limestone rocky terroir that it currently gives its finest expression; it also has potential on other steep, stony slopes such as at Mataret, where Thierry Tissot has vineyards, or above Culoz, on the foothills of the Grand Colombier.

In Savoie Chardonnay has had an up-and-down existence since the 1960s. The presence of the vine nurseries in the Combe de

Savoie meant that there was a ready supply of Chardonnay vines, and there was added incentive from 1973 when the AOC authorized Chardonnay as part of white blends with Jacquère for Apremont and other crus. It was even allowed up to 50% with Altesse for the Roussette de Savoie appellation (although this was not for crus, such as Frangy or Marestel, and is no longer allowed). The rules changed in 1998, and it has since declined. The one tiny enclave where it really can shine is at Brison St-Innocent, above the Lac du Bourget. Today it represents about 4% or 80ha of plantings and is rarely replanted, though that may change if Crémant de Savoie is successful. Some growers already use it in the blend, in which up to 40% is allowed.

Chardonnay is grown in Isère by some producers; there is some grown in the AOC Châtillon-en-Diois, where Jaillance makes decent examples; and there are also plantings in the Hautes-Alpes vineyards.

Chardonnay wines

Bugey's best Chardonnays, such as Manicle, are worth seeking out, with characteristic crisp acidity and minerality showing a fine marriage with the terroir. In Savoie, Chardonnay is rarely valued in the same way or even planted on the best sites. The few good still wines show a hint of Alpine freshness, but they are usually a triumph of winemaking over terroir.

Chasselas

Savoie, Coteaux de l'Ain

It should be no surprise that Chasselas, the quintessential Swiss grape, is grown in Haute-Savoie, in the AOC Savoie vineyards on the southern slopes above Lac Léman, east of Geneva. It was cited in the 1803 grape inventory and there would once have been many more plantings, but today it covers less than 100ha. Its strongholds are in Crépy, Ripaille, Marin and Marignan and there are a few other

scattered AOC and IGP areas. A little is grown in the IGP Coteaux de l'Ain Pays de Gex, just across the border from Geneva.

Despite Chasselas being once ubiquitous in France (mainly as an eating grape) and having the same name as a village in Burgundy's Mâconnais, historical research along with DNA analysis leads current thinking to confirm its origins as somewhere near Lac Léman, either from Switzerland or across the border in Haute-Savoie. The Swiss Valais synonym Fendant is occasionally seen in historical texts on Savoie. Another synonym is Bon Blanc ('good white'), used in Seyssel, where this variety is said to have been widely grown pre-phylloxera.

Chasselas can be an erratic producer, prone to very high yields if conditions and training allow, but also subject to *coulure* and *millerandage*, which will reduce yields naturally. The breezes off Lac Léman help keep away frosts in most years, but oidium can be another problem. It ripens relatively early and growers often fear storms and pick before complete ripeness; Dominique Lucas of Les Vignes de Paradis believes it can be left much longer on the vine and extends his Chasselas harvest by several weeks, if not months.

Chasselas wines

It is all too rare to find a Chasselas wine here that reaches the quality of those from the finest vineyard sites on the other side of Lac Léman in Switzerland's Vaud canton. The vineyards are not nearly as steep on the French side and the soils more fertile and less rocky.

Chasselas can rarely achieve even 11.5–12% naturally and the vast majority (Lucas is the big exception) are chaptalized to this level. It is often incorrectly described as being naturally high in acidity, but on both sides of the border its problem has been high yields and lack of ripeness. Malolactic fermentation as a means to soften it, common in Switzerland, is also done by some producers in Haute-Savoie. In Crépy there was a tradition for *perlant* or *spritzig* whites – the Mercier family having coined the rather amusing term *crépytant*. The bubbles of retained carbon dioxide can balance the acidity and help mitigate the combination of rather bland flavours and little weight.

The berries on Chasselas bunches can take on a yellow colour if left hanging late, as practised by organic producers such as Château La Tour de Marignan.

A good Savoie Chasselas can be delightful, with notes of hawthorn and fruit salad on the nose; dry, light, fresh and slightly citrussy or appley on the palate, but these examples are all too hard to find. The wines that offer more character have received better attention both in the vineyard and the cellar and prove it is possible for fine Chasselas to be made – I hope there are more in the future.

Clairette

Diois, Hautes-Alpes

An old grape variety, Clairette is likely to have originated in southern France and has existed in the Diois for many years. It is not really

known which came first, the name of the grape or the wine Clairette de Die: it derives from the word *clair*, the French for 'pale', and this could have described the grape berry colour or the wine. It is a rustic variety, best grown on stony, calcareous soils, and is fairly disease resistant. It ripens considerably later than Muscat.

Today there are 250–300ha of Clairette in the Clairette de Die AOC zone, some of which is used for the dry sparkling version of Clairette de Die, which must be 100% Clairette, and for Crémant de Die (minimum 55% Clairette). Up to 25% is allowed in Clairette de Die Méthode Ancestrale, the majority of the blend being Muscat à Petits Grains – it is useful to add acidity to the blend in warm years. The Clairette de Die wines are described more fully in the chapter on sparkling wines.

A tiny amount of dry, citrussy still wine is made under the Coteaux de Die AOC and there is a little grown for still and sparkling wines in Hautes-Alpes.

Gringet

Savoie

The rare Gringet variety is grown only in the villages around Ayze, where Domaine Belluard is the most famous vigneron.

Grown only in the Ayze vineyards of Haute-Savoie, Gringet has been at risk of extinction for decades, if not centuries, and today there are

only around 20ha left. It grows in some of the highest altitude Savoie vineyards on the south-facing slopes above the classic Alpine valley of the Arve river, about halfway between Geneva and the Mont Blanc tunnel. Down in the valley, hundreds of thousands of tourists travel on the motorway each year between Geneva airport and Chamonix, oblivious of the vineyards sheltering this rare grape up on the slopes above.

The largest producer of Gringet wines, Dominique Belluard, claims that Gringet was first mentioned in an 11th-century text, found in local archives, but these were lost in a fire and further investigation is difficult. The next written reference is from 1766. I must now unashamedly steal from the wonderful tome *Wine Grapes*, whose authors unearthed an irresistible description of Gringet from a book written in 1832 by André Jullien, *Topographie de tous les vignobles connus*. Monsieur Jullien writes about wine from the Arve Valley near Bonneville, obviously from first-hand experience (the translation below is my own):

> *On fait, près de cet endroit, un vin blanc nommé Gringet, du nom du plant qui le produit. Ce vin a la singulière propriété de ne pas enivrer tant qu'on ne quitte pas la table; mais aussitôt que l'on prend l'air, on perd l'usage de ses jambes et l'on est forcé de s'asseoir.* ('Near here, they make a white wine called Gringet, the name of the plant that produces it. This wine has the unique property that it doesn't make you drunk as long as you don't leave the table; but as soon as you go out into the fresh air, you lose the use of your legs and are forced to sit down.')

For many years, Gringet was considered to be a clone of Savagnin, but at the request of Dominique Belluard, José Vouillamoz conducted DNA testing and proved that this assumption was false. He could find no relationship with any known variety on his database, and thus concluded it to be an indigenous variety. However, since then José has discovered that Gringet is likely to be a parent of Molette from

Seyssel, together with the once-ubiquitous Gouais, hence he concludes that Gringet's origins must be in the French Alps.

Gringet does especially well on clay-rich, stony soils. It is sensitive to both mildews and has small berries, so it doesn't give a particularly large crop. It has high natural acidity and ripens well if left hanging on the vine long enough. For many years, it was used almost exclusively for sparkling wine, with little time on lees, often made in a semi-ancestral manner, as a Pétillant Naturel might be today. As techniques and demand improved, traditional method sparkling became the norm for Ayze (and is required by AOC rules) and thus for Gringet. Dry, intensely flavoured, mineral still wines are also made, quality examples being pioneered by Dominique Belluard. The producer entries for Ayze give more details on both styles of wine and it is hoped this variety will survive.

Jacquère

Savoie, Isère, Bugey

Its origins may not be the most noble, nor is this variety prized sufficiently to be planted outside its homeland, but for many years Jacquère has been the most planted variety in AOC Savoie. Today there are over 900ha, making up about 40% of the region's plantings. The variety became important only from the 19th century, when it was also prevalent in Isère, known as Cugnète/Cugnette, and in Bugey. Today, there are only tiny amounts outside the Savoie AOC, with less than 8ha in Bugey.

Considering its importance in Savoie, Jacquère has been surprisingly little researched. Jacquère appears in the 1803 inventory of grapes grown in Savoie with a long list of synonyms. Later, Tochon reported it growing in the 'Abîmes de Myans', the slopes below Mont Granier, which were covered with limestone scree from the major landslide in 1248. This area coincides more or less with today's Abymes. Ampelographers have found a probable parent-offspring relationship between Jacquère and the prolific Gouais Blanc, which

was also grown in the area centuries ago; no more detail of its pedigree is known.

These images were taken in Le Cellier du Palais vineyard in Apremont during harvest: the top photo shows typical Jacquère bunches; the lower photo is a pink mutation.

Jacquère thrives on the rocky and steep limestone slopes of the Prealps. Its unrivalled stronghold is at the foot of Mont Granier in Apremont and Abymes, where more than 600ha are grown. Across the valley Chignin has another 90ha; there are 9ha at Cruet and about 170ha scattered along the Combe de Savoie. Chautagne and Jongieux have less than they used to, with about 50ha between them. These figures do not include plantings destined for Crémant.

Since the 1960s Jacquère has been valued as a cash crop, grown to make wine for a quick sale to satisfy a thirsty market, which is

advised to drink it within a year of purchase. Yet for the past 15 years a handful of producers have proved that it can be much more than this, particularly from old vines. By picking later, limiting yields and using appropriate cellar techniques Jacquère can be made into a special, light white wine, which can age. It expresses its site too – a Jacquère from Apremont or Abymes does not taste like one from Jongieux or Chignin.

Jacquère is a hardy variety and produces high yields if left unchecked, hence its popularity when abundant crops were the main aim. It buds relatively early, and with its thick skins it is fairly resistant to downy and powdery mildew. However, it is susceptible to both black rot (see Growing the Grapes, here) and botrytis bunch rot.

It is usually the last white variety to be picked and the berries gradually turn from green to yellowy-green; some older selections develop a pink-toned green. Even if yields are held well in check this grape rarely manages to produce high sugar levels, though the Apremont producers Jean-Claude Masson and Domaine Dupraz achieve 12% in good years. A standard potential alcohol level today would be about 10% and in warm years 11% (the minimum required for the AOC before chaptalization is 8.5%; 9% for the crus and for Crémant).

Jacquère used to be regularly blended with Chardonnay or sometimes Altesse, even in Apremont and Abymes. Today up to 20% is allowed, but it is mainly the larger négociant houses that practise blending for their AOC Savoie still wines. Some producers blend it with more flavoursome varieties.to good effect in IGP Vin des Allobroges and IGP Isère.

There are five approved clones for Jacquère and an experimental vineyard has been planted for observation at Domaine Philippe et Sylvain Ravier in Myans, under the auspices of the CAAPG.

Jacquère wines

Chaptalization is common and most producers aim for a final alcohol level of 11–11.5% (the maximum allowed for AOC Savoie; it is 12% for crus). Jacquère is typically relatively pale, greeny coloured, with a

nose of hawthorn, citrus, stony minerals or occasionally almonds. It should be dry, with a mountain freshness, lightweight but with sufficient fruit character – citrus, apple or occasionally riper, pineapple – to balance the acidity. That allusive word 'minerality' comes to mind particularly when tasting excellent Abymes and Apremont – and if you visit the vineyards and try to imagine the Mont Granier landslide, you can see exactly where that minerality or stony character comes from. Good Jacquère wines last easily through to the summer two years after the harvest, and from older vines and lower yields the ageing potential is several years longer.

High-yielding Jacquère is prone to high acidity and a low aromatic profile, so the big question is how to balance this. Many producers, especially in Apremont and Abymes, have juggled with both residual sugar levels and a slight spritz of retained carbon dioxide, which can be attractive if the sugar is not too high. The regional advisors have in recent years been trying to encourage lower sugar levels so as to highlight the grape's mineral freshness, but also in a bid to crack down on the practice of stopping fermentation with excessive amounts of SO_2. Latest vintages have still shown some worrying levels of sweetness and SO_2. A few vignerons, most commonly in Chignin, have dabbled with malolactic fermentation. This can be a plus, but risks taking away from Jacquère its potential steely minerality, especially in recent, warmer vintages. In general Chignin and Jacquère from the Combe de Savoie, as well as from Jongieux, do taste fuller and riper than those from Apremont and Abymes.

For many years, some Savoie producers have made traditional method sparkling wines with Jacquère, alone or in a blend. Now that the Crémant de Savoie appellation is in place, with a requirement for a minimum of 40% Jacquère in the base wine blend, the variety is all of a sudden in even more demand. And it is being planted in areas where it did not exist before, in Haute-Savoie in both the Lac Léman vineyard areas and in Frangy. In Bugey, the little Jacquère remaining is used mainly in sparkling wine blends.

Good Jacquère wines define Savoie for many critics, but there's work to be done for this grape to be recognized as one of the world's

greats. Outside the French Alps, there is said to be 3ha of Jacquère in Portugal.

Molette

Savoie, Bugey

Molette is an historic variety in Seyssel, but there is perilously little grown, particularly considering the latest (perhaps badly conceived – see Seyssel) requirements in the Seyssel sparkling AOC for a minimum of 75% Molette, blended with Altesse. The Seyssel Molette AOC for still wines has recently been created – traditionally it was simply the everyday white table wine consumed locally. The only Molette grown outside AOC Seyssel is possibly a tiny amount in Ayze and about 6ha in Bugey, where it is blended into Bugey Brut. Total plantings are likely to be 20–25ha. DNA testing indicates that Gouais and Gringet are Molette's parents.

Molette crops well and is fairly tough, though sensitive to mildews. It ripens rather unevenly and relatively late at about the same time as Jacquère. It gives reasonable sugar levels but sometimes searingly high acidity, which is why it is most prized for making sparkling wines.

Old-vine Seyssel Molette (non-sparkling) gives good floral and grapefruit flavours with enough intensity to balance the acidity, but is too often covered up by residual sugar. There are two clones, one newly developed, and it is hoped that more of this rare variety might be planted.

Muscat à Petits Grains

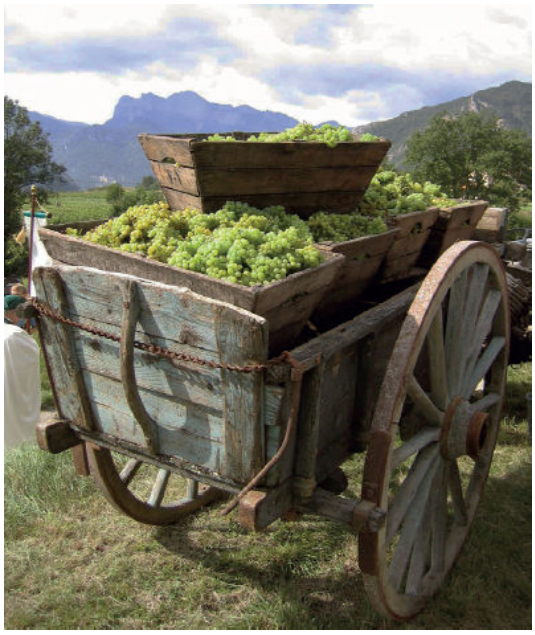
Diois, Hautes-Alpes, Vin des Allobroges, Isère

This small-berried and likely most ancient of the Muscat grape varieties, considered the finest in quality, may have originated in Italy or Greece and has been known across the Mediterranean basin for many centuries. In the Diois, where it accounts for about 75–80% of

plantings, they believe that Muscat fits with the description by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*, written in the 1st century AD, of a grape named Helvenaca, used by the local Voconces tribe to make a sparkling wine (see History, here). The next record in the Diois is in 1629, when the people of the area are said to have presented two 'loads' of Muscat to Louis XIII as he was passing through.

In the Hautes-Alpes, it is not certain that this white version of Muscat was present much before phylloxera, but the Allemand family consider it a traditional variety and it is grown by them and several other producers for both dry and sweet wines. Further north it is more anecdotal, although there is some evidence of it being a traditional variety in Savoie.

Muscat is very much the pride of Clairette de Die Méthode Ancestrale, which requires a minimum of 75% in the blend. And the natural red variant is used as part of the blend for rosé versions. Although considered a mid to late ripener, Muscat ripens before Clairette in the Diois; tests have shown that it is sturdy enough for machine picking, something that has only recently been allowed. Classically grapey and floral in flavour, the Clairette de Die wines are described more fully in the sparkling wine chapter. Still Muscat wines are mentioned in producer profiles in the relevant regions.



To make Clairette de Die, Muscat grapes are harvested not too ripe. The cart is not obligatory … the image is from a harvest festival.

RARE LOCAL WHITE VARIETIES

Mondeuse Blanche

Savoie, Coteaux de l'Ain

The late-ripening Mondeuse Blanche has been planted by a few growers, including Domaine Dupasquier.

An ancient Savoie variety, Mondeuse Blanche was identified by DNA testing in 1998 as the mother of Syrah, the happy father being Dureza. Previously it had been thought to be a variation of Mondeuse Noire, or the same as Molette, but Mondeuse Blanche is now known to be an entirely separate grape variety. According to José Vouillamoz, it is likely to be either a parent or offspring of Mondeuse Noire. It had died out completely in Savoie, but in the 1980s Roger Raffin and Gilbert Nicaise, local vineyard consultants and two of the founder members of the CAAPG, brought cuttings from the Vassal collection, had them grafted and asked Jean-Paul Finas, a now-retired vigneron in St-Pierre-de-Soucy, in the IGP Vin des Allobroges vineyards, to plant them. Those first vines are now farmed by Brice Omont of Domaine des Ardoisières, along with those planted at Cevins by Michel Grisard; the grapes are used in blends. Interest in Mondeuse Blanche grew and it has been planted in small quantities by several Savoie producers, including Domaine Dupasquier. Plantings are less than 10ha. In Bugey, it is grown in tiny quantities by Caveau Bugiste.

Mondeuse Blanche is a tough variety to grow, vigorous and productive, requiring much canopy work to control the shoots, which manage to grow downwards as well as upwards, and it's more sensitive to disease than Mondeuse Noire. Once fully mature, late in the season, the acidity may already have dropped, so picking time is sensitive. If yields are not kept very low, the wine will be rather bland, but there is good potential for this variety, especially as part of a blend. Single-varietal Mondeuse Blanche at its best has a dry herbal character with decent weight and freshness too.

Roussette d'Ayze

Savoie

This very rare grape has nothing to do with Roussette, aka Altesse, but is an indigenous variety from the Ayze area. There are various hypotheses as to its origins. It has almost died out, despite being listed as an approved variety for AOC Savoie Ayze still or sparkling

wines and for the other Haute-Savoie crus. According to Nicolas Montessuit of Ayze, who has a little, originally planted in the 1970s, it ripens early and has low acidity. It used to be grown to add roundness to the potentially austere Gringet grape, but for fine wines, it is not ageworthy.

Velteliner Rouge Précoce (Malvoisie)

Savoie, Isère

Malvoisie appears in old texts on Savoie, but the name also crops up in many parts of the world, for different, often unrelated grape varieties. In Savoie there are two versions of 'Malvoisie', with rarely a clue on the label as to which you will get: Velteliner Rouge Précoce, sometimes erroneously named Velteliner Rose, and Pinot Gris. What was grown traditionally in Savoie appears to have been the Velteliner Rouge Précoce or Frühroter Veltliner (Early Red Veltliner), an Austrian variety unrelated to the more famous Grüner Veltliner. This variety is listed in the 1803 inventory of grapes as Malvoisie Rouge or Malvoisie de Po and according to *Wine Grapes* has also been known as Malvoisie Rouge d'Italie.

In the official Savoie AOC rules, Velteliner Rouge Précoce is specified, and it is no longer permitted to write Malvoisie on labels. Adding to the complications is that around the turn of this century, when there was some excitement about replanting Malvoisie, there weren't sufficient plants of Velteliner Rouge. Some of what was planted by producers including Domaine Grisard, Domaine A & M Quenard and Domaine Jacquin, was in fact Pinot Gris. In Isère Domaine du Loup des Vignes grows a little. In total, there is less than 10ha across the regions.

Technically Velteliner Rouge Précoce is a pink grape, whereas Pinot Gris is a grey grape. It is vigorous and subject to mildews and rots, and it ripens early, usually being the first grape to be harvested. Some vignerons make a dry white and others an off-dry or medium-sweet Malvoisie, which may be this grape or Pinot Gris or even a field blend – some vignerons don't correctly identify which they have. The

best examples show honey and spiced flavours, with alcohol around 12% and real ripeness of fruit balanced with acidity.

Verdesse

Isère, Savoie

One of the traditional grapes of Isère, Verdesse may also have existed in Piemonte in Italy. Current DNA research indicates that it may be an offspring of Savagnin. It almost died out with the sharp decline of vineyards in Isère and yet it has the potential to make excellent whites. Its name refers to the dark green colour (*vert* is 'green' in French) of its leaves and also the berries, which remain very green until just before they are ripe. I first came across it in the early 2000s from Michael Ferguson, a South African living and working in Grenoble, who replanted it in 1998 from a local grower's cuttings and who sells tiny quantities under the name Mas du Bruchet. Since then it has been planted by several vignerons in both Isère and Savoie, though probably fewer than 5ha exist – all are excited by its quality potential and it is beginning to show in their wines.

It has the potential to produce high sugar levels, reaching 12.5% naturally and sometimes as high as 14.5%, so it's no surprise that some producers make a late-harvest version with residual sugar, but its great advantage is that there's always balancing acidity too. Flavours tend to be exotic, spicy and veering towards yellow fruit.

Other White Varieties

Aligoté

Savoie, Bugey, Diois

This sturdy grape, originally from Burgundy, has long been thought to suit Alpine climates as it ripens relatively easily, but it is little grown today. There are a few hectares in Chautagne; in Bugey, Caveau

Bugiste make a good example from old vines under the IGP Coteaux de l'Ain designation and some appears in blends elsewhere, especially for sparkling wine. In the Diois it is grown in a small way in AOC Châtillon-en-Diois.

Arvine/Petite Arvine

Vin des Allobroges

Even though there is no evidence that it was planted here historically, there is a growing fascination with Petite Arvine (also known as Arvine) in Savoie since it appeared on the French list of authorized grape varieties in 2010. It originates from and is increasingly widely grown in Valais in Switzerland, and in 1970 was introduced into the Aosta Valley in Italy – it certainly has an aptitude for growing in Alpine vineyards. Domaine Saint-Germain has some young vines and is using it in a white blend to excellent effect and Les Vignes de Paradis make a late-harvest version; a few other vignerons have also planted it.

In this vineyard below Château de Miolans and the imposing Dent d'Arclusaz, Domaine Saint-Germain grows Petite Arvine; the estate was one of the first in Savoie to plant it.

Marsanne

All regions

The partner of Roussanne (aka Bergeron) in the vineyards of Hermitage in the Rhône Valley, and likely to be either the offspring or parent of Roussanne, it would not be surprising if Marsanne should also crop up in the French Alps. A tiny amount of Marsanne has been planted by Domaine du Petit Août in Hautes-Alpes, and there are pockets of plantings elsewhere.

Pinot Gris

Vin des Allobroges, Isère, Hautes-Alpes, Coteaux de l'Ain

In the 1803 Savoie grape inventory Pinot Gris appears as Malvoisie Blanche (see Velteliner Rouge Précoce). Technically Pinot Gris is not allowed in the Savoie AOC, but it is permitted as IGP Vin des Allobroges and several producers have a little, until recently labelled Malvoisie. Dominique Lucas of Les Vignes de Paradis makes a very good pure Pinot Gris from vines he planted in Crépy. There is some in Coteaux de l'Ain, Isère and Hautes-Alpes too, as this grape ripens relatively easily. Sadly, most have neither the freshness and delicacy of the best northern Italian versions, nor the dry richness and exotic character of the best Alsace versions.

Technically a grey variety, this very ripe bunch of Pinot Gris from Dominique Lucas is almost the colour of Pinot Noir.

Viognier

Isère, Hautes-Alpes, Coteaux de l'Ain, Vin des Allobroges

Viognier is a traditional grape of Isère, often known under the synonym Galopine. Condrieu, the appellation that made Viognier famous, is only 60km southwest of the Isère Balmes Dauphinoises and there is a little grown here and in Coteaux du Grésivaudan. Viognier is closely related to both Mondeuse Noire and Blanche, so

although at its northern limits, it should come as no surprise that it is also grown in a small way in Savoie and Bugey. In Hautes-Alpes, Domaine de Tresbaudon has 3ha. The biggest risk to this variety, grown so far north, is spring frost, but apart from this, with a warming climate, the French Alps seem an ideal place to make a fresh and balanced Viognier, not overblown by alcohol. With its floral and exotic fruit flavours, Viognier is ideal as part of a blend.

Main Red Varieties

Gamay

All regions

Gamay is right at home in Bugey Cerdon, here in Renardat-Fâche's organic vineyards.

Gamay's official name is Gamay Noir à Jus Blanc (black Gamay with clear juice) to differentiate it from Gamay de Bouze or its mutation Gamay de Chaudenay, which are *teinturier* grapes (with red juice). A tiny amount of these *teinturier* Gamays is still grown and they are permitted in IGP Vin des Allobroges.

Gamay is grown all over Savoie and Bugey, and across the French Alps for IGP wines. In Savoie it is the most planted red variety, covering about 14% of the AOC vineyards, although declining slowly as little has been replanted since 1990. In Bugey, where it is the main

grape for Cerdon sparkling rosé as well as the principal red wine variety, it accounts for about 44% of total plantings. In the Diois, it is the main red grape in the small AOC Châtillon-en-Diois (sometimes blended with Pinot or Syrah) as well as recently being used in a sparkling rosé made in the ancestral method. Before phylloxera it was mentioned by Jules Guyot in his 1868 work *Etudes sur les Vignobles de France* ('Studies of the Vineyards of France') as being grown in Haute-Savoie, but there are few other mentions of it growing in the French Alps. Even in Cerdon, where it dominates today and which is located just 60km to the east of Beaujolais, home of Gamay, pre-phylloxera Gamay was just one of many varieties grown. But, after phylloxera and particularly in the post-Second World War period, Gamay, with its relative ease of growing, high and consistent yields and decent potential alcohol levels, undoubtedly helped save many vineyards from extinction.

It's not all rosy for Gamay growers as it buds early, so is prone to frost (which was especially damaging in Cerdon in 2017), and its thin skins mean that it is easily damaged by hail and is very susceptible to mildews and botrytis bunch rot. Apart from for sparkling wines, Gamay tends to be picked after Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. In Cerdon it is picked before Poulsard.

In Savoie, it has long been the speciality of the warmer Chautagne area and was also until recently valued in Jongieux, but now Mondeuse is slowly taking over there for reds. In predominantly white wine areas such as Apremont, Abymes and in the Lac Léman district, Gamay tends to be grown to provide a little red and/or rosé wine, both still and sparkling, sometimes blended with other red grapes.

Perhaps more than for some grapes, how good the Gamay wines of the French Alps are depends partly on vine age and yield and partly on producer. There is a big advantage in Savoie now that the average vine age of Gamay is 30 or 40 years, but there is still a tendency to use it as a quick cash crop type of wine and thus over-crop it. Most producers make the wine in the traditional manner with a very short maceration, but increasingly semi-carbonic maceration is used. The best Gamays are full of joyous red fruit, with an extra

vibrancy of acidity from the mountains; stony minerality is rarely a feature, as – except in Chautagne – Gamay is rarely grown on the best slopes. There are a few noble exceptions of Gamays that not only sing when young, but become profoundly delicious with a few years' age – these are to be found mainly in Jongieux.

In addition to Cerdon's ancestral method Gamay-dominated rosés, there are increasing examples of medium-dry to medium-sweet Gamay sparkling rosés from Savoie and Bugey, either made by the traditional method or by the ancestral method, the latter usually handled for producers by one of the larger Diois producers.

Mollard

Hautes-Alpes

The attraction of this grape is one of the reasons I decided to include the wines of Hautes-Alpes in this book. In his 1868 book Jules Guyot praised the characteristics of Mollard, which he found in the Hautes-Alpes and described as being between Gamay and Mondeuse in style, and I agree with him. As with so many rare grapes, its decline mirrored that of the vineyards of the Hautes-Alpes – in the 1950s there were around 300ha grown; by the start of this century there were only about 25ha. The few vineyards that remained in the Upper Durance Valley by the 1980s were often replanted with international varieties, but Mollard's saviour came in the form of vigneron Marc Allemand, who worked to save and develop the plant material and two clones. He has over 4ha, which include some old vines grown at up to 700m altitude. It has also been replanted by Yann de Agostini, who has some very old vines too. Several other growers in the area still have a little and the local co-operative makes a single varietal version as well as blends. There is a tiny amount in Sonoma, California.

Mollard is likely to be an offspring of Gouais. It is sensitive to the two mildews and very productive, needing green harvest. It usually ripens well, with modest potential alcohol of 11–12%. Mollard has good colour and freshness, with rustic red fruit flavours and the

structure to age. It's often used in blends and for rosé too. For more details see the producer chapter on Hautes-Alpes.

The rare Mollard variety was saved from extinction by Marc Allemand in Hautes-Alpes.

Mondeuse

Savoie, Bugey, Isère

Mondeuse can be very productive even on very old vines, like this one in Arbin.

Known also as Mondeuse Noire, to differentiate it from Mondeuse Blanche, this has been Savoie's most famous grape for centuries. Yet even after a deserved renaissance in recent years, it remains only the region's second most-planted red grape, after Gamay, with about 250ha in the AOC vineyards and some more in the IGP vineyards. In Bugey there is less than 30ha, some of which is used for rosé and for sparkling base blends. A little is grown in Isère. Historically, in all three regions it was widely planted and highly regarded.

Mondeuse is known for being a vigorous vine, which ripens very late. After the arrival of chemical fertilizers, the combination of high yields with late ripening resulted in grapes with very little sugar or flavour, giving mean wines that required massive chaptalization. They were mean because the grape skins were not ripe and nor were the stems, and before the introduction of destemming machines, these could add green flavours too (see Making the Wines, here). All in all this was not a recipe for fine wine and yet Mondeuse had enjoyed an illustrious past – the French author Jules Guyot, in *Etudes sur les*

Vignobles de France ('Studies of the Vineyards of France'), published in 1868, waxes lyrical about Mondeuse as grown in the best vineyards of the Combe de Savoie and in Chautagne, writing that it has the same qualities as light Médoc wines and pointing out that it develops with age.

Having hit a low in the 1970s of about 150ha in Savoie, it was not until the 1990s that plantings began to increase again. By then, not only was there a growing appreciation of the value of indigenous varieties, but also some of the steeper slopes between Chignin and Fréterive in the Combe de Savoie, where traditionally Mondeuse has performed best, were being replanted, especially in Arbin and St-Jean-de-la-Porte, where wines must be made exclusively from Mondeuse in order to use the cru name. There are three approved clones, but at least one is very over-productive; the CAAPG's experimental vineyard in Montmélian is trialling more.

Gradually in the past two decades the importance of better vineyard practice combined with better cellar handling has been taken on board and the wines may once again be considered as fine. The steepest, stoniest and best-exposed slopes are ideal. The best vignerons favour training Mondeuse either with Gobelet *sur échalas* on very steep slopes, or along wires using Cordon de Royat or Eventail (see Growing the Grapes, here), all systems that reduce the potential vigour. To further limit yields, bud rubbing and the use of green harvest (dropping bunches) are crucial. Mondeuse bunches can be very large, with distinctive 'shoulders', and some vignerons scrupulously cut off the shoulders, but there are several schools of thought.

Savoie's most historic grape variety

The origins of Mondeuse have been subject to much misunderstanding and speculation in recent years. Two millennia ago, *Vitis allobrogica* was mentioned by various writers including the Roman agronomist Columella and the

author of *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder. It was described by these writers as suiting limestone soils, coping with cold, ripening late and producing a wine of good quality, and for a long time it was believed to be Mondeuse. Modern ampelography asserts that the *allobrogica* vine described could have been Syrah, Pinot Noir or something else completely, but many believe it to have been some sort of heritage version of Mondeuse. The variety must have been grown in Savoie in the 18th century and possibly long before because it was mentioned in the 1803 inventory of grapes. It appears to have had many local synonyms, including Le Bon Savoyan in Savoie, Persagne in Ain, Gros Rouge in Switzerland and Maldoux in the Jura.

In the 19th century Mondeuse was taken to Australia (to Brown Brothers in Victoria) and to California. In the 20th century at the University of California at Davis the variety was misidentified, confusing it with Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso of northeast Italy, a relationship disproved by DNA testing. Once Mondeuse Blanche was discovered to be one of the parents of Syrah, this paved the way for further testing to identify Mondeuse Noire. The latest research shows it to be an offspring or parent of Mondeuse Blanche and a relative – either a half-sibling or grandparent – of Syrah.

During most of the 19th century, Mondeuse was the most planted grape in Savoie and also in Bugey. After phylloxera it was hardly replanted at all in Bugey, but it was replanted in Savoie and in the 1950s remained important – records show plantings in France of more than 1,000ha in 1958, which would have included some in Ain and in Isère. The abandonment of vineyards on the steepest slopes and in certain valleys, especially in the Maurienne and Tarentaise Valleys, as well as in Isère, would have contributed to its decline. In addition, when the renaissance of the Savoie vineyards started in the 1960s and 1970s, Mondeuse was

considered simply too difficult to achieve a profitable crop and unsuitable for modern tastes. Gamay became the post-Second World War red grape favourite.

As a late-ripening variety, vintage conditions make a big difference to Mondeuse wines and it is very much a beneficiary of climate change. A particularly challenging aspect of Mondeuse is that the grapes rarely reach more than 10.5–11% potential alcohol even on the best sites and at low yields. Vintage 2018 was a notable exception. The AOC requires a minimum potential natural alcohol of 9% or 9.5% and in some vintages even this low level is hard to achieve. In the winery, this low potential alcohol, combined with high potential tannin, needs careful handling to avoid ending up with an unbalanced wine. The use of oak has been truly mastered by very few producers.

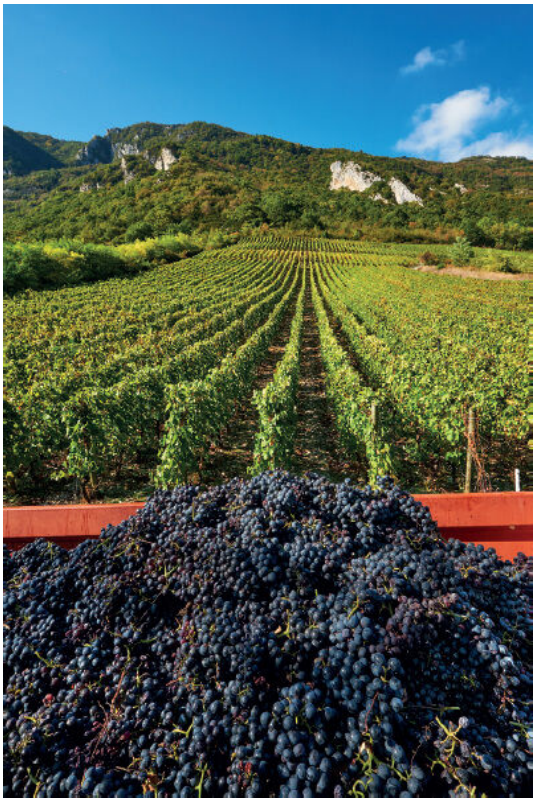
Having been all but abandoned apart from in the Combe de Savoie and in the warmer Chautagne area, today Mondeuse is grown all over Savoie, albeit in very small quantities in Haute-Savoie. It is a variety that truly expresses its terroir in the structure and flavours of the wines. In Bugey, the best expression can be found on the steep, stony Montagnieu slope, but a little is grown across the southern Bugey vineyards, where some suitable slopes exist too. Some is grown in Isère.

There are small plantings in Switzerland; a few wineries in California make single-varietal Mondeuse, notably Lagier Meredith; Brown Bros in Australia grows a small amount; and Cottanera in Etna, Sicily, makes a wine from vines planted in 1997 when it was sent instead of Syrah from a Savoie vine nursery. As a naturally low-sugar variety with a long growing season this grape could have great potential in the face of climate change.

Mondeuse wines

Much Mondeuse is made in a fruity style to be bottled quickly and consumed within two years of the vintage. However, at its best,

sometimes with oak ageing, it gives spicy, peppery, dark red fruit and earthy flavours and has the structure to allow bottle ageing for 5–10 years and sometimes more. The established top vignerons believe that chaptalization to achieve 12% alcohol is essential for the wine to be balanced and ageworthy, but several of the new generation of Savoie vignerons are daring to bottle it at a much lower alcohol. Give a Mondeuse blind to a wine aficionado and they will rarely guess the real alcohol, nearly always thinking it to be 1–2% more than it is, such is the intensity of flavour and texture of the best examples.



The tough-skinned Mondeuse is usually the last variety to ripen in Savoie, and the best producers like Domaine Genoux wait to pick as late as possible.

The appearance of Mondeuse wines is usually mid to dark ruby red, with medium to full intensity, and the colour fades only very slowly with age. Red fruits and spicy, earthy characters dominate, but occasionally there will be an almost Syrah-like floral element or even white pepper. Mondeuse from Apremont, Jongieux, Chautagne, Haute-Savoie and even Chignin tends to be lighter in every aspect

than those from the Combe de Savoie – this is partly because in these regions the steepest vineyards are often reserved for other grape varieties. They can, however, produce wines with joyous red fruit with a surprising kick of structure. The acidity levels, while rarely very high, can add an acidulated character to the red fruit. Arbin produces the deepest, richest, most tannic and long-lived Mondeuse, but the potential of St-Jean-de-la-Porte and other villages in the Combe de Savoie is not far behind and it is from these that the floral notes tend to emerge with a slightly gentler structure.

Oak barrel ageing is used by several producers for a special cuvée; it often adds a spicy edge and a hardness, nothing more. However, there are a few producers, who will be noted in their profiles, who make wines at low yields, with enough power to marry well with oak. Wine lovers may be tricked into thinking there is oak ageing simply by the inherent spicy and powerful character of Mondeuse.

In Bugey, Montagnieu red must be 100% Mondeuse, but very little is made; the steep stony slopes are ideal and based on examples from Franck Peillot or Yves Duport, for example, it would be good to see more grown there. Many vignerons use it in their blend for Montagnieu Brut. Most Bugey Mondeuse has simple red fruit flavours and does well only in the best vintages.

In particular in the IGP areas, Mondeuse is occasionally blended with other varieties, as it often was centuries ago. In all areas, Mondeuse is sometimes used to make delicious dry varietal rosés, or included as part of a rosé blend.

Persan

Savoie, Isère

Domaine Giachino is one of the few Savoie vignerons to have successfully reintroduced Persan.

Persan is thought to have originated near St-Jean-de-Maurienne in an area called Princens (see here), the derivation of the Persan name and a local synonym. Widely planted and much revered until phylloxera, it was replanted afterwards and there were still 200ha in the late 1950s. But, as the vineyards in the Maurienne Valley died out due to industrialization, so – almost – did Persan. From a low of about 3ha, the variety is now being revived. In the French Alps it has been confused over the years with Mondeuse Noire, Etraire de la Dui and even Syrah. DNA profiling has proved it to be the same as a grape grown in the mountains of Piemonte in Italy, called Bécuet, and also that it is probably the parent of Etraire de la Dui. One of its parents is thought to be Savagnin and the other has not yet been identified.

Persan is distinctive in the vineyard as its berries are oval-shaped and look almost like black olives. It buds early, which can be a frost risk, and it is very susceptible to both mildews. It does, however, ripen well, giving good potential alcohol levels – considerably higher than Mondeuse – along with high acidity, which allows it to age.

In modern times, until the turn of this century, Persan was confined to scattered vineyards in the department of Isère, south of Chambéry towards Grenoble, where, confusingly, it is often named Serine, a synonym also for Syrah. Revived interest in old varieties led it to be planted by several growers, notably in 2000 by Michel Grisard in the Domaine des Ardoisières vineyard in Cevins (IGP Vin des Allobroges). Michel recalls that his father had always retained some Persan vines in the vineyard he used for his vine nursery, and Michel believes that Persan should be planted for blending as it was in former times. Another vine nurseryman, the late Gilbert Bouvet, was possibly the first in the 1990s to have made a Savoie wine with it, in an unusual oak-aged blend with Cabernet Sauvignon, named Amariva, still made by the estate today.

More growers, especially in the Combe de Savoie, have now planted Persan; it has also been replanted in the Maurienne Valley, where there are experimental vineyards, including at Princens. Persan's number one cheerleader is Nicolas Gonin in Isère, who exports his Persan widely. However, it is estimated that there is still less than 20ha planted, with most growers having only 0.5ha or less. For now, growers are cautious, due to its erratic ripening and disease susceptibility, and also because they are not sure yet of their traditional customers' reaction to it. The Savoie AOC's restriction of not growing more than 10% accessory grapes (as Persan is categorized) may also be holding it back.

Persan wines

Occasionally blended with Mondeuse or other rarer varieties, Persan is mostly made as a single variety (with sometimes up to the permitted 20% of Mondeuse or other red grapes). Winemaking is still experimental, so some use oak ageing and others don't. It gives wines of a deep colour with dark plummy or mixed berry fruit flavours and the acid and tannin structure for ageing. Persan wines are prone to reduction, so they take a while to open up in the glass. There is ageing potential of 5–10 years with good Persan wines, but

it remains to be seen whether its quality and ageing potential can equal Mondeuse.

Pinot Noir

All regions

In terms of percentage plantings in the French Alps, Pinot Noir is most important in Bugey, where it represents around 6.5% of total plantings. It is the only permitted red for Bugey Manicle, where its history goes back to the period after phylloxera at the end of the 19th century. There is no history of Pinot Noir growing in Savoie until after the Second World War. Little by little the amount grown there has increased, so that now it represents 5% of plantings, some used for traditional method sparkling wine, some for reds and some, very occasionally, as part of rosé blends. There is a little Pinot in Isère, in Châtillon-en-Diois in the Diois and in Hautes-Alpes.

Pinot Noir ripens well on the steep slopes of southern Bugey.

In the prevalent limestone soils, Pinot suits anywhere with sufficient sunshine, although like Gamay it is prone to rot or mildew in poor summers. It matures relatively early with good sugar levels, so its attraction in these regions is obvious. As everywhere with Pinot Noir, more than most varieties, the success of the wine is very much in the hands of the vignerons. You would expect these Pinots to be lighter than Burgundies and they are, but occasionally, especially in good summers, the true Pinot characteristics of red fruit and even

gameyness emerge to make some delightful wines. A few producers age in oak, but most make it in a simple fruity style.

Poulsard

Bugey

The notoriously difficult but increasingly admired red grape of the Jura, Poulsard is grown in the Cerdon part of Bugey, which is effectively an extension south of Jura's Sud Revermont district. Pre-phylloxera more was planted, but today there are less than 15ha of Poulsard, used in a blend with Gamay for Cerdon Méthode Ancestrale, the pink semi-sweet sparkling wine. In the rainy climate here, it is just as challenging as in the Jura, prone to fungal and other diseases and to over-cropping, and requiring very careful handling in the cellar. I don't know of any red or rosé still wines made from it.

The only place that Poulsard is grown outside the Jura is here in Bugey Cerdon.

Rare Local Red Varieties

Douce Noire/Corbeau

Savoie, Isère

With its highly coloured leaves, at harvest time Douce Noire is one of the prettiest grape varieties – it was once widely grown in Savoie and Isère.

Corbeau is known in the French Alps as Douce Noire (which means 'sweet black'). It was widely grown in Savoie in the 19th century and even post-phylloxera, up to the 1950s, Douce Noire was among the most planted red varieties, but was never considered to be as fine as Mondeuse. Elsewhere in France it was often named Corbeau (after the word for crow, because its wine was so dark-coloured) and in Jura it appeared as Charbonneau. DNA testing has proved that it is identical to Charbono in California and to Bonarda in Argentina (not the same as Italian Bonarda). In Argentina it is the second most-cultivated variety, with more than 15,000ha – compared with less than 3ha in France. In Savoie it was also known as Plant de Montmélian and despite other hypotheses having come and gone

(notably that it might have been the same as Piemonte's Dolcetto), it is now believed to have originated in Savoie.

Douce Noire gives low potential alcohol levels, but traditionally it was used for blending to add colour to Mondeuse as well as softness, and also to add softness to Persan. Curiously, despite the grape being widely planted not only in Savoie, Ain and Isère, but also elsewhere in France with a total 962ha, in 1958 it was dropped from France's national grape register. This meant that it was not included in Savoie's VDQS regulations and is still not permitted for the Savoie AOC. Fifty years later in 2008 it was finally restored to the register, under the name of Corbeau, thanks to the work of Roger Raffin (later president of the CAAPG) and vigneron Jean-Paul Finas (now retired). In 2011, the Douce Noire name was officially accepted.

Today, the Bachelliers at Les Sartos du Bec in the Maurienne Valley have experimental plantings of different mass selections. They have used it in red blends and more recently as a delicious varietal '*nouveau*' style, made with carbonic maceration and full of red fruit: they see Douce Noire's deep colour, high acidity, red fruit character, but low alcohol, as an advantage. It is grown by a few other vignerons, including Domaine Giachino, who use it in a blend with Mondeuse and Persan, called Ma Douce.

Espanenc/Plant Droit

Hautes-Alpes

This variety was once widely grown in the Hautes-Alpes, but almost died out. In France there are nearly 20ha as it survives in small quantities in the southern Rhône Valley (as Cinsault Droit); it is also grown in Spain as Garnacha Francesa. It is believed to be related to the white Clairette grape.

In Hautes-Alpes, Yann de Agostini of Domaine du Petit Août found 0.5ha of old vines, farmed by a member of Cave des Hautes Vignes, the local co-operative. He took mass selections for new plantings from 2010 to 2017, giving him 0.3ha in total. He made a tiny quantity from the 2015 vintage, which showed a classic Alpine structure and

acidulated red fruit; his 2016 has more structure; sadly he made none in 2017 due to spring frost. Cave des Hautes Vignes uses Espanenc only as part of a blend.

Etraire de la Dui

Isère, Savoie

This now rare grape is believed to originate in Isère's Coteaux du Grésivaudan valley and was first mentioned in the early 19th century. Its name comes from a farmhouse named L'Aduï where an enormous vine was discovered growing by a spring. Etraire was the name of Persan in Isère, and it looked similar, with oval-shaped berries, so the same name was adopted with the La Dui suffix. It was subsequently propagated and spread to Ain and Savoie. It is relatively sturdy and not too prone to fungal diseases, which aided its popularity, and initially it was rumoured to be resistant to phylloxera. DNA testing has confirmed that it is indeed a likely offspring of Persan. With the decline in the Isère vineyards from the late 1950s, the variety nearly died out, but Thomas Finot and Domaine des Rutissons have rescued some old vineyards and replanted it too. Today there are around 10ha grown. It appears to be best suited to clay-limestone vineyards; it buds early, so is risky if there is a late frost, and it is potentially over-vigorous. For Savoie vineyards located in Isère, it is permitted for the AOC, but most appears as IGP Vin des Allobroges or IGP Isère.

Etraire de la Dui is sometimes blended, but there are also single-varietal wines. It has a medium colour and on the nose has a floral character, but the palate can give a shock of acidity, tannin and even bitterness, so it needs good ripeness to provide balance. Potential alcohol is rarely more than about 12% and this is certainly a grape with potential to age for a few years.

The official name is Etraire de la Dui, but there are many alternative spellings.

OTHER RED VARIETIES

Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot

Hautes-Alpes, Savoie, Coteaux de l'Ain

The surprise is finding the two Cabernets authorized in the AOC Savoie rules, but this is a legacy of the prevalent vine nurseries in Savoie, which sell vines to other regions. In Savoie for some decades there has been a tiny amount of Cabernet Sauvignon grown and commercialized, some in Chautagne, made by the co-operative, and some in the Combe de Savoie, made by Domaine Bouvet. All three varieties are found at several producers in the Hautes-Alpes either as single-varietal wines or as part of blends – Merlot is particularly useful in this respect. Cabernet Sauvignon may have difficulty ripening in these areas, but Cabernet Franc has good potential here.

Gamaret

Coteaux de l'Ain, Vin des Allobroges, Isère

This is a Swiss crossing of Gamay and Reichensteiner, created in 1970 and widely grown in the Geneva canton. It's no surprise that it has crossed the border to Ain and there is some interest in using it in Savoie, where it is permitted for IGP Vin des Allobroges. It is relatively disease free and ripens early. It is known for its deep colour and intense tannins, therefore makes a good blending partner.

Syrah

Isère, Châtillon-en-Diois, Hautes-Alpes, Coteaux de l'Ain

Syrah has a long history in Isère and a little is grown in the Balmes Dauphinoises vineyards. Further south it is permitted as an accessory variety in AOC Châtillon-en-Diois and is grown by one or two producers in Hautes-Alpes for blends or single-varietal rosés and reds.

Mondeuse Grise was a surprise find, and now it is being rehabilitated by Philippe Grisard; other vignerons plan to plant it.

Very rare local varieties

The following grape varieties are traditional to one or more of the French Alpine wine regions and are in the process of being rehabilitated, although there is often less than 1ha currently planted. Inevitably, the list is not exhaustive.

White grapes

Bia Blanc: Savoie, Isère

Possibly related to Viognier and Mondeuse Blanche. There are some old vines interspersed with Jacquère at Domaine Dupraz. Cuttings from two different sources are being replanted and tested. There is a lot of interest from vignerons, including Nicolas Gonin, who plans to plant some in Isère Balmes Dauphinoises as soon as it is available.

Blanc de Maurienne: Savoie

DNA testing has proved that this grape from the Maurienne Valley is the same as the Rèze, a rare but much-admired grape grown in Switzerland's Valais canton. It has been replanted in Maurienne and the first trial wines made from it.

Petite Sainte Marie: Savoie, Isère

Originally known as Ste-Marie de Chignin, this old grape variety has recently been approved, but the authorities have insisted on the name Petite Sainte-Marie as place names are not allowed; this despite the fact that Petite Sainte-Marie was also a local synonym for Chardonnay, to which it is not related. Gilles Berlioz has planted 400 vines and made some micro-cuvées and describes it as very flavourful and fruity. Some exists in Bugey and Isère too.

Other varieties: A few vines of Cacaboué, a traditional Savoie variety from Charpignat by Lac du Bourget, have been planted in the vineyard of the luxury hotel/restaurant Château

de Bourdeau, to be used in a sparkling field blend. Once it has been reclassified and given a new name, Thomas Finot plans to grow Sainte-Marie de Biviers in Isère. Dongine is under consideration in Bugey.

Red grapes

Mècle de Bourgoin: Isère

Originating from close to Bourgoin Jallieu in the Balmes Dauphinoises and possibly a descendent of Savagnin, this variety was confused with Poulsard, because in nearby Ain Mècle was a synonym of the Poulsard. Nicolas Gonin found an old vineyard from which to take cuttings; he has planted 0.3ha and made 50 litres in 2018. Deep coloured, it seems to be between Mondeuse and Persan in style.

Mondeuse Grise: Savoie

Some years ago Claude Paul alerted the CAAPG to the existence of a grey variation of Mondeuse Noire in Bugey. Testing proved it to be a natural variation (like Pinot Gris is to Pinot Noir). It has now been officially registered and Philippe Grisard has planted some and made an interesting pinkish-tinged white wine.

Onchette: Isère

A progeny of Gouais, this variety has been rescued by the CAAPG together with the association that is reviving the vineyards in the high-altitude Trièves district southeast of Grenoble. Samuel Delus of Domaine de l'Obiou made the first experimental wines from 275 vines planted in 2010; more has been planted since. The variety has now been approved and Samuel uses it in a blend for a classic light red mountain wine.

Other varieties: Thomas Finot has planted Serénèze de Voreppe and Sébastien Bénard has planted Servanin, both in Isère. Nicolas Gonin plans to plant Salagnin (also known as Robin Noir) and Servanin in his Isère vineyards. Maxime Dancoine has planted Joubertin in Aiton. Jacquère Noire (found among vines planted at Château de Bourdeau), Hibou Noir and Peloursin (which exists in the Jura under the name of Gros Béclan) are among others under current research.

This very steep Chignin vineyard, below the mountain known as La Savoyarde, belongs to Domaine Berthollier and is farmed organically with close-planted Bergeron vines trained sur échalas.

GROWING THE GRAPES

Mountain viticulture can be harrowing – excuse the pun – or indeed heroic, when the vineyards cling to such steep rocky hillsides. A visitor can only stare down the vine rows with bemusement, wondering how vineyard workers manage to stay upright while pruning, de-budding or picking.

You might expect to see terraces to make the work easier, but in the French Alpine vineyards there are very few, though historically there were more, especially on the highest and steepest parts of the slopes – some abandoned vineyard terraces can be still seen hidden in the forests. Today, building terraces is simply too much work and cost, for a massive loss of vine space – most that do exist are very wide and built to avoid working on a steep slope.

It is obvious that little can be mechanized in the steepest vineyards and this is one reason why so many were abandoned in the first half of the 20th century. The introduction of mechanization and chemical herbicides, insecticides and fungicides eased the work considerably from the 1950s and arguably saved the vineyards, but the biggest challenge today is how to make these hard-to-work vineyards more environmentally friendly and cost-effective.

From the 1970s, vineyards were increasingly planted on flatter lands lower down the hillsides to make them more easily mechanized, to ensure bigger crops and to be able to meet a price, albeit with more frost risk. Yet a movement starting in the late 1980s and still continuing has seen some higher and steeper vineyard slopes replanted. Those vignerons who undertook this gamble deserve credit for their vision and confidence that their work would be rewarded.

The contrast between the facility of work in the flatter vineyards and in the steeper ones is great in terms of labour and thus cost. This chapter explores this work and addresses the biggest viticultural issues in the French Alps, including the advances made in adopting organic, biodynamic or sustainable farming methods.

The vines: rootstocks, clones, mass selections and age

Given that Savoie is known for its vine nurseries, there is a surprising lack of clones of the indigenous varieties and very little officially supported vine research.Sadly, financial resources are limited and although there is an experimental vineyard at Domaine de Méjane in St-Jean-de-la-Porte, which grows a number of clones of the main Savoie varieties, little in the way of follow-up studies has been done recently. It has taken the largely volunteer-led CAAPG to further the research into rare Alpine grape varieties and to develop a collection of different plant material of the main Savoie varieties. This is vitally important to ensure healthy, disease-free and strong vines, able to produce good-quality grapes. Most Savoie vignerons buy their grafted vines from nurseries within the department, and for rare varieties this is the only option. Bugey has no vine nurseries and its vignerons buy mainly from Savoie.

Planting of mass selections rather than clones is confined, as elsewhere, to the most dedicated of producers, mainly organic; with increasing communication between the best producers, some vignerons share selected vine material. So, for example, when Dominique Lucas of Les Vignes de Paradis in the Lac Léman area wanted to plant Altesse he obtained cuttings from his friend Dominique Belluard of Ayze. In neither of these areas is there any recent tradition of planting Altesse: Belluard planted his Altesse in 2002, having obtained his plant material from a mass selection grown by Domaine Dupasquier in Jongieux.

Planting a new Persan vineyard for Philippe Grisard in the Combe de Savoie, with the backdrop of the Dent d'Arclusaz and the high Alps.

In terms of officially led viticultural studies, there are even fewer resources in Bugey, Isère and Hautes-Alpes. All three areas, though, have enthusiastic vignerons who participate in the CAAPG's annual meetings.

Due to the highly varied soils, a wide range of rootstocks is used. Given the predominance of limestone, in some areas growers' choice is orientated towards a rootstock that can cope with high calcium levels. Other choices may be made to help reduce the vines' potential vigour in a humid climate – there is some resurgence in the use of old rootstocks such as Riparia Gloire, known to promote lower vigour. On the other hand, grassed-down vineyards require reasonably vigorous rootstocks to cope with the competition.

Vine age varies greatly in these regions. On the one hand, there are many young vines, partly due to revived vineyard areas and partly to increased plantings of indigenous grape varieties. On the other hand, due to the post-Second World War vineyard revival in Bugey and Savoie, which occurred mainly between the 1960s and the 1980s, there are Chardonnay and Gamay vines in the former and Jacquère and Gamay in the latter that are now reaching a very respectable age. It is to be hoped that the esca and *flavescence dorée* scourges do not reduce the average age too much.

Vine density, pruning and training systems

The AOC rules in Savoie and Bugey require a minimum planting density of 5,000 vines per hectare (with slight variations for certain vineyards). In practice most modern vineyards are planted at a density of around 6,000 vines per hectare, with many older vineyards planted at 8,000–10,000 vines per hectare – the latter have to be worked with an *enjambeur* tractor that straddles the vines or a very small, low tractor, a *chenillette* (small tracked vehicle), a horse or manually. The Diois and the other areas are similar.

The 19th-century viticulturist Guyot (after whom Guyot training was named) noted after visiting Savoie that every village or valley had a different form of training. Examples of the traditional high training systems that were prevalent in Savoie are the *hautains* of Chautagne and the *crosses* of Marin. Today most vineyards are trained on wires and use the Single Guyot or occasionally Double Guyot systems (sometimes used in arched form, especially for Chardonnay for Bugey Brut as it gives higher yields). For Mondeuse that is trained on wires, another permitted system, Cordon de Royat, is used by many growers; others use Eventail: both are spur-pruned systems.

Gobelet training, usually attached to a single post (called '*sur échalas*') or very occasionally a wigwam set-up as used in the northern Rhône, is much in evidence on steep slopes and/or for older vines, especially favoured for Mondeuse. I've also seen it on steep Chignin Bergeron slopes, in Marestel for Altesse and in Ayze with Gringet. *Sur échalas* is also used on particularly steep slopes in Bugey, including in Montagnieu and some parts of Cerdon. These vines are often planted at an even higher density of around 12,000 vines per hectare. It's always impressive to look at because it's immediately obvious how much sheer manual and sometimes skilled labour is required to weed around the vines, trim and tie up the shoots. The attention that needs to be lavished on these vines makes the vigneron at one with each vine.

In the Diois, for Clairette de Die, training is Guyot or Cordon de Royat; a small amount of Gobelet is still seen, but technically is no

longer allowed and is being phased out.

Managing the soil and the growth of vines and weeds

My home in Haute-Savoie is located at much higher altitude than the vineyards and the growing season for my south-facing garden is short. Once the snow has gone and the spring really kicks in, the speed of growth is phenomenal. The fact is, it rains in the Alps – it rains a lot at times – and it can be really sunny and warm in between. These weather conditions are perfect for everything to grow strong and fast and, given a chance, grass and weeds will take over, leaving little energy left in the soil to nurture anything else. A big part of a vigneron's job is to manage the vigour of both the vines and those weeds, as well as the grass or any other ground-cover.

As everywhere, there is work to be done in the vineyard almost throughout the year. After the intense manual work of winter pruning, mainly from December to March, during the four months from April to July the vigneron is trying to control weed growth and vine growth. But, given the high rainfall here, everything must also be done to prevent mildew attacks: this includes aerating the soil and keeping the air circulating around the vines. Finally, of course, the aim is to aid steady ripening and to intervene to avoid the vine over-cropping. The process of de-budding and removing laterals is taken more and more seriously by good vignerons and given that this process is manual, seasonal vineyard workers (experienced regulars if possible) are required for several weeks in early summer. Later, around *veraison* (the grapes' colour change), certain varieties, especially Mondeuse, require crop thinning or green harvest.

The picture shows Bruno Lupin's steep, grassed-down Mondeuse vineyard above Frangy. The vines are trained sur échalas.

By contrast, is the stony, bare earth of these terraced, wire-trained vineyards in Chignin, built by Michel Quenard in the late 1980s to facilitate working the steep slope.

The process of *buttage* (banking up the soil) to protect the vine is a traditional method sometimes still used as a way to avoid weeds. In the process of *débuttage* (when the soil mound is demolished) the weeds can be pulled up and fertilizer added – these processes can be mechanized as part of the ploughing activities. In years gone by, vignerons had no choice but to weed laboriously by hand, using a hoe. From early in the 20th century, if the vigneron was sufficiently wealthy and the steepness of the slope permitted, a plough was attached to a horse, or oxen, eventually replaced by a tractor. On very steep slopes a *treuil*, a pulley system with a plough, can be used by a person on foot, a small tractor or a horse. The system has been around for decades and is increasingly seen once again.

Looking across the valley at various steep vineyard slopes it's common to see bare soils, devoid of any green except the vines. In today's environmentally conscious world it's easy to presume that these must have been entirely weed-killed with herbicide. Yet in centuries gone by, before herbicides, these slopes were prized as excellent vineyard sites. Many of the steep slopes in Savoie, Bugey and beyond – such as the higher slopes of Chignin, Arbin and Cruet in the Combe de Savoie, or Marestel in Jongieux, or Montagnieu, Manicle and Cerdon in Bugey – are so stony that weeds have a hard time growing in any case. More and more vignerons are turning back to manual techniques, perhaps just going through with a hoe or strimmer once a year, or making the compromise of one herbicide treatment in early spring and then hoeing later in the year.

Back in the late 1980s, there was a realization that herbicide use made vineyards look very 'clean' and tidy, but – especially on steep slopes – bare earth encouraged soil erosion or even minor landslides after heavy rain. In Savoie and other Alpine regions more and more vineyards have been grassed down, either letting grass grow naturally or planting specific grasses in between each vine row, or sometimes just every other row, allowing the second row to be ploughed. It has changed the landscape completely, solved some problems and created others. Today, as one of the ways to comply with France's objective of reducing herbicide use, Savoie AOC rules specify at least partial grassing down or ploughing for all vineyards

that are able to be mechanized (i.e. not too steep). Many, especially on the steep slopes of Chignin, are not following the rules right now – vignerons claim grass won't grow, but I was told that it may miraculously appear if they are threatened with losing their AOC.

For weed-killing, herbicide use below the row of vines remains the most commonly used system. The width of the strip that is weed-killed is important and so is the choice of herbicide, as some are more noxious than others: the worst are gradually being banned. Modern machinery and a careful user can apply herbicide efficiently and accurately, helping to limit its use. There are still a few growers who opt for an easy life, but it is now relatively rare that vineyards are 100% weed-killed.

Most growers who have decided to eliminate herbicide completely have invested in an *intercep*, a tractor attachment that enables weeding between each vine. Many Savoie and Bugey growers claim that there is no suitable *intercep* for their particular terroir or slope – something refuted by the regional vineyard inspector and advisor. However, it's true that on certain stony soils there is a risk of damage to the vines, and if they are planted in the Gobelet system *sur échalas* then the only alternative to herbicide is manual weeding with a hoe or a strimmer (the latter is also potentially damaging to the vines). And on very steep slopes, extreme care must be taken. I have heard all too many sad stories of vignerons or their employees turning over their tractors on steep slopes and coming to a tragic end.

In Arbin, the Genoux family, who work biodynamically, plough the soil with a treuil, a harrow attached to a pulley to help it up the steep slope of their Mérande vineyard.

The scourge of *flavescence dorée*

Flavescence dorée is the most common form of bacterial-type infection that exists under the umbrella name of grapevine yellows. This lethal vine disease has now been identified in more than two-thirds of France's vineyard areas and is a growing problem.

In *flavescence dorée*-infected vines, a micro-organism enters the sap, causing the leaves to turn yellow and the wood (required for the following year's growth) to stop developing properly. The vine doesn't produce a crop and never recovers. The micro-organism is spread by a leafhopper, which lives only on the vine and has a two-month life cycle; its larvae are capable of hopping from leaf to leaf, while the adults fly. The action taken to combat its spread is as follows:

- Uproot and remove infected vines as quickly as possible.
- Kill the leafhopper using insecticide sprays through the season. This is now mandated by law throughout France in

affected zones.

- All baby vines must be heat-treated before planting to ensure they are not already contaminated.

In Savoie, where infected vines were first found in 2000, inspection committees have been set up to identify infected vines. A local problem is the number of vines that are either abandoned or exist in private individuals' properties – which can easily remain uninspected. In the past few years in Savoie 10,000–20,000 vines have had to be removed annually, the equivalent of 2–3ha or 0.1% of the total vineyard area. If no action is taken, the effects are dire – there are cases where hundreds of vines have become infected the year following an original infection of one sole vine. Jacquère is more susceptible than other varieties.

The difficulty is particularly acute for organic growers. Pyrévert is the only insecticide against the *flavescence* leafhopper authorized for organically certified vineyards; the spray biodegrades but it also kills a range of other insects and is highly noxious to humans. There is a race to try to find a more appropriate organic solution.

Managing disease

Just as the combination of rain and warmth is perfect for weeds and grass to get the upper hand, it's also an ideal situation for fungal diseases to appear. From May to July vignerons take up the fight against the two mildews: *le mildiou* (peronospera or downy mildew) and oidium (powdery mildew). The ideal way is to train the vines and manage the canopy in such a way as to allow maximum air-flow – and in mountain areas, wind is not usually in short supply. But this alone is not enough and preventative spraying is required however the vines are managed. For most growers this means systemic or chemical sprays at least at the start of the season, if not throughout.

Some will move to the traditional Bordeaux mixture (copper sulphate and lime) and use elemental sulphur against oidium. For those in organic regimes, Bordeaux mixture and sulphur are the main weapons, along with plant-based sprays and essential oils, and even whey from cheese-making. As in other winemaking regions there is much polemic about the dangers of copper build-up in the soil through over-use of Bordeaux mixture.

Black rot is another fungal disease that can be a particularly serious problem in Savoie, Bugey and beyond. Despite being around for a long time, this disease seems not to be well-understood or managed, and remedies are neither environmentally friendly nor very efficient. It appears in mild, wet weather and attacks both leaves and berries, especially if the vine is weakened by hail damage; it may also appear together with downy mildew. It can result in a very high level of crop loss and there has been a worrying increase of the disease in the past decade. Jacquère is the main, but not the only, variety affected and growers systematically spray against the disease. It is more difficult for organic growers but very recently an approved spray has been developed, but not yet adopted by all.

As everywhere in France and beyond, the wood-borne fungal disease esca is a problem without a solution at present. In Bugey 3–5% of vines are killed by the disease annually, with Chardonnay the most affected. In Savoie the figure claimed is below 2%, with Gamay and Jacquère the most affected. Muscat and Clairette in the Diois are also very sensitive to all wood diseases, including esca, losing 3–5% of vines annually.

Although once prevalent, anti-botrytis sprays are rarely used in the region now. Insecticides have also been eliminated by almost all producers, with the exception of compulsory sprays in certain regions against the leafhopper that spreads *flavescence dorée*.

Organics and biodynamics

Chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides were slow to arrive here, but once they did they were widely adopted, with only a few older vignerons resisting. In Savoie, one such was the Canelli-Suchet

family of Marignan, and they were the first in Savoie to be certified organic in 1993. Over in the Diois, the pioneering estate was Domaine Achard-Vincent: grandfather Raymond Vincent adopted the Lemaire-Bouchet method in 1968, shunning chemicals and herbicides; his son-in-law Jean-Pierre Achard was recognized by the organic Nature et Progrès association in 1982; and the current generation, Thomas Achard-Vincent, works biodynamically, achieving Demeter recognition in 2005. In Bugey Cerdon, Philippe Balivet and Raphaël Bartucci converted to organics in the mid-1980s, becoming certified later. Back in Savoie, much more high profile was the conversion of Michel Grisard's Domaine Prieuré Saint-Christophe estate direct to biodynamic farming from 1994, but it was not until the turn of the century that others followed his example even with organic viticulture. Nowadays it usually takes either a dynamic new generation of an existing estate or a new vigneron setting up from scratch to take the plunge; sometimes vignerons who are reaching retirement age, having paid off their debts, decide to convert for the sake of future generations or a future buyer of the estate.

Biodynamic producer Gilles Berlioz uses the services of Pierre Gallet and his mare, Jessy, for ploughing, here in a new Bergeron vineyard below the Chignin châteaux.

Taking a sustainable approach

How and when sprays are applied has a major effect on their environmental impact. In years when there are endless rainstorms it can be difficult to decide upon the most efficient time to spray, but almost all vignerons now subscribe to daily local forecasts by email, coupled with weekly advice specific to controlling vineyard disease.

The term *agriculture raisonnée* (reasoned or sustainable agriculture) no longer has one sole certification programme, but there are various schemes that thoughtful vignerons can sign up to, which encourage them to reduce chemical inputs. In Savoie, due to the proximity of the large Lac du Bourget and bearing in mind that chemicals end up in the river systems, those who are responsible for water quality are behind a five-year programme to assist vignerons to monitor and reduce their chemical use – around 20 vignerons are signed up. Terra Vitis provides certification for sustainable viticulture and is growing France-wide, but has had no take-up in Alpine areas so far. There is a big increase in producers signing up to Haute Valeur Environnementale (HVE), a sustainability programme created in 2011; but its follow-up control is not very well regarded by those who promote organics. In my view, every attempt to reduce environmental damage must be a step in the right direction.

Today in Bugey 19% of the AOC area is certified organic or officially in conversion. In the Diois more than 20% is certified organic. In Savoie, the figure is 9–10% of the AOC area (about the French national average). Outside the AOC regions, in the smaller and more unusual areas, organic farming is usually even more challenging than elsewhere and yet vignerons are even more

committed – it is one way to show the world that their wines are worth seeking out.

There are various organic certification programmes: the best-known, Ecocert, is becoming more expensive and some vignerons are opting for other approved programmes, such as the locally run Alpes Contrôles, which still enables them to use the AB (*agriculture biologique*) organic logo on their labels. Nature et Progrès is a French organic association; standards are strictly controlled, but it does not subscribe to the third-party organic certification required by the EU. Demeter is the international certification for products of biodynamic agriculture; an alternative is Biodyvin.

The biggest challenges in the Alpine regions for organic viticulture are those that affect everyone – controlling the weeds and fighting fungal diseases. The latter, in particular, puts off some vignerons from converting to organics, partly for fear of losing all the crop and partly because they worry about introducing more copper into the soils. Mostly, though, it is the economics of organic farming that discourages vignerons. Traditionally, wines here have rarely commanded high prices – those vignerons with an established customer base fear losing customers through having to put up their prices to cover the necessary increased labour costs associated with organic viticulture in the mountains. If you want to be organic it's a choice – very steep slopes and very steep prices (due to extra labour) or abandon the steep slopes and restrict yourself to gentler slopes, perhaps at greater risk of frost damage.

Organic vignerons in Savoie and Bugey have tended to cherry-pick biodynamic methods, such as using the main preparations to fortify the soil or using plant concoctions or oils for vine treatments to reduce copper use. Many follow the phases of the moon for key dates like bottling, but may not be sufficiently convinced to follow the biodynamic astral calendar for vineyard tasks. Few want to commit to expensive certification. Domaine Genoux (Château de Mérande) farms its 12ha biodynamically and was approved by Biodyvin in 2015. In Savoie, Claude Quenard et Fils, Domaine Curtet, Domaine Giachino and Florent Héritier are Demeter certified, with Gilles Berlioz and Adrien Berlioz among others in the application stage; in Bugey only

Jean-Christophe Pellerin is Demeter certified and he currently works outside of the AOC regime. In the Diois, Domaine Achard-Vincent, Jaillance and Monge Granon have Demeter certification – the latter two for just a part of their vineyard holdings.

Harvest

You might imagine that harvest in the French Alps was late in the season, but summers and autumns can be hot, especially in recent decades. This fact, combined with the importance of sparkling wines for several regions (usually grapes for sparkling wines are picked early) and the sheer variety of different grapes grown, means that harvest can be very extended. Whereas not too many decades ago harvest rarely started before late September, these days it's not unusual for it to start in early September or even in August – and some vignerons will still be picking in mid-October. In Savoie the earliest varieties to be picked are Velteliner Rouge Précoce and Pinot Gris (both known as Malvoisie), Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Gamay; then Altesse and Bergeron (Roussanne) and Persan; finally the late-ripening Jacquère and Mondeuse. In Haute-Savoie, picking dates for Chasselas vary according to producer. Gringet in Ayze is usually picked late in the season.

As in other wine regions, for cost and convenience, machine harvesting is widely used wherever the vineyards are not too steep and where it is allowed. Hand harvesting must be used for Crémant de Savoie and Crémant de Die, and for Bugey's sparkling Montagnieu, but machine harvesting is allowed for other sparkling wines, including Cerdon. Of the three Bugey zones, the syndicate estimates that 80% is machine harvested in the Belley area and about 50% in the Cerdon and Montagnieu areas, where there are more steep slopes. In Savoie, estimates for machine harvesting vary from 60–80%; it is declining slightly due to Crémant requirements and better understanding of Mondeuse, which is particularly unsuited to machine harvesting, due to its stalks sometimes being unripe, thus a machine will damage the grapes.

Defenders of the machine rightly assert that designs are much improved – in fact in difficult weather years there are big advantages, not only for a faster harvest, but also new optical grape sorting options can eliminate rotten berries or help in case of unevenly ripened bunches. Machine harvesters are owned by large estates or are jointly owned by several growers in a CUMA, a kind of co-operative that shares vineyard and winery equipment. There are also companies that provide machine harvesting services. With the resurgence of whole bunch pressing in recent years, among quality producers there has been a move away from machine harvesting for red grapes, especially Mondeuse, and also for Altesse and Roussanne. Jacquère is extremely tough and ideal for machine picking, and in Bugey, where Gamay and Chardonnay dominate, so does the machine.

For manual harvest, finding good pickers is an increasing worry, as is the cost and bureaucracy involved to employ them. This is one of several reasons why vignerons choosing the organic route often prefer to keep their vineyard holdings small, so that they can rely mainly on family and friends to pick. In Chignin, Gilles Berlioz and Pascal Quenard have joined forces to share a harvest team, using them on alternate days. Another big challenge is once again the very steep slopes – one grower in Jongieux told me how he warns his picking team the day before they plan to pick on the Marestel slope, advising them not to come if they have any physical problems or are not feeling super-fit. It's a scary job. Pulleys are used by some vignerons to bring the boxes of grapes up to the trailer at the top of the slope.

One of the advantages of all these small but scattered Alpine regions is that with the exception of the négociants and a very few new-style producers who buy in grapes, almost all the growers have vineyards very close to their wineries, often within a 5km radius, despite owning many parcels of vines. This means that grapes are transported to the winery for processing with little delay.

Harvesting Jacquère above Apremont in Savoie at Le Cellier du Palais, which picks entirely by hand.

Neutral glass fibre or plastic tanks are widely used in the French Alps both for fermentation and storage; at Château de la Violette in Les Marches, Savoie, these are somewhat smarter than many.

MAKING THE WINES

In one sense, making wines in the French Alps is no different to anywhere else, but the marginal climate and indigenous grape varieties present special challenges and so do the economic pressures to bottle wines early. In terms of technology, Savoie and Bugey were backwaters until relatively recently and, to an extent, Isère and Hautes-Alpes still are. The Diois region is somewhat different, dominated by the modern Jaillance co-operative and making almost exclusively sparkling wines, which are covered in the next chapter.

Since the 1980s, Savoie, especially, has relied heavily on expertise provided by local official advisors and on consultant oenologists such as Olivier Turlais of Oeno Conseil. However, all too often Savoie has been one step behind the rest of the wine world. Trends I've encountered over the years include investment in new oak barrels when the oak fashion was dying away; and investment in refrigeration systems and then using very low fermentation temperatures to make bland, tasteless whites. I'm now hoping the producers won't all decide to move to zero-sulphur wines, without realizing the implications.

With a few noble exceptions, French Alpine wines are made to be bottled early, to be consumed within two years from vintage. It came about partly through a conviction that this was all that their own wines were good for, but also, in Savoie especially, it is due to the reliance on customers in the winter sports resorts. The ski season starts in mid-December, with its peak visitor time in February, and the pressure to deliver the latest vintage in time for this crucial period has been to the detriment of quality and the perception of Savoie wines. Since the late 2000s, as new generations of vignerons have taken over and they seek different markets, there has been a growing realization that better and more ageworthy wines can be made here and Savoie winemaking has really begun to improve. Bugey is somewhat behind.

The real challenge of making wines in mountain areas, as elsewhere, is a vineyard challenge. The ideal is simply to bring in ripe grapes with sufficient sugar and flavour, and without excessive acidity or green tannins, something that is being made increasingly possible thanks to the changing climate and a lowering of yields by many vignerons. This chapter looks at the options for making still wines of all styles, with an emphasis on winery handling of the most-planted Alpine grape varieties.

In the small cellar of Château de Lucey in Savoie, Christophe Martin has started experimenting with octagonal concrete tanks, alongside his stainless steel. These seem to suit high acidity white wines such as Altesse.

In cellars across the French Alps, stainless steel receiving vats and pneumatic presses have been widespread for some decades, along with temperature control systems. However, while there are plenty of shiny stainless steel vat rooms at the larger producers, I don't think there can be anywhere else in France that still has so many fibreglass tanks, also known as plastic tanks (often with floating lids sealed by vacuum to avoid oxidation); there are also many old metal (lined with epoxy resin) and concrete tanks still in use. Bearing in mind that very few wines remain in tank beyond the spring after the harvest and that over 80% of wines are bottled before the following vintage, this hardly matters, as long as the tanks are kept full and are well maintained.

The choice of cultured or indigenous yeasts is no different from most regions. Cultured yeasts came late to Savoie and were increasingly used from the 1990s when local yeasts failed. Olivier Turlais explained that after many vineyards were grassed down – in order to prevent soil erosion – nitrogen levels in the soil were reduced, giving less nourishment to the natural yeast population.

Since then the vast majority of producers have played safe with cultured (purchased) yeasts, the exceptions being most organic vignerons. Many producers tell me that they begin fermentation with indigenous yeasts and then if they encounter a problem with fermentation stopping they will add a neutral, cultured yeast; this applies especially to wines from the Altesse grape, which often take a long time to complete fermentation. Some more commercial producers select yeasts to enhance certain flavours in the grapes, such as the thiols (aroma compounds) in Jacquère to give the wines a more tropical fruit character. Turlais believes that better vineyard practices and lower yields mean that a wider return to natural yeasts is feasible.

Chaptalization, now officially known as enrichment, is in widespread use, with the addition of sugar or rectified concentrated grape must to increase the final alcohol of the fermenting juice. However, today it is often just a 0.5–1% increase in potential alcohol, rarely more than 1.5%, and increasingly it is not used at all. This is partly due to higher natural grape sugars thanks to climate change, better viticulture and lower yields, and partly to a growing wish to eliminate sugar additions. Exceptions are those local grape varieties that have low natural sugar levels, including Jacquère, Chasselas and Mondeuse, which until recently have rarely achieved more than 10–11% potential alcohol naturally. There are still very few Mondeuse wines on the market that are not enriched. Note that chaptalization is limited by EU law, and AOC rules also set a maximum alcohol level for chaptalized wines, from 11.5% to 13% depending on the wine style and geographic denomination. Non-chaptalized wines may exceed these limits.

A natural approach for French Alpine wines

The natural or non-interventionist movement is not nearly as prevalent as, say, in the Loire or Jura. As discussed, enrichment is routine for the late-ripening, low-sugar varieties

and for most vignerons cultured yeasts are the norm; sometimes enzymes and yeast food are used too. However, apart from this, there are very few additives, manipulative machines or practices. Some thermovinification is done with Gamay or Pinot Noir, and micro-oxygenation has been used for many years as an alternative to oak to oxygenate reds in particular. Filtration is pretty routine, even for reds, in most cases because they are bottled so early. As everywhere in the wine world, the level of sulphur dioxide (SO_2) used as a preservative, an antioxidant and an anti-bacterial agent has reduced substantially in the past 20 years, though some producers still add too much.

On the other side of the coin, organic and biodynamic producers work as naturally as feasible, with very little or no enrichment, natural yeasts if possible and limited SO_2 use. As all over France, even if the quantities are relatively small, more and more exciting wines are being made with very little intervention indeed.

Jean-Yves Péron (making wines only in the Vin de France category) is the only successful producer I know who could be defined as an extreme natural wine producer in Savoie, in that he works without any SO_2 additions and makes all wines in barrel with long macerations. His whites could all be classed as orange wines and he has a keen customer base worldwide. Some other organic producers make one orange wine and/or sulphur-free wines, including La Gerbelle (Claude Quenard et Fils) and Domaine Giachino in Savoie. Bugey producers who work very naturally include La Combe aux Rêves, Jean-Christophe Pellerin, La Vigne du Perron and Les Grangeons de l'Albarine. Among sparkling wine producers, Domaine Achard-Vincent makes a sulphur-free Clairette de Die and the Balivets produce a sulphur-free Bugey Cerdon. The small regions of Isère and Hautes-Alpes are hotbeds of natural winemaking,

with mixed success: Domaine du Petit Août is the producer to look out for in Hautes-Alpes and Thomas Finot in Isère.

Oak and other maturation vessels

The dilemma with oak barrels is whether they can be suitable ageing vessels for the delicate wines from the French Alps. In the case of brand new oak, the answer is almost always no, but judicious use of older oak should be a consideration for those wines that are destined for ageing. In the mid-1980s Michel Grisard at Domaine Prieuré Saint-Christophe was a pioneer in buying prestigious second-hand Bordeaux barrels to age his Mondeuse and to ferment and age his Altesse. A very few vignerons followed suit for certain cuvées but there have been all too many producers who invested in a few barrels to make a red or white oak-aged cuvée without giving enough thought to using better vineyard or vat selections to begin with. However, in the past decade, this is improving, as is the selection of the barrels, both the source (most use French oak) and the size – some are dabbling in the larger *demi-muids* (350–600 litre capacity), which give less oak impact. For example, Jean-François Quénard has invested in the expensive Stockinger *demi-muids* from Austria to very good effect. It's all part of the change in attitude that Savoie wines can potentially age and increasingly good oak-aged wines are emerging from a range of grape varieties. A handful of growers are experimenting with acacia barrels for white wines, but these add a very distinctive flavour, not enjoyed by this taster. However, barrel use everywhere in the French Alps remains the exception and that may be a good thing to protect the identity of mountain freshness and certain indigenous varieties.

Louis Magnin in Arbin uses small oak barrels to mature his Mondeuse cuvée La Brova.

Large oak vessels are rarely seen, with Domaine Dupasquier in Jongieux being the most notable exception – the family has always worked with *foudres* for their Marestel Roussette de Savoie, as well as for most of their other whites and reds; Michel Quenard in Chignin adopted them for his Mondeuse too more than a decade ago.

Other fermentation and maturation containers such as concrete eggs or octagonal-shaped vessels, clay or sandstone jars and amphorae, are appearing in a handful of cellars. Rather ironically, thinking of the backwards nature of Savoie, in 2004 Dominique Belluard in Ayze was not only the first in the region to trial concrete eggs, he was also one of the earliest in France. Not too far from him, Dominique Lucas uses a range of containers, from barrels to eggs and amphorae, as well as a personally designed vat inspired by the pyramid of Cheops. It's mainly, but not exclusively, the organic vignerons leading the charge to innovation.

Amphorae outside Dominique Lucas's cellar in Haute-Savoie receive a pre-fermentation wash.

Whites – managing mountain acidity

White winemaking is generally straightforward – after pressing and settling, the wine starts fermentation, almost always in tank. In Savoie, the Jacquère grape is responsible for half the volume of wines produced and the worry has always been how to balance its

naturally high acidity and low alcohol. The answer in the past, all too often, was leaving too much residual sugar, which doesn't suit Jacquère; the same is true of Altesse and Bergeron (Roussanne) wines and with Bugey Chardonnay. The permitted maximum residual sugar level in the AOC rule books is hardly dry by any stretch of the imagination. For white wines in the Savoie AOC it is set at 8g/l and in the Bugey AOC it is set at 6g/l. The limit for both Roussette de Savoie AOC and Roussette du Bugey AOC is 8g/l. In practice most good producers keep residual sugar levels below 4g/l, although up to 6g/l is not uncommon for the Roussettes.

The other big question is whether to encourage malolactic fermentation for whites, which will lower acidity and generally soften the wine. Traditionally malolactic was considered to detract from the crisp character of wines from Bugey or Savoie, with the possible exception of Chasselas from Haute-Savoie. From the 1990s a few producers dabbled in malolactic as an alternative to having too much residual sugar. Today, it's a style question and every producer is different. Organic, low-intervention vignerons tend to make completely dry whites and to encourage malolactic, because this means they don't need so much or even any SO_2 protection at the early stages of production.

In the past, many Jacquère and Chasselas wines had a slight *perlant* or bubbly character, once considered a classic feature of Savoie whites. Leaving some natural carbon dioxide at bottling was a way of emphasizing freshness while masking acidity. Some producers still do this, but many more now work with the fine yeast lees, either by leaving the wine on lees until bottling, or by stirring the lees in tank, adding richness to counteract the acidity with occasionally a very slight bubble.

A few Chignin producers use oak fermentation and maturation for their Chignin Bergeron cuvées and there are a number of oak-fermented and -matured Altesse wines in both Savoie and Bugey. It is rare for Jacquère to be oak-aged. When used well, the oak adds depth, complexity and ageing potential to these whites.

Finally, several producers make late-harvest wines, in tiny quantities, especially with Bergeron and Altesse, and occasionally with Jacquère. The term '*vendange tardive*' is mentioned by producers in their tasting rooms, but is not allowed on labels, as it would be in Alsace, for example. Some grapes are affected by noble rot, others are just left to shrivel on the vine; there are even a few experiments with drying grapes for *vin de paille* styles. These are usually sold as Vin de France as there is no provision for them in the AOC rules.

Rosés – a question of colour

A small amount of rosé has always been made in Savoie and Bugey, mainly using the classical method of short maceration before pressing. Today, with the growing popularity of rosés, some producers make pale rosés using the free-run juice from direct pressing; others may make a *saignée* style ('bleeding' off some of the wine from the red wine in fermentation). There's nothing revolutionary about rosés in the French Alps but they are often refreshingly drier than many whites and recent warm autumns seem to have brought a better concentration of fruit. With inherent Alpine freshness, many of them are a delight, whichever grapes they are made from.

Reds – keeping it light

Alpine red wines have traditionally been lightweight and some people regarded that as a fault; today, it is what many new consumers are seeking. Healthy and ripe grapes are the key for quality, to give sufficient sugar levels and ripe tannins from the skins, pips and possibly stems. The big debate, for Mondeuse in particular, is whether to destem (see box); for Gamay and other reds the issue is less complex, as most are machine-picked, so are destemmed on the vine. Whether or not they are destemmed, the length of maceration time is the particular consideration. Reds in the Alps have typically been macerated for a very short time – often a week at most for

Gamay and ten days to two weeks for Pinot, Mondeuse or, latterly, Persan. Today, with better fruit quality, increasing numbers of vignerons are experimenting with longer macerations, even when they use semi-carbonic maceration with whole bunches.

While the vast majority of reds are made in tank only, there are some successful oaked cuvées, mainly of Pinot Noir or Mondeuse. Fruit quality and freshness should be the key characteristics of Alpine reds, so oak ageing needs to be handled delicately as an aid to making longer-lived and more complex reds.

Mondeuse: to destem or not to destem, that is the question

Whether 'tis nobler in the mouth to suffer The tannins and bite of outrageous rusticity, Or to taste fruit against a sea of tartness, And, by ageing, balance them?

Oh, forgive me Shakespeare (and wine) lovers, for butchering such fine words…

Mondeuse does not always ripen properly, and unripe, green stems were traditionally a problem, exacerbating the grape's rusticity. That is why destemming became popular. Today, with a warming climate and lower yields, the stems are more often properly ripe, hence the dilemma.

Until the late 1970s all red wines would have been made using whole bunches. Unfortunately, the screws in receiving vats, which became prevalent from the 1970s, tended to break up the stems, hardening the wines, so destemmers were needed to compensate. Michel Grisard remembers that when the first crusher-destemmers appeared they also had a tendency to damage stems, so he used whole bunch fermentations. But his neighbour, the late Gilbert Bouvet, who had used a modern

destemmer at the Cave de Cruet co-operative, bought one when he established his own wine estate in 1991 and Michel gave it a try. He was amazed by the results and decided to buy one for his own estate, Domaine Prieuré Saint-Christophe.

Apart from Michel Grisard, the two best-respected producers of Mondeuse at the end of the 20th century were the Trosset family and Louis Magnin, both from Arbin. Charles Trosset, and his sons Joseph and Louis, always made wines the old way with whole bunch macerations, whereas Louis Magnin, who studied wine production in Beaune and took over his estate from his father in 1980, immediately introduced a destemmer. But today, he uses some whole bunch maceration too.

For manually harvested Mondeuse, whether to destem is the biggest processing decision made by vignerons. It is a style choice, but also depends on the harvest quality – many good producers take this into account when deciding whether to destem 100% or partially or not at all. The whole bunch wines, which undergo semi-carbonic maceration, tend to produce a fruit-forward Mondeuse early on, depending how long the maceration is. But the jury is out as to which versions age best.

At Domaine de l'Idylle, manually harvested Mondeuse is usually partially destemmed, depending on vintage and the cuvée.

Bottling, bottles and closures

Oeno Conseil and CMC do the bottling for the vast majority of Savoie producers and for some from Bugey and Isère too. A few of the more traditional producers like to bottle their own wines, but may still use the service providers for filtration. Many producers start bottling as early as December and nearly all bottle each of their wines in two, three or more batches through the year, with a final bottling before the next harvest. Some freely admit that despite the wine remaining in perfect condition in cool temperatures, the different bottling dates result in wines that taste different – they may have had longer in contact with the fine yeast lees, for example, and usually later bottlings are better. This practice is used by most producers for all the wines except very small lots. The reasons are partly financial (they don't have to pay for bottles and other packaging so soon) and partly because bottle storage takes up more space than tanks.

As in other wine regions, problems with cork quality have plagued producers. Screwcaps are not usually an option, because few French customers will accept them. Most producers are now using Nomacorc or other good synthetic alternatives; some are using Diam agglomerate corks and a few use real corks. Once again, it all comes

down to price and markets, but the choice is crucial for those wines meant to age.

Many producers sell some of their range as bag-in-box: this is ideal for local bars and restaurants, and many local consumers buy them too. At the other end of the scale, a very few producers, especially those who export, or who sell to some of the finer restaurants in the area, offer magnums – examples include Jean-Claude Masson in Apremont, Domaine Dupasquier in Jongieux and many of the organic wine producers.

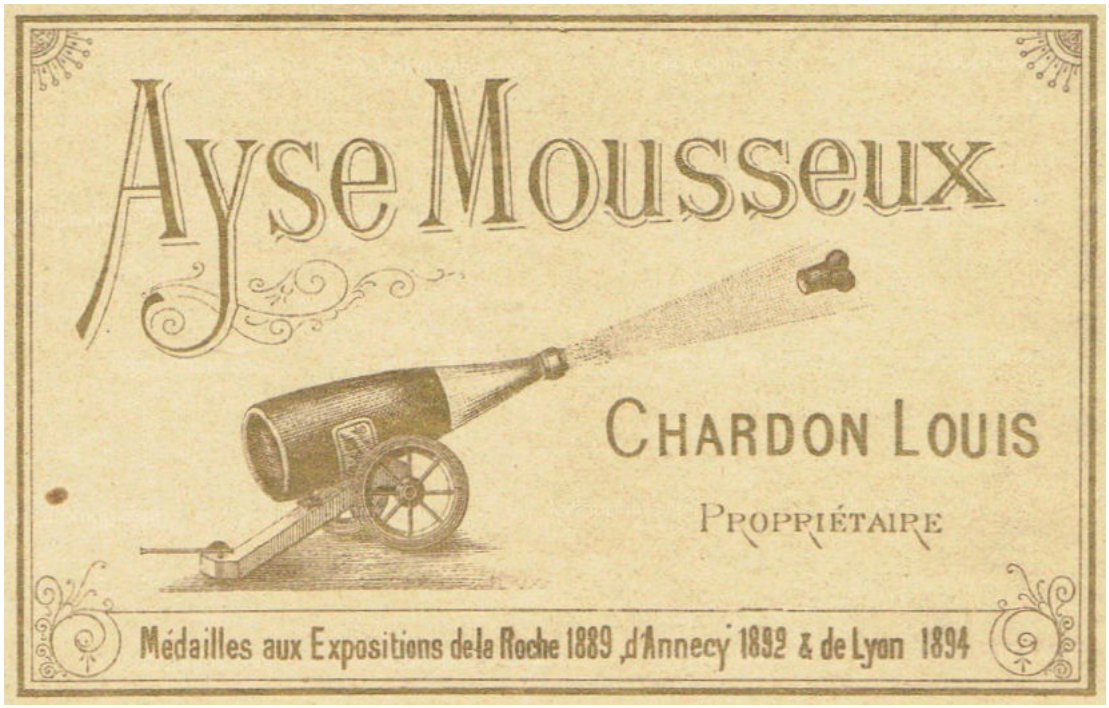
There are several versions of 'official' Savoie bottles, many featuring the Savoie cross embossed on the glass, but producers are under no obligation to use them.

Clockwise from top left: real cork, Nomacorc, basic agglomerate and Diam.

HOW SPARKLING WINES ARE MADE
AND HOW THEY TASTE

More than 98% of grapes grown in the Diois are made into sparkling wines and about 90% of these are Clairette de Die, made semi-sweet in the ancestral method; in Bugey 65% of production is sparkling (with more than half in Cerdon); currently less than 6% is sparkling in Savoie, but there is a steady increase, as demand for sparkling wine rises. Some sparkling wine is also made in Isère and Hautes-Alpes.

It has long been known that marginal climates – regions where grapes struggle to ripen – are ideal for the production of sparkling wines because of the natural high acidity and low sugar levels in the grapes. The age-old stories of 'wine coming back to life in the springtime' have often been explained as malolactic fermentation, but could also have been due to warm spring temperatures causing the natural yeasts to restart their work after an incomplete fermentation. This is the essence of the original ancestral method of making sparkling wine, and of the Méthode Dioise (see History, here) and indeed of Pétillant Naturel, a style of wine that has come back into fashion in regions such as the Loire Valley, Beaujolais and the Jura. Today Clairette de Die, Bugey Cerdon and two other French AOC Méthode Ancestrale wines, Limoux and Gaillac from southwest France, exist in a modernized form, which is explained in this chapter.



Ayse – today, usually Ayze – in Haute-Savoie has a long history of sparkling wine production.

Traditional method wines, made as in Champagne, also have an established history in the Alpine regions, largely thanks to the former worldwide success of Savoie's sparkling Seyssel. Other *pétillant* (lightly sparkling) and *mousseux* (sparkling) wines have also been made in small quantities all over Savoie, notably in Ayze from the Gringet variety. From the 2014 vintage the Crémant de Savoie AOC has created a more regulated style of traditional method sparkling wine, with production methods similar to those that apply for all Crémants. Dry Bugey AOC sparkling wines are also made by the traditional method.

All these dry sparkling wines do well in their local French markets due to their good price points and overall decent quality; Savoie's Crémant designation aims to increase visibility.

Crémant and the traditional method

After making a base wine blend, the traditional method involves bottling with added yeast and sugar to provoke a second fermentation in the bottle. The bottles remain for at least nine months *sur lattes* (ageing on their sides, with the wine in contact with the second-fermentation lees). Riddling follows to shake down the sediment, either manually or more often semi-automatically or automatically in a gyropalette, and then disgorgement to remove the sediment. Finally, the bottles are topped up with wine – usually including *dosage* (a sugar and wine mixture) – and then sealed with cork. Crémant must not be bottled before 1 December after the harvest, meaning that the earliest it can be disgorged is in September the year following the harvest. Bugey Montagnieu must, like Crémant, be hand-picked and must spend at least 12 months in contact with the lees.

With the exception of the Diois, very few wineries in these small regions are equipped for bottling, riddling and disgorgement. In Savoie and southern Bugey most vignerons use the local service provider CMC, which has facilities near Chambéry and in Bugey. Some, especially in Seyssel, use a sparkling wine service provider in the Jura to the north. Shared equipment, usually through a CUMA, is widely used, such as in Cerdon. Even when the wine is disgorged elsewhere, the vigneron will specify the level of sugar for the *dosage*.

Although the method must be conducted correctly, the keys to quality traditional method sparkling wines are the original base wine quality and the length of time the wine spends *sur lattes*.

Traditional method sparkling wine styles and tastes

Bugey white sparkling wine is usually *brut*, though there is a small amount of the sweeter *demi-sec*, especially for rosé, and a small, but increasing, amount of the much drier *extra brut* or *brut zero*. The base is often Chardonnay alone, but it may also be Molette or Jacquère, or a blend of any of these with small amounts of Aligoté, Altesse or red grapes. These sparkling wines are simple, fresh and rarely have depth of flavour or great length, but there are some finer

examples, especially those from Chardonnay and Pinot base wines, and those that have spent longer than the minimum nine months *sur lattes*. The region is not seeking a Crémant appellation, mainly because it doesn't think growers will want to be forced to harvest manually.

Bugey Montagnieu sparkling wine (white), from any or all of Altesse, Chardonnay and Mondeuse, is usually a big step up in quality, with much more elegance, some spice, occasionally an attractive floral or vegetal character, and better length too. Depending on the producer, these are among the finest dry sparkling wines of the French Alps. Production is limited to 150–200,000 bottles annually.

The Royal Seyssel brand is made in the traditional method from Altesse (aka Roussette) with Molette.

Sparkling **Seyssel** is in flux at present and there is a wide range of qualities of *brut* and *demi-sec* styles among the dozen producers, who make 100–200,000 bottles. Gérard Lambert makes the brand Royal Seyssel, which lives up to its name, with zingy, fresh and long-aged cuvées that are well worth seeking out. The base wine is

supposed to be a minimum of 75% Molette with Altesse, but several producers do not have sufficient Molette and this is being reviewed.

Thanks to Domaine Belluard, today **Ayze** is the most famous French Alpine sparkling wine among rare wine aficionados worldwide. Dominique Belluard takes extra care in producing his Gringet grape base wines and keeps them *sur lattes* for longer than usual. The result is a sparkling wine epitomizing mountain freshness combined with ripe, delicately exotic fruit. There are other good Ayze sparkling wines from Domaine Montessuit and more artisanal versions from some tiny vignerons – between them all they produce fewer than 100,000 bottles annually.

Crémant de Savoie has been made only since the 2014 vintage, so at the time of writing the base wines have come from five very different vintages, from the relatively cool 2014 to the very warm 2015 and 2018. Apart from variations in vintage, wine styles vary widely between those who make 100% Jacquère and those who blend the minimum 40% Jacquère with Altesse (the two must together make up at least 60%) and/or Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, all of which add richness, character and length to the Jacquère. In the haste to launch the new AOC, early releases had only the minimum nine months on lees and some producers still give less than a year; in my view they need longer on lees to taste good, and a handful of excellent ones have now emerged.

Previous to Crémant, Savoie traditional method wines made with at least 18 months *sur lattes* showed potential. Many Savoie producers continue to produce pleasant traditional method *pétillant* (lightly sparkling) and fully sparkling wines that do not adhere to Crémant rules – these are now sold as Vin de France.

There is a small amount of dry AOC rosé sparkling wine from both Savoie (not allowed the Crémant designation) and Bugey, often from Gamay base wines – freshness and fruit should be their hallmarks. Some *demi-sec* rosés are made too.

Clairette de Die Brut, which can be disgorged traditionally or transferred to a tank for filtration, has a distinctive character from its base wine of 100% Clairette. The grape can confer bitterness, but if

the time *sur lattes* is long enough the wine – made in small volumes – can be very enjoyable, with a grapefruit twist. **Crémant de Die** is also a relatively small production, made from a minimum of 55% Clairette, with some Aligoté and occasionally a dash of Muscat. There are some attractive examples, especially when producers give two or more years of ageing *sur lattes*. It must be *brut*, with less than 15g/l of residual sugar. Citrus flavours are often to the fore and most Crémant de Die is a better choice than Clairette de Die Brut, the blend of grapes and extra care adding depth.

Ancestral method

The essence of the ancestral method is that the bubbles are produced by a single fermentation, which is stopped in tank and then restarted in bottle without any additions of further yeast or sugar. Historically, the wine was sold with its sediment; once filtration techniques came along, the sediment was filtered out and high levels of SO_2 were used to stop fermentation continuing. The arrival of cellar refrigeration equipment along with advances in filtration revolutionized the way the ancestral method was conducted. Despite its name, which implies ancestral traditions, it is thanks to modern technology that commercial quantities of these semi-sweet sparkling wines can be made efficiently and shipped all over the world.

Clairette de Die Méthode Ancestrale (sometimes referred to as Tradition), based on Muscat à Petits Grains, and the Gamay-based rosé Bugey Cerdon are essentially made in the same way, with some minor differences.

1. After picking at a potential alcohol of about 10–11%, the grapes are pressed; the must is occasionally enriched and is chilled down to 10°C or below and settled for 24 hours.
    a) Cerdon: the Gamay grapes are given a few hours of maceration before pressing; if used, the delicate Poulsard grape is usually given less maceration time or simply pressed directly.

b) Clairette de Die: to have an extremely clear juice to give purity of flavour, earth filtration, bentonite and addition of enzymes are very commonly used.

2. The clear musts are transferred to temperature-controlled tanks where fermentation begins slowly with natural yeasts (used by most producers), although cultured yeasts are not forbidden. Both the Diois and Cerdon claim to have a natural yeast present on their terroir, *Saccharomyces uvarum*, which is able to function at temperatures below zero degrees Celsius. The temperature is kept low to create a very slow initial fermentation, leaving much of the sugar unfermented.

The largest producer of sparkling wine in the French Alps is the Jaillance co-operative in Die.

a) Cerdon: generally fermentation starts at around 10°C, rarely more than 13°C. It is then gradually reduced to zero degrees

or even as low as –2°C.

b) Clairette de Die: fermentation temperatures vary between producers but Jaillance, for example, ferments between +2°C and –2°C; some producers ferment at higher temperatures, up to 10°C.

3. Once the alcohol level reaches about 6% in Cerdon, or between 2% and 5% in Die, the wine is chilled to 0°C or lower and given a rough filtration to reduce the yeast population. Fermentation stops due to the cold and the lack of yeasts. The part-fermented wine is then maintained in tank at 0°C or lower before blending and bottling. In both regions, there is a little blending between the 'current' and previous year's musts, but the vast majority of wines are from a single (rarely marked) vintage.
4. The wine is filled into sparkling wine bottles with a crown cap seal. No *liqueur de tirage* (yeast and sugar mixture as used in the traditional method) is allowed to be added.

   a) Cerdon: bottling begins as early as mid-October, depending on the harvest date, and for most producers is finished by December.

   b) Clairette de Die: at the larger producers, bottling starts in about December and continues up to the end of July the following year.

5. Bottles are moved to a cellar at a temperature of 10–12°C. Fermentation restarts in the bottle, but comes to a stop naturally at an alcohol level of 7–8%, leaving a certain amount of natural residual sugar and between six and a whopping ten bars of pressure.

Some producers mark 'Demi-Sec' on the labels of Cerdon and almost all Bugey Cerdon fits this official sweetness category.

a) Cerdon: the wine must remain in bottle with the lees for a minimum of two months. It used to be three, but producers believe that the freshness of the style they want from Gamay and Poulsard does best with a short time on yeast. Many producers like to keep the bottles upright for a slower fermentation.

b) Clairette de Die: the wine must spend at least four months in bottle with the lees; many producers leave it for at least six months.

6. With the notable exception of Domaine J-C Raspail in the Diois and one or two others, who use traditional riddling and disgorgement, most wines are disgorged and filtered to remove the sediment. This can be direct from the original bottle to a washed bottle via a filter; more often the wine spends a short period (rarely more than 24 hours) in an intermediary pressurized tank before re-bottling (like the transfer method used elsewhere in the world). No *liqueur d'expédition* or *dosage* (sugar and wine addition) is allowed to be added. Sulphur levels may be adjusted

if required, but with the use of such low temperatures, along with high dissolved CO_2, sulphur levels do not need to be as high as in most wines with residual sugar. The final pressure is between three and six bars.

Bicycle pump carbon copies – Cerdon's dark secret

From the 1950s, much Gamay in Cerdon was made sparkling simply by carbonation or pumping in the bubbles; carbonation continued even after the advances in technology facilitating the ancestral method. Although carbonated wines are not allowed to use the Bugey Cerdon label, a large number of Cerdon producers retain the carbonation unit in their cellar (which by AOC law they must detach from the bottling line each time they bottle or transfer Cerdon). They use it to produce wines for early release, sometimes Gamay rosé and sometimes whites, which often sell at their tasting rooms for just one or two euros less than their AOC Bugey Cerdon. As wine tourism increases in the region, this risks confusion, even if quantities remain small. I wish the local syndicate would ban their members from using it.

Ancestral method sparkling wine styles and tastes

Bugey Cerdon could be described as the original, semi-sweet, eminently quaffable and delicately low-alcohol sparkling pink. The best are simply delicious, to drink without too much thought at any time of day, especially in summer. Vignerons recommend that Cerdon is purchased in spring or early summer following harvest and consumed within 6–12 months. The best can age somewhat longer, but it's not to everyone's taste. Cerdons have a bright, intense pink colour; the very few made with more than 50% Poulsard tend to

have a paler, rose-pink colour. My favourites show wild strawberry flavours, sometimes even rosehip, on the nose and have real zippy acidity along with their sweetness and a crisp long finish. Sometimes a little grapefruit shows through if Poulsard has been used. The AOC specifies residual sugar of 22g/l to 80g/l in the finished wine – most are between 45g/l and 70g/l; each grower has his own style or may make several cuvées. Alcohol levels vary between 7% and 8.5%, depending on sweetness.

For **Clairette de Die Méthode Ancestrale**, the final sugar level must be at least 35g/l but most are 50–80g/l. The wines are not allowed to be released before 1 March following the harvest. At alcohol levels between 7% and 8.5%, this sparkling wine presents the essence of bubbly grapey Muscat, with floral and peachy aromas balanced by delicate mountain freshness. The best 100% Muscats show incredible purity and real depth of flavour; those that include some Clairette (a maximum of 25% is allowed) generally have a touch more acidity and less depth.

The first rosé Clairette de Die wines were released in summer 2017 from the 2016 base wines, but the AOC was revoked for rosé in 2018 (see Diois) so only two vintages were made – and even these are not officially allowed to be sold. I have tasted a few samples, which varied in colour from the palest salmon orangey-pink to a more vibrant pink; some producers used maceration for the red grapes; others blended in some still red wine. The best samples combined grapey fruit from the Muscat with the typical red fruit aromas of Gamay (up to 10% permitted); these are very obvious Muscat-based wines with a little less freshness than Bugey Cerdon, and with softer grapey flavours. It remains to be seen how this style will develop, if indeed it is given the chance to do so, but semi-sweet sparkling rosé made in this way is gaining popularity across France and is even made elsewhere in the French Alps, as Vin de France.

Ancestral method producers such as Domaine Raspail keep the wines in tank at temperatures close to freezing point for long periods.

PLACES AND PEOPLE – THE WINE PRODUCERS

Jongieux with its cru Marestel lies above the Rhône river in Savoie; southern Bugey is across the river, with the tail end of the Jura mountains visible.

THE WINE PRODUCERS OF THE FRENCH ALPS

The stories of the producers behind the wines make this book unique. Every wine producer, whether a new vigneron making tiny volumes of wine, a fifth-generation family-owned domaine, or the team behind a large co-operative or négociant, adds their own character to their wines. It is not too far-fetched to consider people to be part of the concept of terroir.

Even though the five wine regions featured in the book are minuscule in comparison to key wine regions of the world, each one has a relatively large number of producers, with nearly 300 bottling their own wine in **Savoie** and **Bugey** alone. Within this large number, in Savoie, there are two co-operatives and several important négociants buying grapes or wine, and in the **Diois**, the Jaillance co-operative dominates production, along with several négociants. Bugey, **Isère** and **Hautes-Alpes** have mainly independent producers.

Some wine-growers have been established for generations, but most have only bottled their wines since the 1970s. There is an influx of new vignerons setting up, often with no family connections to the region or to the world of wine – sometimes they take over an existing domaine, more often they set up from scratch, usually leasing rather than buying their vineyards. Most of the newcomers are working organically.

The producers I have chosen to profile include almost all who export to English-speaking countries and most of those who are certified organic. I have also included the co-operatives and the larger négociants, as well as certain estates whose reputation has

historically been good, but whose wine quality may have fluctuated through the generations. Inevitably I had to draw a line somewhere.

Dividing up the chapters

Chapters on Savoie, Isère, Bugey, the Diois and Hautes-Alpes follow, with a final, more opinionated one looking into the future for French Alps wine producers. In Savoie and Bugey there are sub-chapters to cover the different sectors of the region, each one starting with a map, showing producer locations – maps also open the chapters on Isère, the Diois and Hautes-Alpes. There are further divisions into areas or crus. Each of these areas is introduced in terms of terroir and key points of interest for the wine visitor. Producers are listed alphabetically under each heading. The introductions also highlight vignerons who may be important to the local region, even though they are not profiled.

Producer profiles

Only a few of the producers profiled have good, up-to-date websites and few are in English – increasingly some producers update their news on a Facebook page. These profiles attempt to plug the information gap, which means that inevitably there is repetition when I describe how each vigneron works the vineyards or makes the wine. Some producers, especially the newly established ones, change their range and labels frequently, so instead of describing every wine, I have provided an overview of the range, sometimes with personal highlights. For most, I share where their wines are sold, especially if export markets are important to them.

I have met with and tasted wines from all the producers profiled, and I have visited almost all of them with the owner, winemaker or manager at least once, usually seeing their cellars and sometimes their vineyards. In the case of Savoie, there are some producers I have known and visited regularly for more than 15 years; in other regions and with newer producers I may have visited only once. In all cases, my aim has been to try to convey the essence of each

vigneron, which is reflected in their wine range. In doing so, I've also tried to grasp the key differences in each geographical area of these five regions.

I have often been given samples to taste at home, many of which I have tasted blind against other wines of the same style/grape variety. I have also attended some press events and tastings, giving me further opportunities to taste the wines.

Producer information boxes

Contact details are given for the producer's main winery, including email and website when available. There may be two phone numbers, including a mobile/cell phone number – many smaller producers use only the latter.

Vineyard size is given as it is a more useful guide than annual bottle production, due to the vagaries of the weather; note that some vignerons sell part of their crop to négociants. Colour split of grapes or varieties may be given if the producer has a significant divergence from the norm, e.g. a Cerdon producer with 3ha of Poulsard, when the main grape is Gamay.

Certification is stated only for organic producers and they may be in conversion at the time of writing. Ecocert is the best-known organic certification programme in France, but some vignerons opt for less expensive organizations such as Veritas, Qualisud and the locally run Alpes Contrôles. Those working in biodynamics may in addition have Demeter certification; an alternative is Biodyvin.

Visits: Most vignerons prefer you to call or email ahead for an appointment. When they have a tasting room this is mentioned, and it means tasting facilities are usually better. If

there is no tasting room, you might taste in the cellar or the producer's home. Between June and August, most tasting rooms are open Monday–Saturday, but closed at lunchtime; at other times of the year it is best to check ahead.

One of Chignin's ruined fortified towers, with a view across the valley to Mont Granier.

SAVOIE

The Savoie wine region, which incorporates the departments of Haute-Savoie and Savoie, along with neighbouring parts of Ain and Isère, has just over 2,000ha of vineyards, spread over a vast geographic area. Between the high Alpine mountains and the glacial lakes and rivers, the vineyards are scattered in various 'islands' from Lac Léman (Lake Geneva) in the north down to beyond Chambéry (see map). I cannot think of one vineyard area in Savoie that does not have a gorgeous outlook, perhaps across to the opposite hillside, maybe to snowy or jagged rocky peaks, sometimes onto a shimmering lake or a verdant river valley. This idyllic situation is only occasionally spoilt by the many industrial estates and factories in the

valleys below – this is one of France's most highly populated and thriving semi-rural areas. Another downside is that in such a mountainous area there's only certain land suitable for vineyards – and in some areas that is all too often the same land that is in strong demand for housing.

As explored further in Part 1, these islands of vineyard areas were once much larger. Today the only dense vineyard area in Savoie is near Chambéry, where you will find villages such as Chignin, Apremont and Arbin. These areas, known as the Cluse de Chambéry and the Combe de Savoie, produce about two-thirds of Savoie's wine. This is where you will find wines from Altesse, Mondeuse, Roussanne and the ubiquitous Jacquère grape varieties, among many others. But don't look for Gringet or Chasselas – they are exclusive to certain crus in the north of the region.

Almost all the vineyards in Savoie lie on the lower slopes of the Prealps or the Jura mountains, on a limestone base at altitudes between 250m and 500m. With a more benign climate than many might imagine, the vineyards are often planted with several different grape varieties, even if to label with a specific cru, varieties are restricted. For example, if a vigneron grows Mondeuse in a cru specified for Jacquère, then the wine will simply be labelled AOC Savoie. While leafing through this chapter, you may wish to keep a bookmark here, where the Savoie crus are listed with their permitted grape varieties – given there are 20 Savoie AOC crus (four of them specifically for AOC Roussette de Savoie), it can be a challenge to remember them all.

This chapter is divided into four parts, roughly from the north: Lac Léman and Ayze, situated either side of the Chablais mountains in Haute-Savoie; Around the Rhône and Lac du Bourget, a large area which stretches from Frangy in Haute-Savoie, through Seyssel, straddling Haute-Savoie and Ain, and to Savoie's Chautagne and Jongieux areas; Around Chambéry and the Combe de Savoie, with by far the largest number of producers; and finally The Tarentaise and

Maurienne Valleys, where producers make IGP Vin des Allobroges and Vin de France wines.

Négociants and co-operatives

Even though average vineyard holdings are increasing (now approximately 5ha), there are numerous tiny growers in Savoie, since the average includes several relatively large estates with over 30ha. Almost all producers of AOC wines in Savoie belong to the Syndicat Régional des Vins de Savoie (SRVS), which includes 391 growers; 113 of these belong to one of the co-operatives, and 94 sell their harvest to négociants. The remaining 184 are vignerons who make and sell their own wine, but this does not preclude them selling part of their production to négociants. These numbers go down each year as growers retire and sell their vineyards.

Savoie AOC figures (2018 vintage)

Area under vine:
2,129 hectares

Volume produced:
126,000 hectolitres
(approximately 17 million bottles)

(% of production)	
White still wine	68%
Red still wine	21%
Rosé still wine	5%
Crémant de Savoie and other traditional method sparkling wines	6%

Main grape varieties

(% of total Savoie)	
Jacquère	42%
Altesse	15%
Gamay	13%
Mondeuse	11%
Roussanne (Bergeron)	5%
Pinot Noir	4%
Chardonnay	4%
Chasselas	3%
Gringet	1%
Persan	1%
Others (mainly white)	1%

Nicolas Perret runs the only négociant in the Jongieux area.

The négociants represent more than half of total Savoie sales. The largest négociants that buy grapes and some bulk wine (in tankers) are Maison Philippe Viallet and Maison Adrien Vacher, followed by Jean Perrier et Fils, all of which have their own domaines too. Smaller and currently with a somewhat uncertain future is

Domaine Perceval. In Seyssel, Maison Mollex and Gérard Lambert buy grapes predominantly from that area. In Jongieux, Vins Perret buys bulk wine from across Savoie. Maison Jean Cavaillé (which exports a little wine to the US), Léon Favre and Maison Routin (also a well-known vermouth producer) buy finished bottles and label under their own name.

A new négociant was set up in 2018, Des Vins d'Envie. It is a joint venture between Guillaume Lavie and Maxime Dancoine, who established a winery in Pontcharra, just across the border in Isère. They are purchasing exclusively organic grapes, mainly from Savoie, Bugey and Isère, to make their own range of wines. Their aim is to help local vignerons convert to organics and biodynamics and to create a reasonably priced range of organic wine. In 2018 they have produced 65,000 bottles and are exporting about half, mainly to the US and Scandinavia. Their plan is to increase to about 100,000 bottles.

Today there are just two wine co-operatives: Cave de Cruet in the Combe de Savoie and Le Vigneron Savoyard/Cave de Chautagne. Between them these two co-operatives produce about 20% of Savoie's wines.

Where the wines are sold

According to the Comité Interprofessionel des Vins de Savoie (which does not include IGP and Vin de France producers), exports remained below 5% in 2018, but accurate figures are not available and I suspect the real figure is higher. The Comité is running various promotions abroad, hoping to increase this to 10% in a few years. The main markets remain in the three departments of Haute-Savoie, Savoie and Isère, which account for roughly 70% of sales, with ski resorts remaining important.

Château de Ripaille's vineyards lie on the shores of Lac Léman.

Evian-les-Bains
Lac Léman
Thonon-les-Bains
Publier
Yvoire
Marin
Anthy-sur-Léman
Chens-sur-Léman
Sciez
Dranse
SWITZERLAND
Douvaine
Ballaison
Loisin
Marcorens
D1005
Bons-en-Chablais
D1206
CHABLAIS
Geneva
Ville-la-Grand
Annemasse
D902
Morzine
A40
D903
Arve
Contamine-sur-Arve
Le Môle
1,863m
La Côte d'Hyot
A410
Ayze
Marignier
Bonneville
Samoëns
La Roche-sur-Foron
D1205
Cluses
AOC Savoie – approximate vineyard area
Crus
Ripaille
Marin
Marignan
Crépy
Ayze
0–500m
500–1,000m
Over 1,000m
International border
Mountain range
0 5 km 10 km
0 5 miles
© 2019 Quentin Sadler
Producers
1 Domaine de la Grande Cave de Crépy
2 Les Vignes de Paradis
3 Château La Tour de Marignan
4 Château de Ripaille
5 Domaine Delalex
6 Domaine Famille Montessuit
7 Domaine Belluard

LAC LÉMAN AND AYZE

The vineyards above the southern shores of Lac Léman and those of Ayze (sometimes spelt Ayse) in the Arve Valley are respectively north and south of the Chablais Prealpine mountain range in Haute-Savoie. Close to the spa towns of Thonon-les-Bains and Evian-les-Bains, the vineyards on the slopes facing the lake are mainly planted with Chasselas. A long drive around the Chablais to the south, the vineyards of Ayze are the closest to Mont Blanc of any in Savoie. Here is the only place in the world where the Gringet grape variety is grown. Between these two areas are some isolated vineyards making wines under the IGP Vin des Allobroges designation, planted with a wide range of grape varieties.

Most of this area is extremely wealthy. This is partly due to tourism, partly because of the international community working in Geneva and living on both sides of the border, and partly due to thriving high tech and precision tool industries located along a corridor between Geneva and Chamonix-Mont Blanc. You might think that this gives ready markets interested in the local wines, but sadly its main effect has been to put pressure on the vineyard land, as there is a high demand for housing. The five crus covered in this section exist on the very brink of survival. Representing only about 6% of the total Savoie wine region, they receive little support from the regional wine organizations, being so far from the hub of decision-making near Chambéry.

The main wines to expect

In the Lac Léman area producers offer one or more Chasselas wines under a cru label. The Ayze cru is used for both still and sparkling wines from Gringet. In both areas, small amounts of whites and reds from other permitted Savoie grape varieties

are offered by some producers under the AOC Savoie designation or IGP Vin des Allobroges.

Lac Léman

Lac Léman lies at 372m and the vineyards range from those of Ripaille, lying below 400m, to those of Marin, some of which reach to over 500m. All the vineyards benefit from the benign, moderating influence of the huge Lac Léman; those closest can be prone to humidity and therefore pressure of fungal disease, whereas higher up, especially in the Crépy area, there is more wind, which helps keep disease at bay. Frost is only a problem in certain sectors. There are varied soils, many of glacial origin, and in parts the Dranse river brings more clay and alluvial soils. If you visit the area, you will find yourself caught sometimes by very busy main roads near the lake and also towards the mountain resorts of the Chablais and the Abondance Valley, such as Morzine. As well as Evian and Thonon, it's worth exploring smaller villages by the lake, most particularly the idyllic, car-free Yvoire.

Crépy is the largest cru in this sector but has less than 40ha covering the communes of Ballaison, Douvaine and Loisin. Its wines were once very well regarded as refreshing, slightly sparkling light whites. Crépy previously had its own appellation; since 2009 it has been a cru of AOC Savoie. Becoming a Savoie cru instead of an individual AOC was somewhat of a demotion, but one requested by certain producers, who felt they would benefit from labelling Savoie more prominently. Crépy and the other three crus here – Marignan (in Sciez), Marin (in Marin and Publier) and Ripaille (close to Thonon-les-Bains, the sole producer being Château de Ripaille) – are all designated exclusively for Chasselas although in recent years there has been a move to plant a few red grape varieties to add reds and rosés to the range; some producers make a little sparkling wine.

Apart from the five producers profiled here, there are a few very small producers, which you may come across in situ. Dominique

Lucas is a partner with Bernard Fichard (whose family négociant, Fichard, was once important) in the estate called Les Vins du Léman. At Les Vins de Carra in Ville-la-Grand near Annemasse, Jean-Marie Chappuis keeps alive a small vineyard area growing Chasselas, Pinot and Gamay.

Domaine Delalex

The Delalex family is the standard-bearer for the cru Marin, offering Chasselas wines with a surprising potential for ageing. In the 1980s, Claude Delalex replanted an unusual abandoned vineyard site called Clos de Pont, directly above the Dranse river, and the wine from it was for many years the best quality representative of Savoie Chasselas. Claude's sons, Samuel and Benoît, continue to fly the flag for Marin.

Claude was a mixed farmer, but was inspired by vignerons' sons he met during his National Service in the 1960s. By 1976 the focus was firmly on wine production, backed up with knowledge from courses at the Beaune wine school and connections with neighbouring Swiss growers. Samuel joined him in 1998 after studying at Beaune and work experience at Domaine André et Mireille Tissot in the Jura. Claude and Samuel worked together until Samuel's younger brother Benoît decided to leave his career as a teacher and retrain in wine, becoming an official partner when Claude retired in 2015.

All within Marin, their vineyard holdings lie on old glaciers, mainly with loam and limestone, several just above 500m. They have about 7ha of Chasselas and planted 0.2ha of Altesse and Jacquère in 2016 to make a Crémant de Savoie blend with Chasselas, which will be available from 2020. The red grapes comprise 1.5ha Gamay with a much younger 0.5ha vineyard of Pinot Noir. The steep 2ha Clos de Pont vineyard lies in a bowl with poorer, stony soil, stretching almost down to the river, each year losing a little land to erosion. Vine farming is conventional, though most of the vineyards are grassed down, with herbicide used just below the vine rows; the brothers express a wish to eliminate this soon.

Everything is fermented in stainless steel, using indigenous yeast if the harvest is healthy. Unlike the rest of Haute-Savoie and Switzerland, Marin in general and specifically Delalex has traditionally avoided malolactic fermentation. Bottled late, the lack of malolactic is one reason it believes that the Clos de Pont cuvée ages so well. My notes of a visit in 2008 show that a 1996 tasted stunning; in late 2016, alongside a tank sample of 2015 that lacked expression, but showed great potential, the 2014 vintage was excellent and a 1999, after 16 years in bottle, had evolved into something honeyed, spicy and even petrolly, like an old Riesling. Patience is obviously needed for this cuvée. The main Marin cuvée also benefits from time and generally shows an appley, stony and crisp citrus character. The Gamay is made in a light style; I haven't yet had the chance to try the Pinot Noir.

The Clos de Pont vineyard in Marin is planted with Chasselas. Erosion above the Dranse river risks pushing it back each year.

The Delalex family aims to sell the best wine possible at the lowest price possible, so relatively high yields and low costs are a priority. They export a little to the US, sell about 30% at the cellar

door and at a few wine shows, with the rest selling mainly to restaurants and shops in local ski resorts.

Domaine Delalex
108 Chemin des Noyereaux, 74200 Marin
Tel: 04 50 71 45 82
Email: domainedelalex@hotmail.fr
Web: domaine-delalex.fr
Contact: Samuel or Benoît Delalex
Map ref: C4
Vineyards: 9ha (including 2ha red grapes)
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine de la Grande Cave de Crépy

This estate has an illustrious history, with a 17th-century cellar of old *foudres*, and it remains the largest family-owned domaine in Haute-Savoie. La Grande Cave is best known for its Crépy named La Goutte d'Or (the legal name of the company), sold in a distinctive flûte-shaped bottle. Trademarked Crépytant, this is a play on the French *crépitant*, which means a 'crackling' sound and is in reference to the slight fizz that has always characterized this Chasselas wine.

The estate is managed by the fourth generation of the Mercier family, Stéphane, with much assistance from his father, Claude, in his early seventies at the time of writing. Stéphane's younger brother Anthony also works for the estate, mainly in sales. Claude's grandfather Léon Mercier, responsible for achieving the AOC for Crépy in 1948, was a mixed farmer and could see the potential for wine sales to the many tourists visiting the shores of Lac Léman. His son Louis built up the farm and studied wine at Beaune, returning to start a wine négociant business as well as extending the vineyards. In the 1960s Claude first worked with the négociant business and, after an oenology degree, in 1971 he joined the domaine.

Claude is a man of ideas and he became keenly aware that selling a simple Chasselas was no longer enough. From 2001–2008 he employed Dominique Lucas, who sparked his interest in biodynamics and helped convert a portion of the vineyards to biodynamic methods. The rest of the vineyards are worked sustainably – all are grassed down and herbicide use has gradually reduced. Under the management of Stéphane the project to convert completely to organics or biodynamics has never evolved. Today about 6ha are farmed biodynamically, including all the red varieties. Claude planted mainly mass selection vines rather than clones, and from about the mid-2000s he returned to using indigenous yeasts instead of cultured ones. Everything is hand-harvested.

To broaden the range of wines, in 2004 Claude planted red grapes and later Roussanne and Altesse. From 2009 he started making a range of sweet wines and these now represent a significant part of the estate's sales. Claude invested in a new gravity-fed winery, completed in 2013, stocked with brand-new equipment. It's all most impressive for what could be described as a struggling Savoie estate,

despite the energy and dedication that Claude has put in over more than 40 years.

La Grande Cave retains a good local following and a few exports go to Japan and Belgium. The three Crépy (Chasselas) wines are adequate quality – all go through malolactic fermentation. La Goutte d'Or represents more than 50% of the estate's production and has less spritz than it did in response to local customer demand – in recent warm years it has not been entirely dry. A shocking blue bottle helps sell Cuvée des Fondateurs Vieilles Vignes, from lower-yielding, later-picked vines averaging more than 45 years old. Also harvested late, the Nature de Chasselas from biodynamically-farmed grapes is left longer on fine lees, has less cellar intervention, but is also deliberately made with a touch of residual sugar, which flattens it. While my last tasting of the red cuvées was disappointing, the sweet wines were better, especially the delicate and well-balanced Cuvée de Décembre from Chasselas picked in mid-December.

I hope that Stéphane and Anthony can make a leap forward soon. Once widely reputed for its 'easily digestible' wines, it is a shame to see this historic estate languish.

Domaine de la Grande Cave de Crépy
Ballaison, 74140 Douvaine
Tel: 04 50 94 01 23/06 73 00 17 23
Email: contact@domaine-crepy-mercier-74.com
Web: domaine-crepy-mercier-74.com
Contact: Stéphane or Claude Mercier
Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 35ha (including 5ha red grapes)
Visits: Tasting room

Château de Ripaille

Château de Ripaille is the closest Savoie has to a magnificent Bordeaux-style château. Lying within a park in a gorgeous setting, surrounded by vines, it lies on a peninsula jutting out into Lac Léman. The château was originally built in the 15th century as a retreat for Amédée VIII, who later became an antipope, and the property was transformed into a monastery. At the end of the 19th century the château was rebuilt from ruins by Frédéric Engel-Gros, a wealthy industrialist and ancestor of the Necker-Engel family, the current guardians. Today the estate, which includes the château, part of the old monastery, a park, an arboretum within a large area of forest and the vineyard, is owned jointly by la Fondation Ripaille (a charitable trust), Louis and Paule Necker-Engel and the town of Thonon-les-Bains. Historically there were always several hectares of vines on today's site, and the Necker-Engel family expanded the vineyard in the 1980s.

Paule Necker runs the winery at the beautiful Château de Ripaille.

For many years the wine estate was run by a manager named Claude Guillerez and he built up the reputation of the château's wine, making a consistent Chasselas year after year. After his retirement Mme Paule Necker, a French-Canadian, took over the running of the wine estate. She had studied agronomy in Montreal and followed this up with a wine degree at the Changins wine school in Nyon, Switzerland. The gently sloping or flat vineyards lie mainly on a

gravelly soil of glacial origin, emanating from the nearby Dranse river; originally planted with 100% Chasselas, a hectare each of Gamay and Pinot Noir were planted in 2002. Herbicide is used as little as feasible and the vineyards are grassed down. Treatments are systemic to begin with and then Bordeaux mixture is used. Regular warm air currents usually keep frost at bay, but vines increasingly suffer from drought in the warm, dry summers. Harvest is relatively early and by machine.

If you visit the château, it is well worth seeing the original cellar with its big oak barrels, but the 140–150,000 bottles of wine are made in a practical winery, equipped for everything including bottling. The Chasselas is fermented in stainless steel with cultured yeast, then goes through malolactic fermentation naturally and is bottled partly in spring for the young-vine Chasselas and partly in summer for the rest, although this is not differentiated on the label. It is a straightforward floral, dry Chasselas, which can age for a few years. The rosé, Les Demoiselles du Château, is 100% Gamay made with a short maceration; the Pinot Noir red, Le Comte Rouge, is aged partly in small barrels, depending on the vintage. About three-quarters of the production is sold at the château to many local second-home owners and tourists, and to local restaurants and shops. Other sales are divided between exports (15%) and the rest of France.

Château de Ripaille
83 Avenue de Ripaille, 74200 Thonon-les-Bains
Tel: 04 50 71 75 12
Email: domaine@ripaille.fr
Web: ripaille.fr
Contact: Paule Necker
Map ref: C4
Vineyards: 21ha (including 2ha red grapes)
Visits: Shop open March–October

Château La Tour de Marignan

This little family estate owns the oldest working wine cellar in Savoie, with a tower dating back to the 11th century and vineyards that have been planted almost continuously since then on the slopes below the forested Boisy hillside. In the 13th century the land and the stronghold were bought by the Abbey of Filly; the monks built the cellar to make wine here and owned the property for about 300 years. Various owners followed until, in 1873, local vigneron Jean-Marie Suchet paid for it with gold coins… Almost a millennium after the tower was built, in 1993, Château La Tour de Marignan became one of the very first vineyards in Savoie to be certified organic.

Jean-Marie Suchet's son Octave had only daughters, one of whom married Michel Canelli. The fourth generation, Bernard Canelli-Suchet took over running the vineyards, which have always been around 5ha, at a very young age. Apart from a little work experience and short courses, he mainly learned on the job and after using very few chemicals anyway, he decided to convert to organics. His son Olivier studied at Changins wine school in Switzerland, did work experience at two biodynamic wine estates in Burgundy and in Provence and returned to work with Bernard. Olivier took over officially from 2005; his brother Xavier joined in 2009 and Bernard still lends a hand.

Originally all Chasselas, in the 1990s they planted Pinot Noir and Mondeuse and in 2016 some Altesse. The vineyards, on a gentle clay-limestone slope, are grassed down, with an *intercep* used for weeding. With the forest directly above, the site is sheltered but fairly humid, yet they have always managed with Bordeaux mixture and sulphur. To reduce the copper use especially, from 2017 Olivier has introduced biodynamic methods, using the main preparations, some plants and working with the lunar cycles. Increasingly hail and frost have posed a problem. Harvest has always been by hand.

In their atmospheric ancient cellar, all the wines are aged in old oak. Originally convinced by the methods he learned at Changins that yeasts do not come from the terroir, Olivier used a neutral organic cultured yeast until 2017, when he switched to indigenous yeasts and stopped fining too. Sulphur dioxide levels are kept low, never adding

at harvest, only after malolactic fermentation, which is always done, and pre-bottling. Three excellent, restrained Chasselas wines are made: the fresh and stony Terre de Léman Marignan, kept for up to a year in *foudres*; the fuller and more earthy oak-aged Vieilli en Fût de Chêne Marignan, aged for two years in *foudres* and another year on lees in tank; and the enjoyable traditional method sparkling wine La Perle, with three to five years *sur lattes*. All take some months to open up. The tasty Rubis de Boisy red blend with 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Mondeuse has about two weeks maceration and is then transferred to three- to five-year-old small oak barrels; recent vintages have shown sweet Pinot notes on the nose and some classic sour cherry Mondeuse notes on the palate.

Bernard Canelli-Suchet, one of the earliest organic vignerons in Savoie, flanked by sons Olivier (seated with his son) and Xavier.

This small estate is run with great care and 90% of the wines are sold locally. If you have the chance to visit, ask to try 'La Chèvre' at

the end, a traditional Haute-Savoie drink made from wine, rum, spices and fruit.

Château La Tour de Marignan
264 Route de la Tour de Marignan, 74140 Sciez
Tel: 04 50 72 70 30/06 30 04 06 68 (Olivier)
Email: tourdemarignan@hotmail.com
Contact: Olivier or Xavier Canelli-Suchet
Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 5ha (including some red grapes)
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Welcomed

Les Vignes de Paradis/Les Vins du Léman

'If you are a complicated person, you like complications.' So said Dominique Lucas, who left his family's estate in the heart of Burgundy's Côte de Beaune to make Chasselas in Crépy, arriving there in 2001. His story is indeed complicated and constantly evolving. Les Vins du Léman, a separate domaine run by Dominique, is part of this evolving story, but I will write about that at the end. For the record, Dominique also managed the family Burgundy estate from 2011, but the estate's last vintage was in 2015.

Dominique studied wine in Beaune and worked for a couple of local domaines but he had become disillusioned with Burgundy: he found that the AOC system there was a stranglehold and he was at odds with the neighbours over their disdain for organic methods. Dominique worked in Bordeaux too, but his employers were not interested in biodynamics. A tip-off led him to accept a job with Claude Mercier of La Grande Cave de Crépy, despite knowing nothing about the area, or about Chasselas. Claude was open to ideas and Dominique oversaw the conversion to organics and introduction of biodynamics for a part of the domaine. Dominique left in 2008 – by

this time, he had learned about Chasselas on both sides of the border, visiting the best Swiss producers, and knew that in this idyllic environment he could pursue his dream. He set up his own winery in Marcorens in the Crépy area, leasing 1.5ha of Chasselas vineyards from a small grower, who had used no herbicide since 1995.

Dominique gradually took on other Chasselas vineyards in the crus of Marin and Marignan to reach around 4ha of Chasselas, and a little Gamay from Marin. Dominique loves to experiment, but does so in a very measured way, believing that it takes years to test a vineyard, a grape variety or the ideal vessel for vinification or maturation. In 2009 and 2010, on cleared land in the Crépy area, he planted Chardonnay, Savagnin, Sauvignon and Pinot Gris, then in 2014 Altesse (using cuttings from Dominique Belluard, a close friend) and in 2016 Chenin Blanc, all as mass selections. Once wines from these non-AOC permitted varieties came on stream, and disagreeing with the fact that the AOC system permits chaptalization and other manipulations, from 2013 he has sold his Les Vignes de Paradis wines as IGP Vin des Allobroges or Vin de France.

Dominique Lucas in his cellar with a range of vessels, including his pyramidal Kheops tank.

Dominique uses biodynamic methods fully in the vineyards: he grazes sheep, ploughs certain vineyards with a horse, dynamizes his own preparations and uses medicinal plants and essential oils, but he has chosen not to join Demeter. To respect the vines' instinct to climb he never trims the tops, instead bending them over gently as he saw being done in the biodynamically-run vineyards of Domaine Leroy in Burgundy. Above all, Dominique believes a key issue for Chasselas is working with low yields and he is ruthless about de-budding, ending up with a yield of 35–40hl/ha. To achieve 11–12% natural alcohol, he seeks optimum ripeness, harvesting as late as possible. Given his different grape varieties, harvest can take two months or more and Dominique likes to do at least three passes through the Chasselas and two for the other varieties.

In Dominique's small winery he is fastidious, using two sorting tables, gentle pressing, oxidizing the juice somewhat to avoid problems later, indigenous yeasts and very low or no sulphur additions. He says firmly 'selling vinegar is not my thing' and seeks to make precise natural wines. He prefers natural micro-oxygenation and has shunned stainless steel or other neutral tanks, instead using concrete eggs, oak barrels (mainly *demi-muids*), amphorae made in Burgundy, and a unique, specially commissioned tank, inspired by the Egyptian Cheops (which he spells Kheops). The Kheops tank is a small concrete pyramid constructed using local materials: gravel from the Salève mountain close to Geneva; salt from Chamonix and water from Thonon. It's finished off with stone from the mountain village of Samoëns and oak from a nearby forest. The Kheops is aligned to the cardinal points to help direct energy downwards from the pyramid's point into the wine and has been used for Chardonnay since the 2015 vintage. Dominique finds it gives a very mineral, angular and chiselled wine. Each one of Dominique's cuvées is matured in a specific type of container for every vintage. An added element is music – Dominique believes the soundwaves help the wines evolve, and he relays classical music regularly, mainly Bach and Vivaldi; twice a year he invites musicians to play – stringed instruments only.

Dominique makes only single varietal wines and each cuvée has one sole bottling, done by Oeno Conseil, with rough filtration if

needed; bottles are numbered and the date of bottling is shown. The non-Chasselas wine I know best is the Savagnin, aged in a concrete egg. The 2015 was amazingly expressive, despite high alcohol from that sun-drenched vintage; the 2016 sang with a zingy lemon meringue character, perfectly balanced alcohol and acidity, combining elegance and richness, and superb length.

Notwithstanding his other varieties, Dominique loves Chasselas and makes five cuvées from his plot in Crépy: the two main wines are 'Un P'tit Coin de Paradis' from the siltier, lower part of the parcel, vinified and aged in *demi-muid* oak barrels, and Un Matin Face au Lac, from vines at the top of the parcel, giving more intense, smaller grapes. This is aged in concrete eggs, and with more *molasse* in the soil it offers greater minerality and richer fruit, though both are exquisite. There is an intriguing Chasselas matured in barrel under a veil of yeast; a maceration Chasselas in amphora; and a late-harvest one. The other two Chasselas cuvées are both aged in a mixture of concrete eggs and *demi-muids*: the weightier '1515', from Marignan on slopes with more gravel and clay at around 370m altitude; and the deliciously stony C de Marrin (with 2 'r's) from the plateau in Marin, almost 100m higher, on a glacial pebbled soil. In total Dominique makes about 30–35,000 bottles with about one-third exported to a dozen countries, one-third sold to top restaurants in France and one-third to private individuals.

Les Vins du Léman is often wrongly described as Dominique's négociant arm; he stresses that this is a separate estate, a joint venture with Bernard Fichard, now in his eighties. The domaine leases the vineyards, which are predominantly Chasselas, with a little Pinot Noir and Gamay. The estate is in conversion to organics with certification expected in 2020. Some rosé and two juicy reds are made, and a little traditional method Brut Nature sparkling wine, but the main wine is the Chasselas Quintessence, sold as AOC Savoie. With low levels of SO_2, this is crackingly good Chasselas. Currently the wines are made in the old Fichard winery in Chens-sur-Léman, but the plan is to establish a single winery for the two estates.

Dominique is one of the most clear-thinking natural winemakers of the French Alps, and although he works mainly outside the AOC system, he is a huge asset to Savoie. It is a joy to see this potential for making Savoie Chasselas great again.

Les Vignes de Paradis
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Tel: 04 50 94 31 03/06 33 81 99 35
Email: lesvignesdeparadis@orange.fr
Web: les-vignes-de-paradis.fr
Contact: Dominique Lucas
Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 7.5ha Les Vignes de Paradis; 10ha Les Vins du Léman
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Ayze

The vineyards of Ayze lie on both sides of the town of Bonneville, through which the river Arve, an ancient glacier, flows en route from Chamonix to join the Rhône at Geneva. Most are on the eastern side of the town, above the villages of Ayze and Marignier, the latter being where you will find the hamlet of Le Feu. West of Bonneville is the hamlet of La Côte d'Hyot. This part of the Arve Valley lies below the distinctive, pointed Môle mountain, the southernmost peak of the Chablais Prealps, at 1,863m.

In Marignier, looking up to the steep Le Feu vineyards, with the Môle mountain behind.

About 27ha of vines are grown, of which about 21ha are Gringet, eligible for the cru Ayze sparkling or still whites. There is less than 1ha of Roussette d'Ayze, a grape also allowed in Ayze wines. There are three main soil types: the ubiquitous limestone scree, coming from the Môle; clay-limestone with some yellow marl and *molasse*; and, in the area around Le Feu, glacial sediments of bauxite-rich red clay. Many of the vineyards are on exceedingly steep slopes, well exposed and some reaching up to nearly 600m with views to Mont Blanc. Ripening has not been a problem in recent years, but yields can be. The Môle mountain is almost too protective, therefore there is little wind to prevent or dry up fungal infections, and all too often recently there have been hard spring frosts and/or summer hailstorms.

There are just three producers making wine as a full-time profession, the larger two profiled here. Olivier Gantin makes about 15,000 bottles a year from around 3ha – he has a good local following. There are a couple of others working part-time and selling

locally. Les Vins de Béléma is an Ayze name to look out for in the future. The estate and négociant is being established by Yann Pernuit, with his first vineyard plantings in 2019, not of Gringet, as there is a lack of plant material available, but of Altesse. He plans to plant Gringet, Mondeuse and other varieties in future years. From 2019 Yann will make a few wines from purchased organic grapes. Yann worked for over a decade with Domaine Genoux and since summer 2018 he has worked with Dominique Belluard, who is supporting him in setting up his own estate.

Domaine Belluard

As you drive into the unprepossessing entrance of Domaine Belluard, ahead of you is a huge, green and cream steel barn. It was from there that Albert Belluard emerged one hot summer day in the early 1990s. I had an appointment with a small group, but Albert wore a perplexed look and his T-shirt didn't quite meet his shorts. He was renowned as a very hard worker and a generous tasting host, lingering with visitors in the cute little tasting room in the cellar, opening another bottle given the chance. But he wasn't used to foreigners seeking information. 'Would you like to see my rockets?' he enquired, his round face breaking into its first grin of the visit. We entered the barn and I explained to the group how hail was an unwelcome visitor in Ayze and, at the time, sending up anti-hail rockets was one way to attempt to keep it away from the vineyards. The barn houses the presses and the vineyard machinery, and at the back is a work bench with every tool you could imagin. If he's not in the vineyards, this is where today you will usually find Albert's son Dominique, a man who likes to fix things and to question everything. His reticent smile shows that his journey hasn't always been as easy as one might imagine, given his now stellar international status.

Albert Belluard and his son Dominique, photographed in the early 2000s.

Albert moved with his parents from Menthon-St-Bernard, near Annecy, to Ayze (which the family have always spelt Ayse) in 1947 and they established a mixed farm with a few dairy cows, a small vineyard, and a commercial orchard of apple and pear trees – fruit trees were more lucrative than vines back then. In the 1960s, before the Savoie AOC, Albert Belluard began to popularize a slightly cloudy sparkling wine made in the typical Ayze method of a second fermentation in bottle, a short time on lees, and no disgorgement. His eldest son Patrick joined the business in 1975, the cows went, and the vineyard area grew a little; a few years later, younger brother Dominique went to study wine in Beaune before joining them officially in 1988. Dominique's first vintage was 1986, by which time there were about 6ha of Gringet, and he gradually took over the vineyard management and winemaking, leaving the sales to Patrick. With declining demand, and disease affecting the pear trees, the family stopped the orchard business and focused on vines. The estate was already the biggest in Ayze and at one point grew to 13ha.

In 1995, Michel Grisard suggested that Dominique accompanied him to a conference led by the late François Bouchet, an important early biodynamic consultant. After the conference piqued his interest, he visited several early proponents of biodynamics, mainly in Alsace and Burgundy, including Domaine Guillemot-Michel in the Mâconnais. In 2000, through the latter, he met the consultant Pierre Masson, and

took some of his courses. Dominique liked Masson's less dogmatic approach to biodynamics and from 2001 he started converting the domaine's vineyards. Albert supported him, and by 2008 Dominique had converted about two-thirds of the estate.

Domaine Belluard is not certified organic or biodynamic for the simple reason that it is still not 100% converted – for example, in the 2ha of vineyards in Le Feu, some of them exceedingly steep, about 70% is biodynamic. Herbicides were stopped by 2012; the challenge is fungal disease. So, some vineyards receive two or three early-season non-systemic chemical sprays. Although Dominique reduced total vineyard holdings, letting go of some of the more difficult-to-work ones, he still takes on small old family-owned plots on Le Feu, to preserve this special area. Elsewhere, from the early 1990s, he has planted Mondeuse and now has 0.7ha. After an unsuccessful trial with Petite Arvine (for early vintages of the cuvée Grandes Jorasses), he replaced it with Altesse from a mass selection taken from Domaine Dupasquier, planted in 2002. He now has 0.5ha of Altesse.

To me it is extraordinary that a once-obscure Savoie winery was among the very first to experiment with concrete egg tanks. Dominique first tried oak barrels for his still white Gringet (made from the late 1980s, this now accounts for 50% of the estate's Gringet production), but wasn't satisfied. Through Jean-Daniel Schlaepfer, a Swiss vigneron in the Geneva canton, he discovered concrete eggs and tried one for the 2004 vintage. The Brownian movement allowing the fine lees to remain in suspension appealed and he became so impressed by their suitability for Gringet and Altesse that he increased his number of eggs to 17, each with a capacity of 700 litres. Dominique now believes the quality of the eggs has declined and that some wines lose character and freshness if matured in them too long. He wants to phase out stainless steel and instead of buying more upright eggs he has invested in six diamond-shaped concrete tanks, with horizontal eggs inside.

The wines have been fermented with indigenous yeast since the early 2000s; for most wines, sulphur dioxide is added to the press to avoid undesired flavours from poor yeasts and then a small amount also added before bottling. Malolactic fermentation takes place for all

the wines. The Mondeuse, which is made in a semi-carbonic method with two to three weeks' maceration, is made without added sulphur. It was for a few years aged in amphorae but Dominique wasn't satisfied and now he ages it in a concrete egg. This is a delicious structured Mondeuse with vibrant fruit. In some years Dominique makes a still Gringet named Pur Jus, without added sulphur.

Dominique uses a sparkling wine service for bottling and disgorgement. Two-thirds of the sparkling production is Les Perles du Mont Blanc with 4g/l *dosage* and at least 18 months *sur lattes*. It has a ripe fruit character, with fabulous rounded flavours, almost oxidative, apple notes on the finish and very soft bubbles. The rest is the Mont Blanc Brut Zéro, which is from vineyards on limestone scree, aged *sur lattes* for at least 24 months. This is a genuinely exciting and fine sparkling wine, stony, minerally and lemony, with cooler vintages, such as 2014, having the potential to age many years. The main still Gringet, Les Alpes, from several plots mainly on yellow marl, is bottled one year after harvest, as is the cuvée Le Feu. In the 2017 vintage, tired of complaints about cork taint, Dominique bottled his still wines with glass stoppers. Les Alpes, which after maturation in eggs goes into stainless steel, begins to open up after two or three years in bottle. Le Feu really needs five years to soften the acidity and round out the wine – then you will discover an intensely stony, yet honeyed or even beeswax character of great finesse.

Dominique Belluard with some of his concrete eggs.

In a normal year, Domaine Belluard makes about 60,000 bottles, of which 30% is exported, a figure Dominique does not wish to increase as he wants to supply other clients, especially top French restaurants. The year 2011 was challenging for Dominique. His father Albert died, aged 80, which hit Dominique very hard, and, after a period of battling with philosophical differences, he bought out his brother Patrick's shares in the business. Dominique has two adult daughters from a first marriage, who are not interested in working for the estate; Valérie, his current partner, with whom he has a young son, looks after the domaine administration. But with persistent back problems, along with the difficulties of hiring full-time and temporary staff willing to work in the vineyards, Dominique had been struggling to keep smiling in recent years. Then in July 2018, he invited Yann Pernuit to join him; a younger man and a biodynamic enthusiast, Yann provides great support.

The Belluard family has given a huge gift to Savoie and the wine-loving world. Dominique has continued Albert's work in changing the reputation of the Gringet grape and the Ayze cru from being considered as a simple local oddity, to an important part of the

modern Savoie quality offering, commanding respect around the world.

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Map ref: C1
Contact: Dominique Belluard
Vineyards: 10.5ha (including 1.2ha Altesse and Mondeuse)
Visits: Strictly by appointment

Domaine Famille Montessuit

Although relatively new to the job, brothers Nicolas and Fabrice already seem like a pair of jolly farmers, and the gamble they took to create a new decent-sized wine estate in Ayze is starting to pay off. Their grandfather, André, who died in 1999, had been a mixed farmer, with a vineyard of 3,000 vines (less than 0.5ha), ten cows and another job. Their father and uncle (Jacky and Gilles) kept the vineyard going and from the 2007 vintage Nicolas and Fabrice, working respectively as an engineer and a builder, under some familial pressure, gave them a hand. They discovered that they both loved the vineyard work and wanted to help preserve the vineyards of Ayze. By 2011 the brothers gave up their other jobs, having taken on more vines, notably a 3ha vineyard in Côte d'Hyot rented to them by the commune. This had previously been farmed by the Vallier family but had been left unworked for four years.

The Montessuits have built up their vineyard holdings with several different plots with relatively high average vine age. In addition to the Côte d'Hyot vineyards, which lie on a heavy clay and marl soil, they have about 2.5ha close to their winery in Ayze, including the

original small plot; and they own two parcels near Le Feu with altitudes rising to about 600m. Having received the top category of HVE sustainable certification, in 2019 the brothers plan to convert to organics. Herbicide is not yet 100% eliminated due to three very steep small plots, which they haven't succeeded in weeding without chemicals. Elsewhere they are using a flock of Ayze sheep – and plan to use chickens too – to help with the weeding. To combat fungal diseases, as well as Bordeaux mixture, they use oregano and other plant concoctions, along with essential oils.

Fabrice's experience helped in building a large, naturally cool underground cellar, enabling the use of gravity rather than pumping. They equipped the cellar with mainly second-hand equipment, including a pneumatic press and a mixture of enamel and stainless steel tanks. They used CMC to advise on sparkling winemaking when they began and still use them for bottling, but unusually, the Montessuits are fully equipped for disgorgement.

Currently the Montessuits make about 40% still wine to 60% sparkling. Partly because of their Côte d'Hyot plot, which gives lower acidity juices, they usually avoid malolactic fermentation except in cooler vintages. There are three still Gringets, their 50+-year-old vines being used for Cuvée Jonquille and Crocus Alpinus, the latter being mainly a selection from Le Feu, vinified in second-hand Burgundy barrels. Their three sparkling cuvées are somewhat better than the still wines, and all spend at least 15 months *sur lattes*. The main Brut is pleasant; Grande Réserve is slightly drier with around 5g/l *dosage*, and softer due to a little Roussette d'Ayze, with 24 months minimum *sur lattes*; the limited volume Prestige is zero *dosage* and very toasty after 48 months *sur lattes*.

Brothers Nicolas and Fabrice Montessuit.

They have begun to export a little to the US and Canada, and hope to increase exports to a quarter of their production. In the meantime, they have built up a loyal local clientele, encouraging them through an adopt-a-vine programme, and also sell across France. Not surprisingly, the Montessuit brothers come across as somewhat defensive and will need to remain clear in their vision in such a tiny area, where the only other producer of any size is one of the most famous in Savoie.

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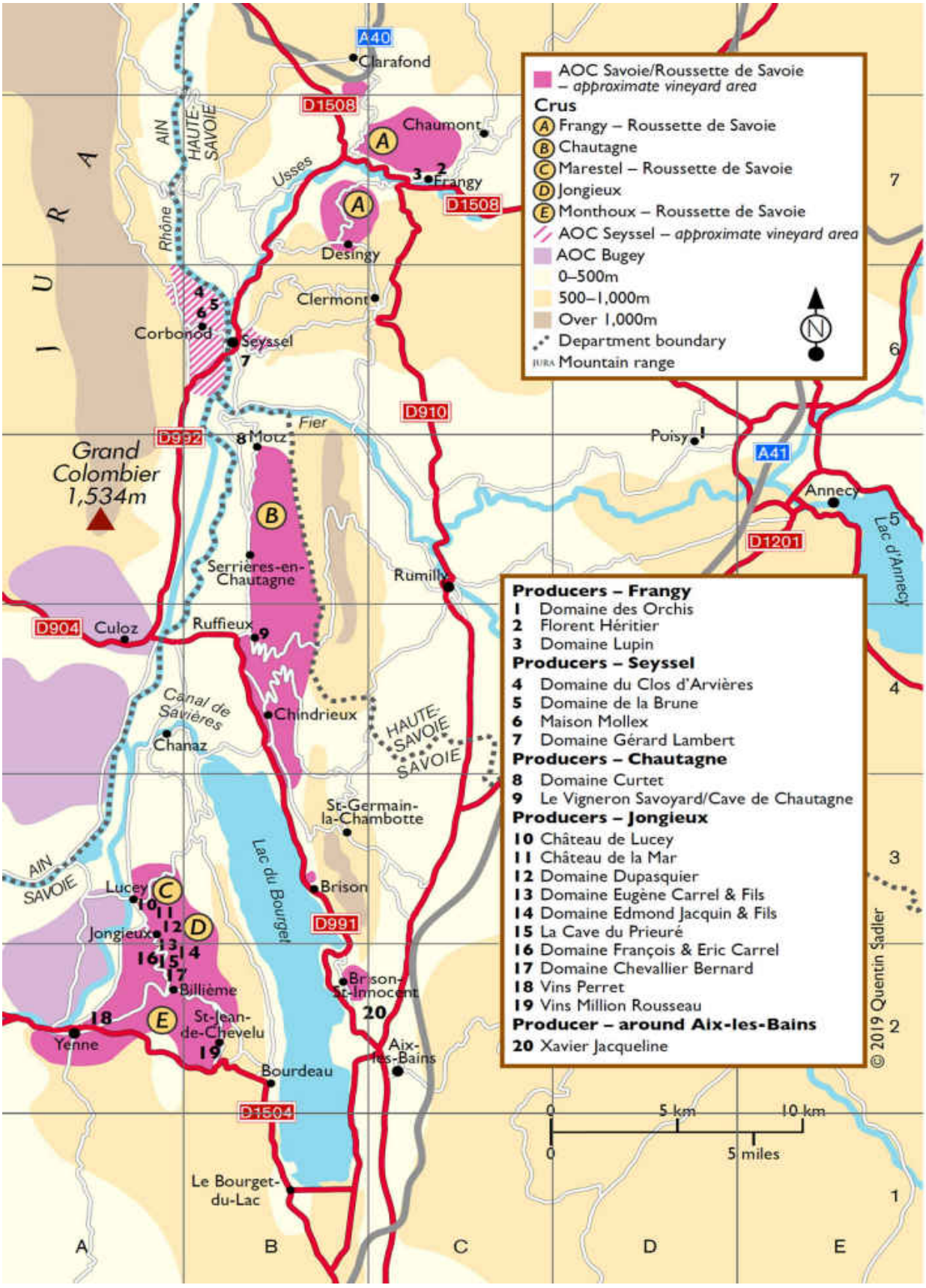
Web: ayze-montessuit.com
Map ref: C1
Vineyards: 8.5ha
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment


AOC Savoie/Roussette de Savoie – approximate vineyard area
Crus
A Frangy – Roussette de Savoie
B Chautagne
C Marestel – Roussette de Savoie
D Jongieux
E Monthoux – Roussette de Savoie
AOC Seyssel – approximate vineyard area
AOC Bugey
0–500m
500–1,000m
Over 1,000m
Department boundary
JURA Mountain range
Producers – Frangy
1 Domaine des Orchis
2 Florent Héritier
3 Domaine Lupin
Producers – Seyssel
4 Domaine du Clos d'Arvières
5 Domaine de la Brune
6 Maison Mollex
7 Domaine Gérard Lambert
Producers – Chautagne
8 Domaine Curtet
9 Le Vigneron Savoyard/Cave de Chautagne
Producers – Jongieux
10 Château de Lucey
11 Château de la Mar
12 Domaine Dupasquier
13 Domaine Eugène Carrel & Fils
14 Domaine Edmond Jacquin & Fils
15 La Cave du Prieuré
16 Domaine François & Eric Carrel
17 Domaine Chevallier Bernard
18 Vins Perret
19 Vins Million Rousseau
Producer – around Aix-les-Bains
20 Xavier Jacqueline
Clarafond
Chaumont
Frangy
Desingy
Clermont
Corbonod
Seyssel
Motz
Grand Colombier 1,534m
Serrières-en-Chautagne
Culoz
Ruffieux
Chindrieux
Chanaz
Canal de Savières
Rumilly
Poisy
Annecy
Lac d'Annecy
St-Germain-la-Chambotte
Lac du Bourget
Brison
Lucey
Jongieux
Billième
St-Jean-de-Chevelu
Yenne
Brison-St-Innocent
Aix-les-Bains
Bourdeau
Le Bourget-du-Lac
Rhône
Usses
Fier
JURA
AIN
HAUTE-SAVOIE
SAVOIE
A40
D1508
D910
D992
D904
D991
D1504
A41
D1201
0 5 km 10 km
0 5 miles
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AROUND THE RHÔNE AND LAC DU BOURGET

Forget Syrah, Grenache or Viognier grapes, the Rhône Valley areas of Savoie are home to Altesse, Jacquère, Gamay and Mondeuse, among other varieties. Much of this sector lies close to the southernmost Jura mountains or between the Jura and the Prealps. Some of the areas are the warmest in Savoie, with the proximity of the Rhône river and, further south, Lac du Bourget – France's largest inland lake – moderating the climate greatly.

To the northwest of Annecy in Haute-Savoie, the small Roussette de Savoie cru of Frangy is located mainly in the valley of the Usses, a tributary of the Rhône. Just to the south, the town of Seyssel straddles the Rhône river – its sparkling wines were once the most renowned wines from Savoie. Heading south into the department of Savoie, the climate becomes distinctly warmer and the more densely planted vineyards of both the Chautagne and Jongieux crus are on hillsides some way up from the Rhône, but often in sight of it. Warmest of all is the small vineyard area on the eastern side of Lac du Bourget near Aix-les-Bains – these vines were first farmed by the monks from the Abbaye de Hautecombe on the opposite shore.

Apart from the area close to Aix-les-Bains, the other areas have always been quiet backwaters, rural farming areas. However, the waterways of the Rhône river, partly canalized; the Savières canal, which links the Rhône with Lac du Bourget; and the lake itself provide delightful opportunities for summer visitors to relax and enjoy water sports. Close to the lake are a cluster of upmarket hotels and restaurants, where some of the best Savoie wines can be enjoyed alongside lake fish and top gastronomic cuisine.

The main wines to expect

In Frangy and Seyssel, Altesse is king. Frangy is a cru for AOC Roussette de Savoie and producers generally make at least two versions; some make Altesse sparkling wine too. In Seyssel, expect to find still and sparkling AOC Seyssel. In Seyssel and Frangy, producers may also use AOC Savoie for whites from other grapes, and for reds and rosés. Although Chautagne is the realm of Gamay, and Jongieux is known for Altesse, especially from the Roussette de Savoie crus Marestel and Monthoux, most producers also grow Jacquère and Chardonnay for whites, and Gamay, Pinot and Mondeuse for rosés and reds. Crémant de Savoie is increasing in production. In the area near Aix-les-Bains, Chardonnay is a speciality.

Frangy

The small town of Frangy is within commuting distance of both Annecy and Geneva. Until the early 20th century it used to be part of the free trade zone with Switzerland, with no tax on either wine or the milk from the many dairy farms in this area. Most of Frangy's vineyards lie above the small Usses river that flows into the Rhône to the west. The area lies at what was effectively the end of the glaciers that formed both Lac d'Annecy and Lac du Bourget and the vineyards are southwest of Le Vuache, a long mountain, which is one of the southern extremities of the Jura.

The area around Frangy has around 35ha of vineyards, including about 20ha of Altesse for the cru Roussette de Savoie Frangy, in the communes of Chaumont and Desingy as well as Frangy itself. The main vineyards are on a wide slope behind the town, part of which is called Coteaux des Aricoques, between about 320m and 400m altitude. Much of it faces full south and it has a predominantly limestone soil with scree in the higher parts. The lower areas are frost prone, whereas the highest areas are cooler. Desingy vineyards, some facing southwest towards Seyssel and the Rhône, are at around 400m, with more clay-rich and colder soils than in Frangy. In general,

the cooler climate makes Frangy Roussette de Savoie fresher and more angular than those from Jongieux.

With the exception of wines from Domaine Lupin, it is rare to find Frangy outside Haute-Savoie and Savoie. Other producers whose wines are available locally include La Treille, and various estates of the Neyroud and Courlet families. Grandsons of Auguste Courlet are the three Héritier brothers: Stéphane (based in Clermont), Philippe and Florent, all of whom have small organic wine estates in the Frangy area, although each one has another job too. Not profiled here, Cave Stéphane Héritier, whose Roussette de Savoie is an attractive example, has also taken over some of the Mondeuse vines from the now defunct Domaine de Vens-le-Haut estate in nearby Seyssel.

Florent Héritier

This tiny estate, run part-time by Florent Héritier since 2004, was, in 2017, the first in Savoie to become Demeter certified. Florent started official conversion to organics from 2010 but does not believe that the organic certification requirements are strict enough. He finds biodynamics interesting, especially in terms of soil management, and believes the main biodynamic preparations are very important. He uses Bordeaux mixture in combination with plant preparations, which he makes from local herbs and plants. He smiles when he explains that today he spends one-fifth the amount he used to on chemicals.

Following wine studies in Beaune, Florent originally planned to go into partnership with Vincent Courlet, but that did not work out, so he decided to work outside of wine (selling cherry-pickers) for his main employment. Florent's vineyards include 1ha of Altesse on the lower part of the hillside behind Frangy, which was originally planted by Auguste Courlet. The remainder of his Altesse is grown in Desingy, where in 2006 he also planted 0.4ha of Mondeuse on a very steep clay-rich limestone scree slope. Most of his vineyards are in shared plots with his brother Stéphane and they share some of the machinery too, although they work separately. Florent does not like bare earth as he believes grass will protect the soil and insects.

Except just before harvest, he doesn't mow the grass between the vine rows, instead he rolls it down.

Florent Héritier in his biodynamically-run vineyards in Designy.

The winery on Frangy's main street is simple, with no air conditioning, and Florent notes that the fermenting wine often needs warmth to finish, particularly with indigenous yeasts, which he has used for several years. As well as tanks, for his top cuvée, Altessima, Florent used old oak barrels for a time, but he has replaced them with one concrete egg. This Altesse is usually 100% from the Frangy slope, which is based on pure limestone. Florent shares the bottling line with his two brothers and uses the minimum of SO_2 at bottling, having added some at harvest to select the right local yeasts and bacteria. He hasn't chaptalized Altesse for many years and avoids it for Mondeuse in the warmer years.

From limited tastings, my impressions are that Florent's wines are full of vivacious fruit, minerality and life. His main Altesse is Confession d'Etrables (Etrables is a hamlet in Desingy, and Confession is in homage to *The Confessions* from the 18th-century writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which evoked the wine of Frangy). Altessima remains in tank or concrete egg for an extra year and is more expressive and linear. The Mondeuse combines delicious fruit with elegant structure. He makes a nicely dry Crémant de Savoie, L'Alliance, with 40% bought-in Jacquère and 60% Altesse, while waiting for his own small plot of Jacquère to mature. Florent sells

mainly to restaurants in the immediate locality, and a little makes its way to Belgium and Japan.

The parents of Florent's wife, Laure, live in Menthon-St-Bernard, close to Lake Annecy, and this was how Florent became entrusted to farm the newly planted vineyard at Château de Menthon-St-Bernard. Once this is fully productive, he should be able to give up his day job, which will be an important change for Florent, who refers himself as a *vigneron paysan*, roughly translated as a farmer-winemaker.

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Map ref: C7
Vineyards: 2.5ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles and Demeter
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Domaine Lupin

Bruno Lupin never intended to join the family domaine, but it's lucky for Frangy and for us that he did. Bruno's grandfather, Jean Lupin, sold wine in bottle to the Swiss when Frangy was still in the free trade zone. Bruno's father, François, farmed dairy cows and was also a wine-grower. The existing Domaine Lupin building was the farm building and doubled as a small winery to make wines to sell in a tasting room on the main street. In the 1970s the family opened the restaurant, La Cave de la Ferme (sold in 2019), which also helped to sell their wine.

Bruno Lupin, whose Roussette de Savoie Frangy travels the world.

Bruno, the second youngest of four children, studied wine at Beaune and in 1983 he started work managing the cellar of the Cave de Genève, the wine co-operative in the Geneva canton of Switzerland. During his 15 years there, he learned about working with high volumes in a technical, super-clean environment, and discovered that the best approach was to do nothing with the wine – the work needs to be done in the vineyard. Despite a long commute (he was not allowed to live in Switzerland), he had a good life, got married to Suzy and started a family. It was hard to leave, but his father asked him to help him, and as his two brothers were not interested and his sister Claudine ran the family restaurant, he felt that he had no choice. In 1994, while continuing his Swiss job, he began working in Frangy too, but administratively this was hard, and from 1998 he moved to Frangy full-time. Looking back now, he is pleased he made the move, partly because he loves the Altesse variety.

For many years Bruno has worked sustainably, with grassed-down vineyards; he hasn't converted to organics as herbicide is still used on the steepest vineyards, but his sprays are all organic now. He does much of the work in the vineyard himself, with some help from Suzy and from seasonal workers, and is hoping to find a permanent

employee. All his vineyards are on the slope behind the village, including the original steep parcel of his grandfather's vines with Altesse (used for his Frangy Cuvée Pépé) and a little Mondeuse, both planted in the 1950s, trained *sur échalas*. Bruno planted more Mondeuse in 2003, partly *sur échalas*. He works hard to control the canopy and leaf-pluck the very productive Altesse and Mondeuse; for the latter he does a green harvest.

In the basic cellar Bruno has used indigenous yeast for many years, as well as low SO_2 levels. Over the years he has reduced the residual sugar in his two main Altesse cuvées and with climate change is finding that to keep a fresh acidity he now needs to reduce the amount of malolactic fermentation. He gives the wines some time on fine lees and for Cuvée Pépé he is trialling a concrete hexagonal tank, with a horizontal egg inside, but finds he needs to move the wine out after a few months to keep that freshness. Bruno is equipped for bottling and bottles small lots throughout the year, believing that it's better to monitor the wine in tank until it's ready. The basic Frangy cuvée accounts for about three-quarters of the total output; floral and fresh, this simple Frangy is almost dry with less than 4g/l residual sugar. The lovely Cuvée Pépé is sold a year later and accounts for just 2,500 bottles; after a year in bottle, this is consistently my favourite, with much more intensity. Bruno enjoys making other smaller lots of Altesse, one in barrique, another in acacia barrels, a wine that is growing in popularity, and – if the season permits – a late-harvest version. For many years he has made about 1,500 bottles of traditional method sparkling Altesse with at least 18 months *sur lattes*, and as Bruno isn't convinced about planting Jacquère to make Crémant de Savoie, it will be Vin de France in future. Bruno's very enjoyable, easy-drinking and fruity Mondeuse is partly from destemmed grapes; some are foot-trodden; he uses a little pump-over and bottles it unfiltered.

Bruno is a regular marathon runner (he's even run the New York marathon) and he has steadily built up the distance with his wine estate. Not for him the endless round of wine shows around France – instead he enjoys nurturing his increasing export markets, which account for one-third of his sales, primarily going to the UK, US,

Belgium and Japan; other sales are divided between private sales and to wine shops and restaurants mainly in the local area. Bruno is also the vigneron charged with managing the tiny organic vineyard and making the wine for Vignes du Lac in Véyrier, one of the revived vineyards close to Lake Annecy. This development makes it even more urgent for Bruno to find a trusty partner or full-time employee, as although his grown-up daughters occasionally lend a hand with the vineyard work, they are forging other careers.

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Vineyards: 6ha (including 0.6ha Mondeuse)
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Domaine des Orchis

Philippe Héritier is one of the most unusual wine producers in this book; he makes just two wines, and they are very good. In 2006 Philippe gave up banking when he was offered a promotion to work in Paris, deciding city life was not for him. Instead, in 2007 he became an organic snail-breeder (try to imagine 300,000 snails) and vigneron, and today the snail farm is behind his winery near Annecy, and his vineyards are half an hour's drive away, near Frangy. While working for Crédit Agricole (a French bank that specializes in working with farmers) he visited many vignerons, including Michel Grisard, and, interested in the organic and biodynamic techniques Michel used, he had started lending him a hand on Saturdays. Philippe was no stranger to vineyard work, having from about 12 years old often missed schooldays in summer to help his maternal grandfather Auguste Courlet. And why snails? In 1995 his father, Joseph, had

started a business breeding snails, selling them prepared in various ways – when Joseph retired, Philippe was the only one of the three brothers available to take over. Today, at the modern winery they built in Poisy, Philippe and his wife Catherine have an event space where groups can enjoy a snail and wine tasting. The prepared snails (in jars or frozen) are sold privately and also to some of the best local restaurants, where Philippe sells his wines too.

Inspired by Michel Grisard, Philippe began planting vineyards in 2006: firstly Altesse and a little Mondeuse on 2.5ha of former vineyard land in Desingy, not classified within the Frangy cru, and secondly in Collonges, at the top of the main vineyard hill behind Frangy, where he planted 0.6ha of Mondeuse on very heavy clay soil with *molasse* from the Vuache mountain above. He also bought a plot situated a few kilometres north of Frangy, in Peillonnex, a hamlet of Clarafond, also outside the Frangy cru limits. The Swiss owner had planted 0.8ha of Altesse in 1992 and this gave Philippe his first crop in 2007; Philippe changed the training from Guyot to Cordon de Royat to limit the yields, planted Mondeuse in 2011 and later some more Altesse and a 0.1ha plot of Mondeuse Blanche, which so far hasn't properly ripened. In 2020 he plans to plant more Altesse, as well as Molette, possibly to make sparkling wine, and maybe Gringet and/or Jacquère – he wants to work with local Savoie varieties and uses mass selections.

Snail-breeder and vigneron Philippe Héritier leans against a rock extracted from one of his new vineyards, near Frangy.

Philippe has a degree in agricultural engineering and took some courses with biodynamic viticulture consultant Dominique Massenot, and later with Pierre Masson, whose company today supplies his biodynamic preparations. He converted the vineyards to organics, becoming certified in 2014, and uses entirely biodynamic methods (uncertified), with a focus on the humus in the soil. Philippe describes his vineyards as fields of experimentation, helping him to better understand life and wine. Up to now he has worked on his own, with temporary staff, but he's hoping to take someone on who shares his enthusiasm and philosophy.

In 2008 Philippe began construction of his unusual hexagonal winery, built according to the rules of the golden number or ratio. The proportions and the shape of the building are like a beehive, which is supposed to bring a positive energy balance. The same techniques of exact location (in terms of latitude, longitude and angle) were used by Leonardo da Vinci and by those who built Europe's great cathedrals. For Philippe the idea is that both the wine

and the people working or visiting the building are in resonance with the place. There are two specific advantages: first there is a smaller area of walls than a normal rectangular building, giving economy of space; secondly it allows the cosmic forces from above to be in harmony with the telluric forces from below. There is no air conditioning, but the barrels – and Philippe matures all his wine in barrel – are in the coolest north-facing part of the building. With very low yields, rarely reaching 30hl/ha and thus a potential of 20,000 bottles, Philippe does everything here including bottling.

For Philippe, in every vintage you start from scratch in the winery and he takes blending of his two wines very seriously – he doesn't rule out making a special cuvée for each variety in the future. Biodynamics enter fully into the winery – for example, he aerates a wine by taking out a bucketful and stirring it biodynamically before adding it back. Only indigenous yeasts are used. The barrels are of different sizes, mainly from Seguin-Moreau and Damy; some for reds were bought from Michel Grisard.

The Quintessence d'Altesse (Roussette de Savoie AOC without the Frangy cru) is fermented in barrel with malolactic fermentation, if it occurs, and usually the wine stays on lees until being blended and moved to tank in July or September. After a year or more in bottle the minerality and herbal character emerges, sometimes quince too. For the Quintessence de Mondeuse, Philippe looks for intensity and density: most is usually destemmed, and he leaves it macerating for at least four weeks at relatively high temperature, mixing limited punch-downs with pump-overs. The wine may show a strong floral character, redcurrants or even smoky dark fruit in some years, with tannins that are softened by the spicy oak and balanced by juicy fruit. Bottling is generally 15–18 months after harvest for both wines, with 40–60mg/l of sulphur added. So far these wines have been proven to age supremely well. Top local restaurants are Philippe's best client sector, with some wine also sold to restaurants in Paris and the south of France, to top wine shops and private individuals. About 10% is exported to the UK, Switzerland and Belgium. Philippe is always learning and is especially focused on the concept of channelling

energy, which is something Catherine teaches in her work as a life coach.

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Vineyards: 5ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room, by appointment

Seyssel

The sleepy town of Seyssel straddles the Rhône, marked by two beautiful bridges, the old one by the middle of town, and a modern one, carrying the main road. These bridges link Seyssel-Ain with Seyssel-Haute-Savoie. Thanks to the Royal Seyssel brand, in the early 20th century Seyssel was the most internationally renowned vineyard area of the French Alps, but today it struggles for recognition and even survival. There are less than 100ha of vineyards; at most 75ha are classified each year as Seyssel AOC (the rest is sold as Vin de France and includes carbonated sparkling wines); about 40% of Seyssel AOC is sparkling. There are only about 5ha of vineyards in Seyssel itself; the remainder are in the village of Corbonod in Ain (also eligible for AOC Seyssel). The Ain vineyards lie between the Rhône and the foot of the eastern side of the Grand Colombier mountain with vineyards at around 300m altitude. On the opposite side they are at a similar altitude. Corbonod is noted for its clay-rich limestone soil, ideal for Altesse, but the closer the vineyards are to the Rhône, the higher the humidity.

Whereas Altesse is the most planted variety and has a very long history here, it was the Molette grape that was traditionally dominant in sparkling Seyssel, for which the appellation was originally created. Royal Seyssel is now owned by Gérard Lambert, who has been president of the Seyssel appellation syndicate since 2014. Before this he was involved in the heated discussions concerning subsuming Seyssel into AOC Crémant de Savoie, to which he was vehemently opposed. When the officials from the Paris-based INAO (who control appellations) came to taste Seyssel, it was the Molette-dominant Royal Seyssel and another from Aimé Bernard, rather than the Altesse-dominant blends, which convinced the INAO that Seyssel was sufficiently different to other Savoie sparkling wines to preserve its own AOC. This led to an ongoing problem that the proportion of Molette in the blend is supposed to be 75%, and there is a lack of plantings – many were grubbed up in the late 1990s and 2000s, when the Boisset wine company owned Varichon et Clerc. Discussions are ongoing to lower the requirement.

For decades, two companies dominated the appellation. The largest sparkling wine producer was Varichon et Clerc (and since 2007 has been Domaine Gérard Lambert), owning Royal Seyssel; Maison Mollex remains the largest still wine producer. Both companies used to buy many more grapes from smaller producers than they do today. There are several other producers who sell their wines mainly locally, larger ones being Aimé Bernard and Maison Gallice.

Domaine de Vens-le-Haut, owned by Swiss scientist Georges Siegenthaler, was a small estate full of promise, founded in 2002 and certified organic in 2010. The aim was to give life to an abandoned slope in Seyssel-Haute-Savoie, working organically with local varieties, and to create a garage wine concept. The domaine made a name for itself on export markets, but Georges was let down by a partner, and reluctantly he decided to retire; the final vintage was 2015. The vineyards have been taken over by Gérard Lambert, Stéphane Héritier and Le Vigneron Savoyard/Cave de Chautagne.

Domaine de la Brune

Although Pierre Alain Vionnet was born in Corbonod, he is considered locally to be a promising newcomer. His father was an engineer in the French Air Force and the family farmed cows in Corbonod. But both uncles on his mother's side worked in the vineyards and Pierre Alain spent time with them as a child, developing his passion for vines and wine. After studying wine in Beaune, he worked for three years for Maison Mollex. When one of Pierre Alain's uncles retired, he took over his vines and created this estate in 2009, taking on more vineyards from a near neighbour, who was retiring and whose small estate was named Cellier de la Brune.

All Pierre Alain's Seyssel vineyards are in Corbonod, with about 3ha Altesse, 2ha Molette and 1ha of Gamay and Mondeuse. In 2017, he formed a partnership with Régis Mollex of Domaine du Clos d'Arvières to take over management of Domaine de Bel Air in Bugey, only 20 minutes' drive to the south. In 2019, Régis and Pierre Alain sought the HVE sustainability label for all three estates and also set up a CUMA to share an *intercep* and other equipment. Pierre Alain is keen to eliminate herbicide and has for some years used it only below the vine rows, grassing down every other row and working the other with a small tractor, but the soil is very clay-rich and heavy to work.

Originally the wines were made in an old stable at the Cellier de la Brune estate, then in 2013 Pierre Alain built a new family house in the vineyards, combined with a wine cellar and tasting room. And it is from there that the vast majority of his wines are sold. The whites have relatively high residual sugar: some are sold as Vin de France instead of AOC Seyssel, because sugar levels are higher than the AOC allows. There are two Molette wines, including the estate's most interesting wine, L'Antique, from nearly century-old vines, redolent of honey and grapefruit, but a touch sweet. Depending on the year, two or three Altesse wines are made. The Seyssel La Roquine is good of its style, off-dry with fresh acidity and minerality. Weightier is L'Ancienne from at least 60-year-old vines, aged in acacia barrels, and in some years he makes a *vin de paille* style. The sparkling Seyssel is mainly from Altesse, and thus may lose the AOC at some point. The small quantity of Gamay is used for rosé and Mondeuse is for the oak-matured L'Authentique. Pierre Alain caters mainly for a very

specific local market at present, but with added contacts through Domaine de Bel Air, maybe he will adapt.

Pierre Alain Vionnet outside his winery; his very old Molette vineyard can be seen in the background.

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Contact: Pierre Alain Vionnet
Map ref: B6
Vineyards: 6ha
Visits: Tasting room by appointment

Domaine du Clos d'Arvières

The idyllic tasting room in the hills above Corbonod was built in the 14th-century cellar of the Arvières monks, who lived just to the west at the foot of the Grand Colombier mountain. The founders of the estate in its modern form, Bernard and Martine Mollex (no relation to the Maison Mollex family) named the tasting room L'Abbaye (The Abbey). Son Régis sells half the estate's wine from there, with the rest sold through local wholesalers, plus a little exported to Belgium. Bernard's father Louis was a mixed farmer with some vines, selling

most of his harvest; Bernard and Martine joined him and from 1986 they devoted themselves to wine, building a new cellar at the end of the 1990s. Régis took over on Bernard's retirement in 2015, working alongside his mother. He studied wine at Beaune, but before returning to the estate worked for the local council water board.

There is 1ha of Gamay and Pinot Noir to make small quantities of red and rosé, alongside 7ha Altesse and 3ha Molette, some of which is sold to Gérard Lambert. The vineyards are partly up near the winery and partly down by the river, where the humidity makes organic growing difficult. The family have worked sustainably for some years and limit chemical spray use. Since 2017, as explained in the Domaine de la Brune profile, Régis has also co-managed the Bugey estate Domaine de Bel Air. The shared *intercep* is allowing Régis to reduce herbicide use, which he hopes to eliminate, but the heavy clay soils mean that there is not always a weather window to work the vineyards. Now that dependable pickers are so hard to find for manual harvesting, Régis has invested in his own machine harvester and notes that with Molette, for example, he can set it to harvest only those grapes that are properly ripe.

This family have always produced some of the more reliable local wines, which include a delicate Molette, redolent of hawthorn and grapefruit, dry and tangy (now sold as IGP Vin des Allobroges) – for this they use the free-run juice, reserving the rest for their sparkling Seyssel. The latter is usually 80% Molette, 20% Altesse and spends 12–18 months *sur lattes*, with the Molette adding that tangy grapefruit note. The family's largest production is the basic still Seyssel, for which fermentation is stopped to leave about 5g/l of residual sugar and the wine does not go through malolactic fermentation. Much better is the small-volume Seyssel Cuvée de l'Abbaye from a south-facing slope of older Altesse vines, with about half aged in barrel and 100% malolactic, released somewhat later. The joint venture in Bel Air should help provide sufficient resources for Régis to maintain this family estate, which his parents built up with so much dedication.

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Web: vinsmollex.fr
Contact: Régis Mollex
Map ref: B6
Vineyards: 11ha
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine Gérard Lambert

This is the home of Royal Seyssel sparkling wine and Gérard Lambert can justifiably claim to be its saviour. Royal Seyssel was created by Henri Varichon in 1901, who later associated with Charles Clerc. In the 1980s the Varichon et Clerc company moved out of family hands and went through various owners until it was purchased by Boisset of Burgundy in 1997. Ten years later Boisset closed the Seyssel winery, retaining the Varichon et Clerc brand, which it still uses for non-Savoie sparkling wines.

Gérard's own great-grandparents and subsequent generations all sold grapes to Varichon et Clerc and he feels intimately connected with Royal Seyssel. And Royal Seyssel inspires amazing affection in the US and the UK, although at the time of writing none is exported to the latter. As a wine student in London in the 1980s I saw it regularly presented as a good example of a non-Champagne French Méthode Traditionnelle. In 1988, Gérard and his wife Catherine had bought Les Caves de Seyssel, an ailing wine négociant founded in the 1930s, and subsequently sold wines from all over France. Gérard bought the Royal Seyssel brand from Boisset and vowed to continue buying grapes for it from the long-time suppliers. He moved to a building on the edge of Seyssel-Haute-Savoie to create a retail shop with a winery behind. At first, he produced only one Royal Seyssel,

always as a vintage wine, then from 2010 he gradually added special cuvées. Some years later, coming full circle, Gérard was in contact with Olivier Varichon, the grandson of the last Varichon connected with Royal Seyssel and co-owner of Domaine Vinci in the Languedoc, and Olivier introduced Gérard to his US importer, Kermit Lynch.

As if this was not enough for Gérard, when Georges Siegenthaler was searching for a successor for Domaine de Vens-le-Haut, Gérard was keen to preserve these Seyssel-Haute-Savoie vineyards and took on 2ha, as well as helping to sell the 2015 stock. These 2ha, planted with Altesse and Molette, formed the beginnings of an organic estate for Gérard; elsewhere he has taken on some very old Altesse and Molette, some of which were family vineyards, as well as a little Gamay and Mondeuse. All Gérard's vineyards should be certified organic by 2019, apart from some of what he buys for Royal Seyssel. And Gérard has become a big fan of biodynamic philosophy; although he has little time to work the vineyards, he has taken on employees who are experienced with organics, all the team effectively learning on the job. The main biodynamic preparations are purchased; some plant sprays they make themselves.

Gérard has a simple modern cellar, using CMC's mobile service for bottling and disgorgement. He is now finding his own way in winemaking, trying to use more indigenous yeast, for example. He shuns malolactic fermentation for both still and sparkling wines and doesn't like residual sugar. His approach, undoubtedly coupled with the good organic grapes, gave a very balanced first vintage from Vens-le-Haut – from 2016 the wines are sold as Domaine Gérard Lambert. Both the Molette and Altesse had excellent mouth-feel with tangy grapefruit on the former and a herbal nose on the latter. For the promising 2018 vintage Gérard is trialling old *foudres* for the Altesse. A good old-vine Seyssel is made, but I have not yet tasted his reds.

All the main Royal Seyssel cuvées are 70–75% Molette, 25–30% Altesse and have at least 36 months *sur lattes*, sometimes up to five years, varying in their original base wine selections and *dosage*. The main Royal Seyssel cuvée is always vintage dated; with around 6g/l *dosage*, it is crisp, with excellent mousse, and depending on the year

it may have grapefruit or a sweeter fruit or even brioche character. It ages well and a 2010 vintage, disgorged in 2014, tasted intense and stony in early 2019; a 2008 tasted on the same day was elegant and long. This ageing ability is a tribute to Molette, Gérard believes. Other cuvées vary each year: there is usually a drier Cuvée R, but I've found it somewhat over-vegetal; and in 2012 there was a very good Extra Brut in which the blend was made with the local Savoie and Bugey sommelier association.

This bridge was built in 1840 to link Seyssel-Haute-Savoie with Seyssel-Ain.

In the US, as well as Royal Seyssel there is Petit Royal, a lower-priced non-AOC traditional method sparkling cuvée from Seyssel grapes, with two years *sur lattes*. About 15% is exported, which Gérard hopes to increase; 20% goes to supermarkets in the region, 30% to restaurants and independents, and the rest is sold in the tasting room. Unusually for tasting rooms in the region, its shop is full of gifts as well as the wines, most of which are available to taste. If you meet Gérard, be prepared to be regaled with the wonderful history of Royal Seyssel, Molette or even the wonders of biodynamics.

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Map ref: B6
Vineyards: 5ha + purchased grapes
Certification: Ecocert (for part)
Visits: Tasting room/shop

Maison Mollex

Sébastien Mollex carries a lot of responsibility on his young shoulders. Following the sudden deaths of his grandfather René and his uncle Jean-Pierre in 2006, he returned urgently from Australia when he was only 22 years old to help his father Jean-Luc and his great-uncle Georges. Georges died in 2011, and then in December 2018 Jean-Luc died, aged 56. This story is viewed with great sadness in the local area, for this was a pioneering family company, waving the flag for Seyssel wines since its founding in 1931 by Ernest and Marguerite Mollex. Ernest Mollex sold some of their wine in bottle and fought to obtain the AOC Seyssel.

Sons Georges and René Mollex expanded the winery in the 1960s, with their sons joining later, and it became known as an important négociant, selling almost one million bottles a year up to the mid-1990s, sourced mainly from Seyssel, the wider Savoie area and Bugey. In that period, the two special cuvées of Mollex still Seyssel, La Tacconnière and Clos de la Péclette, were among the most reliable Altesse wines widely available in Savoie restaurants, although they had higher residual sugar levels than fine Altesse wines do today. These remain Maison Mollex's best-known cuvées. La Tacconnière is a blend from different parcels, including some purchased Altesse; the potentially ageworthy Clos de la Péclette is from a single 6ha vineyard with a proportion of old vines.

The vineyards are all in Corbonod and were exclusively Altesse until 2016; since then, some Molette has been planted. The few grape purchases are exclusively from the Seyssel AOC area; from

elsewhere in Savoie they buy some wines in bulk or in bottle. The total commercialized today is about 175,000 bottles per year, of which nearly 60% is traditional method sparkling wine, and just one-third of that is sparkling Seyssel AOC. With a historic old cellar in the centre of Corbonod, Maison Mollex has always been fully equipped for riddling and disgorgement. However, the equipment had not been updated for years when Sébastien joined, and sparkling wines were made in a very labour-intensive way. In 2017 he invested half a million euros in a fast and fully mechanized disgorgement line. Mollex now offers services to Le Vigneron Savoyard and also to local producers Clos d'Arvières and Domaine de la Brune.

After Sébastien Mollex joined the family company he updated the cellar to include a high-tech disgorgement line.

Having made much AOC Savoie sparkling wine previously labelled Pétillant, today, as well as some sold as Vin de France, Sébastien makes Crémant de Savoie, purchasing the base wine of 80% Jacquère with 10% each of Pinot Noir and Gamay from Le Vigneron Savoyard in Chautagne. The Seyssel sparkling wines include about 30% Molette. The Brut is decent enough with a *dosage* of 10g/l and the Extra Brut has just 3g/l *dosage*, allowing the flavours of apples and yeastiness to emerge better.

Mollex remains the largest producer of still AOC Seyssel and Sébastien is gradually lowering the residual sugar levels to create a better balance with acidity. La Tacconnière is fresher than it was, but Clos de la Péclette can be somewhat flat. Sébastien's short period of

wine studies before he was needed full-time at the winery were mainly on the commercial side at the University of Wine at Suze-la-Rousse and he has used CMC to advise on winemaking. His father managed the vineyards, but now Sébastien has to run all sides of the winery and the vineyards are obviously a challenge. Sébastien's younger sisters Séverine and Cyrielle have joined the firm to help with administration and sales but have no wine training. Sébastien has invested hugely in the winery, equipment and a new tasting room; I wish this family and their historic estate well.

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Contact: Sébastien Mollex
Map ref: B6
Vineyards: 20ha + purchased grapes
Visits: Tasting room

Chautagne

The balmy Chautagne area lies between the broad marshes of the Rhône river to the west and the Gros Foug mountain, part of the southern Jura, on the east. Motz and the gorge of the Val de Fier mark the northern boundary and Chindrieux and the Lac du Bourget mark the south. With the Gros Foug protecting the vineyards on the hillsides, along with the warming effect of both the river and the lake, this is the only area in Savoie where red grapes outnumber whites and has for years been known for its Gamay. While there is a limestone base, the northern part especially is more Alpine than Jurassic with some glacial deposits, and the soil adds to the warmth of the area due to the many outcrops of *molasse* and sandstone.

Nearly all the vineyards are on slopes, some steep, with most lying between about 300m and 400m altitude. Frost is rare here, but hailstorms can be a problem.

There are approximately 135ha of vineyards in Chautagne, much less than in the 1990s. For many years most have been farmed by members of the Chautagne co-operative, now called Le Vigneron Savoyard, strategically placed in Ruffieux, between Serrières and Chindrieux, the densest area of vineyards. Apart from the co-operative, the largest estate is Domaine de Veronnet, owned by Alain Bosson, but its future is uncertain. There are a few other estates, notable among which are Yannick Thonet, who has a decent reputation locally, and the 7ha Domaine de Châtillon, below the eponymous château overlooking Lac du Bourget. Owned by Australian-based financier Ed Peter, who co-owns Yarra Yering in Victoria, Australia, Domaine de Châtillon wines are made by Le Vigneron Savoyard and exported to Australia, Singapore and the Far East, but I have had no chance to taste them. Some larger Savoie négociants also buy Chautagne grapes.

The Chautagne region viewed from the Cellier des Pauvres vineyard in Motz.

Domaine Curtet

Jacques Maillet, the renowned organic vigneron who retired in 2016, is a hard act to follow. But while he did the groundwork, it is the energetic Marie and Florian Curtet who are taking this now certified

biodynamic estate to perhaps even greater heights. I don't get the feeling that this couple are taking for granted their luck at finding such an estate to make their own, and they are both ambitious and hard-working.

Marie is from Brittany and tried several careers before she discovered vines and wines. She came to Annecy for environmental studies, worked in Lyon as an administrator and in restaurants in the Chartreuse… she spent some time in New Zealand, where she discovered biodynamics, through vegetable growing. Nothing really clicked with Marie until she ended up working in the Savoie vineyards in Chignin with Gilles Berlioz. In 2014 she met her future husband and partner, Florian, when she came with Gilles to help Jacques Maillet with harvest. Florian is from Annecy, always wanted to work outside and chose wine – having studied at Beaune, he later became enthusiastic about working with plants and organics. This led him in 2013 to work for Jacques Maillet, with a view to taking over his vineyards. Very soon after taking over the estate Marie and Florian gained Demeter certification for the 2017 vintage and already at least half their wines are exported.

The year 2016 was unforgettable for this couple: they made their first vintage from Jacques' vineyards, using his cellar, and in December their daughter Lili was born. Vintage 2016 was the only one where the Curtets made a pure Pinot Noir and a Chautagne Gamay – all their wines are now labelled AOC Savoie rather than Chautagne. They have 3ha of reds and 2ha of whites, including small plantings in 2018 and 2019 of mass selection Gringet, Savagnin, Molette, Mondeuse Blanche and Jacquère – exciting for the future. Florian had a head start, being completely familiar with the two vineyard sites: Les Vignes du Seigneur (The vineyard of the Lord) in Serrières-en-Chautagne and Le Cellier des Pauvres (The cellar of the poor) in Motz. Les Vignes du Seigneur is planted with Gamay and Pinot Noir, and at Le Cellier des Pauvres there is Altesse, Jacquère and Mondeuse, including some very old vines of the latter, as well as the new plantings. Both vineyards are on *molasse* soils, but there is more topsoil in Les Vignes du Seigneur. Both are windy sites, which suits the Curtets, who make sure the vines are trained to take

advantage; rather than disease, their biggest challenge is to retain humidity on such rocky soil. They keep the grass high and roll it over rather than cutting it. The Curtets have a part-time employee and a trainee to help mainly in the vineyards.

Florian and Marie Curtet against a slab of molasse rock above their vineyards.

In 2017, the Curtets used a cellar at a rented farm, installing some fibreglass tanks and concrete hexagonal tanks, with horizontal eggs inside. In 2018, they were able to find somewhere more permanent and dig an underground cellar, installing 10-hectolitre earthenware pots for part of their white wine vinifications – they use no oak at present. The couple have always been adamant that they should work in the cellar in the natural way, avoiding any additions, such as sugar for chaptalization, encouraging malolactic fermentation and keeping sulphur dioxide additions to a bare minimum pre-bottling.

The distinctive labels feature a dragonfly, which is the emblem of Chautagne; many different species are found in the marshes across the Rhône river. It seems to reflect the lightness and precision in their wines. The Autrement name, which came from Jacques, is retained

for their Gamay-dominated red blend (usually 50–80% blended with Pinot Noir and Mondeuse) and in 2017 for a white blend, in 2016 for Jacquère. A single varietal Altesse and Mondeuse have completed the small range. These wines are lively, with texture and minerality revealing itself in both colours. The Curtets have a clear idea of what they are looking for – not for them the rusticity of Mondeuse, they want to show silk, they told me, and whereas I did not find that in 2016, the 2017 was simply superb. So far, for me, the reds have shown slightly better than the whites, but with these biodynamic wines, the timing and location of tasting is so important. From 2018, along with Autrement red and a Mondeuse, renamed Frisson des Cîmes, there will just be one blended white called Tonnerre de Grès (*grès* meaning earthenware).

Apart from exports, the wines are sold to restaurants and through organic wine shows, finding trade clients especially at the Pétavins tasting in Paris. Open-minded for the future, the early success of this couple is well deserved; I hope both Jacques Maillet and the Savoie region will be proud of them in years to come.

Domaine Curtet
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Contact: Marie or Florian Curtet
Map ref: B5
Vineyards: 5ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles and Demeter
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Jacques Maillet

‘Seeing my wine in all the best restaurants was like a dream,’ Jacques Maillet smiled at me. His last vintage was 2015, but you may well still find the wines and they age extremely well – they are hugely sought after by followers of authentic or natural French wines. ‘Natural wine’ is not a term that this defiant vigneron has ever been at ease with. In 2011 Jacques explained to me how he introduced himself at tastings:

- My name is Jacques Maillet.
- I make wine.
- I make organic wine.
- I make biodynamic wine.
- I make wine with no added SO_2.
- (None of the three points above matter).
- I make wine.
- I will not join the ‘church’ of natural wine.

It was also on that damp, grey November day, after we had visited the vineyards, admiring Jacques’ ancient Mondeuse vines of about 110 years old, that he gave me more insight about drinking his wines. They were not showing well that day and Jacques explained, not only was it the wrong day in the biodynamic calendar, but the weather was in a low-pressure system. ‘I would not want any sommelier offering my wine on a day like this, they should suggest someone else’s,’ said Jacques firmly.

Born near Annecy and a mountain lover, it was while working as a special-needs teacher in Montmélian that from 1976 Jacques entered the world of wine, working in the vineyards of Chignin. In 1983, a climbing friend took him to one of France’s oldest-established organic wine shows, in Rouffach, Alsace, which included some of the early, prominent biodynamic winemakers. Jacques bought their wines, tasted them blind against non-organic wines of the same AOC and realized something was different.

Hearing that there were opportunities in Chautagne to make red wines, which were much in demand in the ski resorts, in 1988 Jacques and his partner Christiane moved there. He rented some old

vineyards and purchased and leased some former vineyard land to plant. He wanted to start right away in organics and biodynamics but was refused loans and had no choice but to farm conventionally and join the co-operative, especially with no means to build a winery. He chopped and sold wood to supplement his income, working all hours, and in 1992, the first year his new vineyards produced grapes, Jacques fractured his spine… And at the end of the 1990s he became very ill, unable to work in the vineyards for three years through allergic reactions to the chemical sprays.

When Jacques returned to work in 2001, he reduced his vineyard holdings by half, to 4ha, and converted them to organics, replanting all but the very old vines – local colleagues thought he was mad as his remaining vines were all on the steepest slopes. From 2004 the co-operative gave him one tank to make his own red blend of Gamay, Mondeuse and Pinot Noir, with low added sulphur – he called it Autrement or 'another way'. This arrangement worked for three vintages, but in 2007 his relationship with the co-operative ruptured and Jacques had to find somewhere else to make wine. His friend Frédéric Giachino, with whom he had studied wine at Beaune as mature students, offered him space at his family's cellars in Chapareillan.

Jacques and Christiane Maillet in the Vignes du Seigneur vineyard.

Through his many contacts, Jacques was invited to sell his wines at the important organic and natural wine fairs. Working with two vineyard sites (see Domaine Curtet), from 2009 the range expanded from the original Autrement blend to single varietal reds and whites (Autrement white being Jacquère). Approaching 60 years old, in 2014 he finally dug a cellar under a barn by the house and after three vintages Jacques negotiated with Florian Curtet, who was working for him in the vineyards, and his partner Marie to take over.

Jacques Maillet's wines were almost all made with no added sulphur, no pumping and no oak… and when they were good, they were very good indeed. He made wines to drink on the right day with the right people. He did his best for Chautagne and Savoie, and he made his wine 'Autrement'.

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Le Vigneron Savoyard/Cave de Chautagne

The Chautagne wine co-operative was founded in 1952 and the tasting room retains the name Caveau de Chautagne. In 2016, the winery changed its name to Le Vigneron Savoyard following the merger with the original Vigneron Savoyard co-operative, based in Apremont. Le Vigneron Savoyard had about 45ha of vineyards, with mainly white grapes, to add to the 110ha of vineyards of the Chautagne co-operative, comprising over 60% red grapes. Whereas Le Vigneron Savoyard had always been relatively small, in its heyday the Cave de Chautagne had over 300 members and even in 2005 still controlled more than 150ha, which has gradually reduced, due to lowered returns and the increasing age of growers with no one in the family willing to take over the vines.

Of the ten members of the original Vigneron Savoyard co-operative, six live from their vineyards, with an average of about 7ha; in the Chautagne co-operative just seven of the 50 members live from their vineyards, one with 24ha and the others with 12–15ha. The wines from the Vigneron Savoyard are mainly Apremont and Abymes. The Cave de Chautagne has one member in Jongieux; the rest are in the Chautagne area. Its grape variety breakdown includes 40ha of whites, of which about 16ha is Jacquère, with the rest Altesse, Aligoté, Chardonnay and a little Velteliner Rouge Précoce/Pinot Gris (not always identified). The reds include approximately 50ha Gamay, 10ha Pinot Noir and 10ha Mondeuse, with a little Cabernet Sauvignon.

For a couple of decades up to 2010, Jean-Pierre Rosset was the widely respected director of Cave de Chautagne. In 2004 he enabled the members to improve their farming methods through joining Agri-Confiance, a sustainability label for agricultural co-operatives. He also encouraged them to reduce yields and rewarded them for better quality fruit. In 2006, Jean-Pierre upgraded the tasting room, adding a museum and wine educational centre with activities including 'l'Eveil des Sens', where you can use the five senses to learn about a wine. This remains well regarded as a local tourist attraction. In the early part of this century I found the wines to be very reliable, but

although the sustainability initiatives have remained, the wine quality has gradually slipped, no doubt due to financial pressures.

For eight years the co-operative member president, Gilles Clerc, doubled as director, then Fabien Danjoy joined as director in 2018; he is keen to breathe new life into Le Vigneron Savoyard. In 2019 the 60 members, nearly all of whom are 50 years old or more, agreed that to ensure its future, they should launch an ambitious community crowdfunding project. This has a second purpose too, which is to help preserve traditional vineyard areas – Apremont vineyard land is in demand for housing and Chautagne suffers from vineyard land becoming barren. Named Les Vignes des Alpes, the initiative aims to attract 2,000 new shareholders and raise one million euros, which represents 50ha of (mainly) new vineyards. All the vineyards within the scheme will be organic. The idea is to attract youngsters to the area, who can earn a living through working with the co-operative. The scheme includes nearly 5ha of existing organic vineyards in Chautagne, some of which were taken over from Domaine de Vens-le-Haut and are already farmed by young growers.

Le Vigneron Savoyard retains its pressing facilities in Apremont and the juice is brought to Chautagne for vinification, where winemaking takes place through to bottling. The only wine style the co-operative is not equipped for is the disgorgement of Crémant de Savoie, handled by either Maison Mollex in Seyssel or CMC. Although there are still the large concrete tanks dating from the 1950s, the winery has been steadily brought up to date. Smaller stainless steel tanks have been brought from Le Vigneron Savoyard in Apremont, providing much more flexibility.

Sales from the Caveau de Chautagne tasting room and the occasional local event account for about 20%; another 20% goes to the négociants; the final 60% of Vigneron Savoyard-branded bottles is handled by Vacher Distribution (in which Le Vigneron Savoyard has a share) and which looks after exports too. There are different ranges for different markets, with a plan to increase the number of individual vineyard parcel selections, including organic selections. For all the years since I’ve known the wines of the Cave de Chautagne it has been the Gamay, or occasionally Pinot Noir, selections that have stood

out, and Le Vigneron Savoyard has always produced a decent quality Apremont. This combined co-operative is an essential component of the fabric of Savoie wine region – let's hope that its crowdfunding venture attracts the young blood it needs to survive and regain its quality reputation.

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Map ref: B4
Vineyards: 155ha
Visits: Tasting room

Around Aix-les-Bains

The old spa town of Aix-les Bains is known as the Riviera of the Alps and there were once many vineyards around the town – today the only ones remaining are at Brison-St-Innocent above Lac du Bourget. The 25ha of vineyards lie on the slopes above the village, below the forest of the L'Epine mountain, on classic limestone scree, with some clay, at altitudes rising to about 350m. These are the warmest vineyards in Savoie; only 15km south of the heart of the Chautagne vineyards, harvest is usually ten days earlier. North of Brison-St-Innocent are a few scattered vineyards, with grapes grown for private use. Above, the view from the restaurant Le Belvédère at St-Germain-la-Chambotte is spectacular.

This is the only area in Savoie where the Chardonnay grape is the most important; indeed the vignerons here battled for it to be included in the AOC regulations. The few vignerons in Brison-St-Innocent have no problems selling their wines locally – the largest is

La Colombière, owned by Christophe Rossillon; below I profile the up-and-coming organic estate of Xavier Jacqueline.

Xavier Jacqueline

In 2017 Mathilde Jacqueline (Jacqueline is her family name) became the youngest ever Savoie vigneron to receive the award of Chevalier d'Ordre de Mérite Agricole, a French governmental recognition for agricultural work. The award was made for her work on the soils, including eliminating herbicide use and retaining the natural biodiversity in each of her parcels. In 2008, Mathilde's father Xavier had tried to convert to organics, but rampant mildew forced him to give up the quest, although he rarely used herbicides. After Mathilde joined her father in 2016, the pair applied for official conversion to organics; following courses with Pierre Masson, Mathilde also began working with biodynamics, making her own herbal teas. Steeper slopes are managed with a *treuil* – a harrow on a winch – and sheep are used for weeding too.

Xavier, who remains an active partner, is the son of a doctor in Aix-les-Bains who was also somewhat of a gourmet. Xavier pursued studies in agriculture and geology and then went on to take an oenology degree in Bordeaux. In 1985 he returned to plant the vineyards on an abandoned clay-rich plot in Brison-St-Innocent, called La Combe aux Moines. Originally he planned to sell his grapes, but in 1988 he decided to make his own wine in the wine cellar built by his great-grandfather, which had not been used since the 19th century. Following business studies, Mathilde originally worked for Rémy-Cointreau, spending two years in Toronto, Canada; on her return she studied wine in Beaune.

Nearly half of the estate is planted with Chardonnay and there is also 1ha Altesse, 0.7ha Velteliner Rouge Précoce (named Malvoisie by them), some Muscat and for reds 1ha Mondeuse, plus a little Pinot Noir. Both Malvoisie and Muscat were said to have been grown traditionally in Brison-St-Innocent. There is a modern vinification cellar and the original cellar is used for barrels, in which several of their wines are aged – Chassin is a favourite cooper. There are three

Chardonnays: La Perle du Lac is a simple, off-dry traditional method sparkling wine, spending 18 months *sur lattes*; a very drinkable ripe appley and floral Chardonnay is aged in tank on fine lees; and a cuvée named Le Jardin de Mathilde No. 1 was introduced in 2016 from the first vineyard planted by Xavier, which lies on almost solid rock. This is vinified in new oak, yet on the palate the spiciness is well balanced with the acidity and weight, reflecting the hard graft in the vineyard. Xavier and Mathilde like to say they tend them like a garden. Aged only in tank, Roussette de Savoie La Romantique is an excellent fresh Altesse, and the Malvoisie is aromatic and spicy, having been aged in oak. The reds are lightweight with fresh mountain acidity. It's an eminently drinkable range.

Mathilde and her father Xavier Jacqueline.

Mathilde has a dream to plant a 0.5ha vineyard on land she has bought in Challière, just to the north. About 80% of their sales are to private customers, mainly at the tasting room in the Aix-les-Bains suburbs – the only one in Savoie that could be described as an urban

wine cellar. The remainder is sold to local restaurants and wine shops, with no exports at present. Mathilde's younger sister Justine has done sommelier studies and worked in wine shops as well as in the family vineyards – she is joining the family business with plans to develop the wine tourism side. With ambitious Mathilde taking on the leadership, helped by a steadying hand from Xavier, this estate deserves wider recognition.

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Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 6ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles
Visits: Tasting room

Jongieux

From the Chambéry direction, the 2km Tunnel du Chat takes you into an entirely different world of Savoie wine – indeed, even if approaching from Bugey across the Rhône or from Chautagne to the north, once you are in the Jongieux vineyards, the landscape changes. The vineyards lie on very steep slopes below the rocky Mont de la Charvaz, an extension of the Mont du Chat. But this area of hills, with the Rhône river flowing below, seems far away from the snow-capped peaks of the Mont Blanc ranges. It is peaceful too, nowhere near Savoie's main industrial valleys. The Jongieux area and to the south around Lac d'Aiguebelette and the town of St-Genix-sur-Guiers is also known as the Avant-Pays Savoyard, geologically the

forelands of Savoie, and historically referred to as the Petit-Bugey Savoyard.

From the 19th century, wines from the Jongieux area were delivered to the restaurants and hotels in the thriving spa town of Aix-les-Bains or as far as Chambéry. And until the 1930s, the grandfathers or great-grandfathers of at least four of the producers profiled here would take wine in barrels on a cart pulled by a horse or oxen over the perilously steep and winding Col du Chat pass. Pilgrims continue to walk through this area on one of the Camino de Santiago routes. Known in French as the Chemin de St-Jacques de Compostelle, the pilgrims are commemorated at the St-Romain chapel, built in 1995 on the site of an older one on the instigation of a village association, led by Raymond Barlet (of La Cave du Prieuré); it is well worth going up there for an overview of the Jongieux vineyard area. The landscape of Marestel and Jongieux has been a French protected environmental site since 2010.

Today there are around 300ha of vineyards in this area, providing about 15% of Savoie's wine production. More than half lie in the commune of Jongieux itself, but there are also vineyards eligible for the cru Jongieux – for Jacquère and also for reds – in the nearby villages of Lucey, Billième, St-Jean-de-Chevelu, and around the little town of Yenne. Many of the vineyards are in sight of the Rhône, with bridges in Yenne and Lucey over to Bugey, and they stretch from about 300m up to 450m. The Rhône moderates the temperatures here; there is also less rain than in other areas. In the 1970s much Jacquère and Gamay was planted, but some of the lesser quality slopes have been taken out of the AOC Savoie, so producers with these vineyards now have no choice but to label as IGP Vin des Allobroges. In recent years, Altesse has taken a more prominent role, along with Mondeuse.

Two of the four Roussette de Savoie crus are here: the small Monthoux cru in St-Jean-de-Chevelu and the larger, more famous Marestel cru with about 30ha above Jongieux. Pronounced without the 's' in the middle, Marestel (named after the aristocratic Mareste family, owners at one time of both Château de Lucey and Château de la Mar) and the prolongation of the slope into Lucey is likely to have

been where Altesse was first planted. A classic south-southwest-facing vineyard slope, with a mixture of clay-limestone and glacial moraine, its higher slopes had been abandoned after phylloxera. Prompted by a terrible storm on 11 July 1995, help was given to the vignerons of Jongieux to rework the slope to make it more stable and a programme of new plantings, higher up, reaching 400–450m, was carried out by several vignerons. Once these were established, a restaurateur was encouraged to restore an old vineyard house and in 2005 Les Morainières was born, the only restaurant in Savoie that is right in the middle of the vineyards; it now has two Michelin stars.

Jongieux vineyards below the Chapelle St-Romain.

Although there are about 25ha of vines in the village of St-Jean-de-Chevelu, in a typical year less than 6ha is Altesse for Roussette de Savoie Monthoux: about half is made by the négociant Jean Perrier et Fils and most of the rest by Vins Million Rousseau, profiled below. A new organic Monthoux vineyard of 0.6ha has been planted jointly by

Matthieu Goury and Nicolas Ferrand, which should give a first vintage in 2019.

There has never been a wine co-operative in the Jongieux area, although one producer belongs to the Cave de Chautagne. The only remaining négociant here is Vins Perret; large négociants elsewhere in Savoie buy in grapes from Jongieux too. Family-owned estates here built up their areas from the 1990s and there are several today that are larger than average for Savoie, the most prominent in terms of sales outside the area and/or quality are profiled here.

To the south, it is worth visiting the pretty Lac d'Aiguebelette, which has several beach areas. Nearby, outside St-Genix-sur-Guiers, is Domaine Demeure-Pinet, with 9ha of hillside vineyards planted with local and international varieties for a range of simple, fruity wines sold under IGP Vin des Allobroges and exporting a little to the US.

Domaine Eugène Carrel et Fils

From 2007 these were some of the first Savoie wines to be regularly on sale in the US. Today, about 60,000 bottles wing their way over each year, more than half of it a predominantly Gamay rosé, with a touch of Mondeuse; Jacquère is in demand too. Exports (also to various European countries and China) account for 36% of the domaine's sales, with 15% sold at the tasting room, 15% unlabelled to a négociant and the rest via wholesalers or direct. My first encounter with the wines of Eugène Carrel was in the 1990s when my favourite (sadly closed) local Alpine restaurant, La Ferme de Lormay, always served a small glass of Eugène Carrel's Jongieux Blanc (Jacquère) as a welcome drink, together with slices of home-smoked *saucisson* – the pairing delighted everyone.

Although there were vineyards in the family earlier, it was Olivier Carrel's grandfather, Célestin, who created the family farm after he returned from Germany where he was a prisoner of war. When his son Eugène joined him in the late 1960s the farm comprised pastures, crops, 20 cows and a few vines, notably one *journeau* (an old measure of the area of land able to be ploughed with oxen in a

day) on Marestel. In the 1970s, encouraged by his wife Paulette, Eugène gave up cows to focus on the vineyards, converting a stable to make wine. Initially the wines were sold to local négociants, but by the 1980s, the Carrels were bottling their own wines. As a child, their son Olivier was fascinated with the tractors and other vineyard machinery and started work with his parents from a very young age. After studying wine at Beaune, in 1994 Olivier officially joined the domaine when there was 10ha of vineyards and he has gradually increased the area with plots in Jongieux, Billième, Lucey, and in Bugey. There are about 6ha of Altesse (including nearly 2ha on Marestel), 3ha of Mondeuse and the rest split mainly between Gamay and Jacquère, with some Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Olivier Carrel outside his tasting room.

With the large area of vineyards on steep slopes, working organically would be out of the question, thinks Olivier. For many years the vineyards have been grassed down, with herbicide used only below the vine rows and sprays used sustainably by paying close attention to the weather reports. About 20% is machine harvested (mainly Jacquère and the Gamay for rosé). Eugène built a new vinification cellar in the mid-1980s and today it is equipped mainly with stainless steel. Fermentations are with cultured yeast and – apart from riddling and disgorgement for sparkling wine (done by CMC) – everything is handled there. The estate has made traditional method sparkling wines for years and today produces about 40,000

bottles. Olivier's Crémant is 60% Jacquère with 20% each of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, it is off-dry with good vinosity and length.

The Carrels took on a small Bugey vineyard from a grower named Marcel Perrin, a friend of Eugène who worked until he was 82 – from this they make an attractive, lightly creamy, but fresh Chardonnay. As well as the ever-reliable, floral and fresh Jongieux Blanc there is a range of Altesse and Marestel wines, which can be a little overblown, especially when young, despite Oliver doing less malolactic than his father did. The top Marestel cuvée, Eugène Marc, is a single-parcel selection from a clay-rich partly-terraced plot, which retains humidity. Part-fermented in new 500-litre barrels, it marries spicy oak with fresh acidity and ripe, exotic fruit. The old-vine Prestige Jongieux Gamay is a reliable choice, made with whole bunches using semi-carbonic maceration. Mondeuse is improving, although I prefer the simple version to the oaked Allégro. Olivier works with three employees, one being his sister Nathalie, whose son is currently working with them as an apprentice. The solid range of good-value wines made here explains its export success.

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Vineyards: 24ha (including 1.5ha Bugey Chardonnay)
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine François et Eric Carrel/Domaine de la Rosière

Eric Carrel comes to life when visiting the vineyards – and specifically the steep slopes of the cru Marestel. He's a man of the land, following on from four previous generations of Carrels (no relation to Eugène Carrel et Fils), who were mixed farmers. His late father François made the leap to concentrating on vines in 1977 and started bottling wines in 1979. Eric remembers his grandfather Joseph, born in 1924, as a real wine lover too; he had planted 3ha of Altesse, Jacquère and Pinot Noir – a lot for that period.

When Eric joined the estate in 1993, apart from some small plantings on Marestel, it was almost all Jacquère and Gamay. There is only a little Jacquère now; Eric has retained the Gamay and planted more Altesse and Mondeuse. As well as nearly 2ha on the Marestel slope, Eric has 2ha of Altesse in Lucey. Part of Eric's Marestel vineyards are among the highest and steepest, planted *sur échalas*, with a tepee arrangement to support each vine. There is little soil so no need to use herbicide; they simply burn off any weeds. Elsewhere the vineyards are grassed down with weed-killing below the vine rows. Eric works with systemic sprays at the start of the season, keen to avoid use of copper during flowering, and later moves to Bordeaux mixture. Harvest is by hand, and for the highest areas of Marestel Eric warns only the bravest to come on that day. He encourages selection at the vine and then uses a sorting table at the cellar.

Eric Carrel in his vineyards at the bottom of the Marestel vineyard slope.

Neither whites nor reds are destemmed, except Pinot Noir; stainless steel is used for all the main wines; there is one special cuvée of Marestel in oak and Eric uses 400l and 600l barrels for Mondeuse. For whites malolactic is prevented when possible. The cellar is equipped for bottling and filtration, with CMC handling sparkling wine disgorgement.

While the reds show typical characteristics of the Jongieux area, and there's a pleasant sparkling wine made from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, it is the Altesse wines that stand out. The Roussette de Savoie from the Lucey vineyard is properly dry and mineral; the main Marestel cuvée, named La Maréte, combines ripeness with fresh acidity, and a touch of spice. The vines are deliberately stressed so that they don't produce too much sugar, even when harvested late – the aim is for an average of 13% alcohol with 3.5g/l of residual sugar. I haven't tasted the oak-fermented Cuvée Théa, but the 2015 L'Authentique, a late-harvest Marestel, was gorgeous. This is not always AOC, due to the high sugar levels, and comes from a lower part of the slope where noble rot forms most years, encouraged by the fog rolling in from the Rhône.

About 10% of production is exported to the US and Canada. A good half is sold in ski resorts and to regional restaurants and wine shops; there's about 20% sold through wholesalers and the same amount at the tasting room, which is in one of the former cow barns. Eric's daughter Théa is studying wine and loves working outdoors too, so it seems succession is assured.

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Vineyards: 15ha

Visits: Tasting room

Domaine Chevallier Bernard

From a vine-growing family in Jongieux, Chantal Chevallier met Jean-Pierre Bernard from Beaujolais during their wine studies in Beaune. Chantal worked as a vineyard consultant in Beaujolais while Jean-Pierre managed a négociant there. Chantal's parents Marcelle and Francis Chevallier had moved from mixed farming to specialize in vineyards in 1970 but sold all their wine in bulk to a négociant. By 1996, when Chantal and Jean-Pierre took over the estate, they had 8ha. The pair increased the vineyards to 12ha, but two years later the négociant stopped buying. They switched to selling their wine in bottle, with support from a different négociant, and gradually built up a customer base.

After their rocky start, this determined couple have step by step progressed every aspect of their estate. They built a modern vinification cellar in 2004, which was expanded in 2014. From 2004, they were certified for sustainable agriculture (with a now-defunct certification) and in 2016 they were the first Savoie estate to become HVE certified, though still use both conventional and organic sprays. Chantal does most of the work in the vineyards, while Jean-Pierre drives the tractor, does the wine deliveries and the office work. Roles are reversed during harvest, which is manual, with Jean-Pierre in the vineyards and Chantal in the cellar. She is fanatical about work in the vineyards, keeping very precise records, following weather forecasts, aerating the vines by leaf-plucking and carrying a magnifying glass in her pocket so she can examine the leaves for any sign of bugs, signalling the start of a problem. Chantal is adamant in her defence of sustainable, rather than organic, methods and says that the combination of such a rocky soil and the inclination of their vineyard slopes makes it too hard to stop herbicides entirely.

They have almost 2ha of Altesse, including 0.75ha on Marestel, with about 2.5ha of Mondeuse; the rest is split between Gamay and Jacquère with a little Pinot and Chardonnay, some grown in Billième,

the rest near the Jongieux winery. This is equipped with a pneumatic press, sorting table, mainly stainless steel with some fibreglass tanks and a few barrels for special cuvées of Marestel, Mondeuse and Pinot. No malolactic fermentation is used for whites; Gamay is handled as whole bunch; Mondeuse is partially destemmed. Their easy-drinking white Jongieux is made from high-yielding Jacquère, but with minimum 35-year-old vines it gives a decent concentration. At the many wine shows they sell at they tend to offer two vintages of Marestel to show the variations: generally this wine is properly dry and refreshing with a sweet-sour character, melding spice and exotic fruits. Chantal declared that 2015 was the first vintage she made a good Mondeuse; the relatively young average age of the vines means that warm vintages make all the difference to bringing out the fruit.

Exports to the US began in 2018 and an increasing proportion of wine is sold in France direct to private individuals. A little is still sold to the négociant Maison Vacher. In 2016, son Antoine joined his parents after wine studies at Mâcon, allowing this hard-working couple a little time to breathe – I predict this winery will climb steadily upwards.

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Vineyards: 13ha
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Domaine Dupasquier

Forgive my self-indulgence, but while writing this section (in April 2019), I have been sipping on a 2010 Roussette de Savoie and a 2010 Savoie Mondeuse, both from Domaine Dupasquier. These wines of nearly nine years old sum up the philosophy and essence of this estate. Noël Dupasquier wanted to prove that his wines could and should age to be appreciated, and held back vintages to sell to restaurants especially. His father, Antoine, who worked with his brother Marie-Louis, sold wine mainly in barrel as far away as Annecy, but also bottled a little wine in springtime and always retained a few bottles; and the tradition continues with the current generation, David and Véronique, Noël's son and daughter. Living in the delightfully-named hamlet of Aimavigne ('love the vine') below the Jongieux church, they can trace their family back to 1840. Eugène, Noël's grandfather, born at the end of the 19th century, planted some of the Altesse vines that the family still farm today.

From the age of 14, Noël worked with his father in the vineyards; he studied wine at college in La Motte Servolex and in 1973, with 4ha of vineyards, he took on running the wine estate – he remembers seeing the oxen and mules working in the vineyards. He and Marie-Jeanne, his wife, built up the estate to about 13ha by the turn of this century, planting in Jongieux and Lucey. In the 1980s the fermentation was still in oak, and although that changed, Noël always kept the *foudres* for ageing and simply wasn't interested in the trend in Savoie to make wines for quick sale and consumption. He tried and dismissed cultured yeasts as he felt they did not make wines to age, and avoided malolactic fermentation for whites.

Since 2008, David and Véronique have been at the helm, Véronique joining that year after an early career in banking. Noël and Marie-Jeanne are around to lend a hand, with Noël still striding up the very steep slopes to work the vineyards behind the winery. Today the family farm about 5ha of Altesse, of which 2ha is Marestel; 3.6ha of Jacquère and Chardonnay; 0.6ha Mondeuse Blanche, planted in 2007, and 5.8ha of reds, with slightly more Pinot Noir and Mondeuse than Gamay. They have always planted mass selections.

Marie-Jeanne and Noël often pour the wines at wine shows and in the tasting room; Véronique manages the communication and sales

overall. Although it has not changed their work one bit, official HVE certification from 2018 assists Véronique, who is frequently asked to explain why the estate is not run organically, despite their wines being made in a very natural way. For them, vineyard work has always been their priority – Noël remembers that they used to employ 20 people to help hoe out the weeds in early May and again in mid-July, and they still like to work the soil once a year. To stabilize the soil, from 1985 onwards they allowed the grass to grow naturally, and they use herbicide below the vine rows. Aerating the vine canopy is a priority to limit treatments, which are mainly sulphur and copper, though in extremis they use a chemical spray. Harvest is by hand and usually much later than others in Jongieux, as they look for very ripe grapes and stems (only young Mondeuse is destemmed) – a regular group of pickers returns for harvest with this friendly family.

David, now the winemaker, studied at Beaune, but has been in no rush to change anything. He installed a few stainless steel tanks alongside the fibreglass and cement ones and insulated the cellar. And the family gradually invested in new *foudres*, replacing those old ones which were really giving too much aeration – all the wines except Jacquère spend a few months or more in them. The wines are bottled in late summer and most of the range is not released for at least another year.

David and Véronique Dupasquier with their father Noël and some of their more recent foudres.

For years I have appreciated the Altesse, which is simply Roussette de Savoie, rather than the flagship cru Marestel, because it is more angular and the minerality comes to the fore, rather than opulent fruit. The first vintage of Mondeuse Blanche was 2011 and it improves with each vintage, being possibly the finest example, balancing acidity (often lacking in this grape) with a herbal character. In reds, I've always preferred the dark fruit of the Pinot Noir to the Gamay; the Mondeuse is silky smooth, yet with the necessary edge, and both Pinot and Mondeuse age supremely well for at least 5–10 years. An addition to the range from 2012 was La Gourmandise, a varying blend of Pinot Noir, Mondeuse and Gamay, put in old small oak barrels after blending, and allying acidulated forest fruit and mineral characters with well-structured tannins.

The estate sells less than 10% on export markets; most sales are direct to private customers at the tasting room or wine shows, with some to local restaurants and wine shops further afield. The new generation of natural wine lovers across the wine world adore the

Mondeuse especially, yet it is Marestel that is sought after by older French gourmets. For years the very top local restaurants, although listing few Savoie wines, featured several vintages of Domaine Dupasquier's Marestel, going back 20 years or more. Noël told me once that he thought it was best at around eight years in bottle, so a decade old, and I fully agree with him. At this age it begins to develop a honey and spiced apple character, while still retaining that streak of acidity, reminiscent in some ways of Loire Chenin Blancs, but lighter in alcohol. It is a wonderful match with good Beaufort cheese. Yet, on the few occasions I've tasted much older bottles, this wine always amazes in its ability to stay alive and evolve, providing a nectar for lovers of old white wines. David and Véronique have a huge responsibility in perpetuating the venerable wines of this estate.

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Map ref: A3
Vineyards: 15ha
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine Edmond Jacquin & Fils

The first Roussette de Savoie Marestel wines I tasted were from this estate in the early 1990s and Marestel has always been my favourite from the Jacquin range, alongside an always juicy Gamay Vieilles Vignes. Back then, the patriarch and founder of the winery, the jolly Edmond Jacquin, who died in 2010, was still there to pour the wines in the tasting room, while son Patrice was busy bringing modernity

into the cellars and Patrice's brother Jean-Pierre was usually out in the vineyards.

Patrice was the mayor of Jongieux from 2001 to 2014, during which time he was most proud to see through the classification of the Jongieux and Marestel vineyard areas under the strict French environmental code. He was also president of the Savoie/Haute-Savoie chamber of agriculture from 2013 to 2019. Patrice has overseen his family estate becoming the largest in Savoie, apart from those belonging to the négociants, and now his two sons, Ludovic and Steven, have joined the winery.

Patrice studied wine in Beaune and joined his father in the early 1980s when there were less than 10ha of vineyards; Jean-Pierre followed suit ten years later, gradually taking over the vineyard work, now together with Steven. In all, they farm about 12ha of Altesse (nearly 3ha on Marestel), 5ha of Jacquère, plus some Chardonnay, Aligoté and mixed Pinot Gris and Velteliner Rouge Précoce (Malvoisie) for whites; 9ha of Gamay, 4ha each of Pinot Noir and Mondeuse for reds. There are several parcels in Jongieux and Billième; in Yenne they have a single 7ha plot on a sandy and limestone hillside taken over in 2010. And in 2007 they leased the 5.3ha of vineyards, planted in the 1970s, surrounding the impressive 14th-century Château Bergin above St-Jean-de-Chevelu, a site with particularly good exposition and microclimate from the warming effect of the two nearby lakes.

The vineyards are managed sustainably with Patrice monitoring disease pressure through the regular climate bulletins, and in 2019 they are applying for the highest HVE level. For diversity, he has planted 5ha of walnut trees, worked organically. He is adamantly against machine harvesting, especially for Altesse and red grapes. In the winery, Patrice has been evolving methods since he started and by the 1990s the winery was technologically advanced compared to most in Savoie. He prefers whites with minimum residual sugar, but with fruit and floral character, and up to 30% noble rot in the Altesse. Today malolactic fermentation is rarely more than 40% to retain elegance. Reds are all destemmed with no sulphur added in the early stages, using conventional maceration for short periods, searching for

fruit without the exuberance of carbonic maceration. He tried *foudres* for reds, but now prefers to let the terroir express itself and shuns oak. Although the range has evolved over the years, especially with the addition of Château Bergin wines bottled separately, the stars for me have not changed. Jongieux (Jacquère) is always fresh and pleasant; Marestel remains a luscious choice, and while dry, has a sweet-sour character that makes it food-friendly; Malvoisie shows interesting spicy flavours. In reds, the Vieilles Vignes Gamay is a sure bet and the Mondeuse has improved.

Patrice Jacquin in the tasting room.

Patrice now has Ludovic to help on sales. He believes it's important to extend sales within France, as an insurance against world issues; exports remain below 5%. In 2013 a new tasting room was built, where the large range of wines is displayed and groups can be welcomed – this accounts for a quarter of sales. Patrice is keen to start building library stocks from the best years for Marestel, Pinot Noir and Mondeuse. Patrice's sons are inheriting a fine estate; it's up to them to take it to the next level in quality.

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Vineyards: 38ha
Visits: Tasting room

Château de Lucey

The wine estate of Château de Lucey achieves a rare combination of fairy-tale magic with down-to-earth common sense. The former comes from the history of this beautiful château and the latter from Christophe Martin, the man who, since 2010, has overseen bringing the vineyards and the wines to life. I have not met Christophe's boss, the owner of the château, M. Antoine de Galbert-Defforey, an art collector, but I salute him for giving this intelligent man a relatively free hand. The estate is distinguished not only for being the sole remaining agricultural business in Lucey, but also the only organic wine estate in the Jongieux area.

The history of the château, situated in a strategic position in Lucey on a rocky outcrop high above the river, goes back to the Middle Ages. In the 16th century the estate came into the hands of the Mareste family – the King of Sardinia stayed there in 1775 and is said to have drunk the wine from the vineyard slope above the château, called Les Altesses. After the Revolution, it eventually became the property of General Benoît de Boigne, whose family restored and improved the castle. It was purchased in 1917 by M. Jean-Baptiste Morel, an industrialist and great-grandfather of the current owner. M. de Galbert's mother, Nicole, now in her nineties, married M. Charles Defforey (whose family founded the Carrefour supermarket group) after the death of her first husband. They modernized the château and in 1992 planted 1.5ha of abandoned vineyard land in Lucey with Altesse; plantings of Mondeuse and Pinot Noir followed later.

For many years, the wine estate was managed by a vineyard owner who also belonged to the Cave de Chautagne. On a visit I made in 2003 the wines showed potential, but by the time the

manager left in 2009, the estate had been neglected for a few years. A Savoyard himself, Christophe Martin originally trained and worked as an industrial designer but, in his words, he recycled himself, studying wine in Chambéry. He then worked for over five years for various Savoie wine producers, including two in Jongieux. Christophe heard rumours that Château de Lucey was going to give up their vineyards, so he applied to manage them. The owners wanted to do something different from other local vignerons and Christophe proposed converting the vineyards to organics. He had little experience with organics, but the idea of reducing agricultural inputs to a minimum appealed and the owners gave him the green light to update all the vineyard equipment. When Christophe took over, the vines were over-vigorous and suffered badly from oidium, but within a couple of years, the yields had reduced and the vines were balanced, plus the environment was better to work in.

There are more than a dozen vineyard parcels, all in Lucey, mostly on a slope that is a prolongation of Marestel, having the same south-southwest exposition, and a similar soil mixture of glacial moraine and limestone scree, with clay in parts. There is 0.9ha of Mondeuse and the remainder is Altesse. A parcel of 0.6ha Pinot Noir is closer to the river, with associated humidity and frost problems, so quantities are usually limited. Christophe does not like biodynamics because he thinks it requires too many inputs and doesn't see proof that it works. Yet he is focused on every detail of how to manage the soil and the vine foliage in each plot. For example, he no longer ploughs in late autumn, but only in spring, since 2017 using a horse for three particularly difficult parcels. He keeps copper levels down to less than 1.5kg/ha by working hard to keep the vines aerated, controlling the foliage, and by taking care when spraying Bordeaux mixture to coat every leaf. Harvest is by hand with just ten people, taking it slowly over three weeks.

In the cellar, he is also non-interventionist, chaptalizing only the Mondeuse if needed and using modest levels of SO_2. Indigenous yeast for Altesse means that the fermentation can be very slow indeed; levels of malolactic vary with each cuvée and vintage. There are four distinctly different Roussette de Savoie cuvées, which are

released 2–3 years after harvest. L'Originel is from the more clay-rich, higher-yielding soils and represents 50% of production; aged only in stainless steel tank, it is exceedingly good value, dry, fine and stony. Pimpenan is aged half in barrels, including *demi-muids*, and Christophe is working to improve the balance, for example by reducing the lees stirring. The extraordinary, very steep 0.3ha vineyard of Les Altesses was planted in the year 2000 at a density of 10,000 vines per hectare, but until Christophe arrived it was 100% weed-killed, 'like a moonscape,' said Christophe. Today he lets the grass grow and in summer it is full of wild flowers – Christophe personally uses a strimmer to remove the weeds around the vines. The cuvée Les Altesses is unoaked and powerful, despite an early harvest, with exotic fruits predominating. And from 2015, Christophe launched the exuberant Chapitre 15, a concept of blending one or two parcels to express the most interesting from each vintage and then ageing in oak; Chapitre 16 is to be released in 2019 and was aged in a hexagonal concrete tank, with a horizontal egg inside, but Christophe is not convinced of the tank's merits.

Christophe Martin in the steep Les Altesses vineyard above Lucey and the Rhône river.

For the reds, the Pinot Noir is partly whole bunch, whereas the Mondeuse is mostly destemmed, with both having a traditional

maceration time of up to three weeks. Both reds show obvious purity of fruit, with the Mondeuse Sous le Sarrasin giving delicious spicy and deep fruit characters, aged half in oak for six months.

Christophe does everything: for the vineyards he only uses seasonal workers, and sometimes he has a part-time employee for sales at the tasting room and wine fairs. Direct sales account for 55%, a little is exported and the rest is sold to restaurants and shops. On Christophe's minimalist back label for his small volume of exuberant Altesse sparkling wine is a quote from the French poet and film director Jean Cocteau: '*Rien n'est plus sérieux que le plaisir*' or 'Nothing is more serious than pleasure'. Long may this fairy tale continue.

Château de Lucey
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Web: chateaudelucey.com
Contact: Christophe Martin
Map ref: A3
Vineyards: 6.75ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles
Visits: Tasting room weekdays; weekends by appointment

Château de la Mar

Château de la Mar lies at the bottom of the Marestel slope with its vineyards stretching upwards from the château grounds. The existing castle dates back to the 17th century, although it had been a stronghold from the 13th, and one of its owners was the Duc de Mareste. The château went through many owners and fell into disrepair by the late 20th century. From northern France, Jean-Paul Richard had sold his successful window-fitting business and was

looking for property to turn into luxurious bed and breakfast accommodation – in 2005 he found what he was looking for in Château de la Mar, even if it required extensive renovation. The vineyards all around the château had been farmed for many years by the Jeandet family and in the 1980s the wines had been sold under the château name; later the grapes were sold to négociants. In 2010 Jean-Paul took on the vineyards, along with Didier Jeandet to manage both them and the cellars. The winemaking is overseen from start to finish by Olivier Turlais of Oeno Conseil, and Jean-Paul started selling the wines in their new, smartly packaged bottles in 2013.

The vineyards have been extensively improved, grassed down and some replanted – most of the area is very steep and they are worked sustainably, with manual harvesting, generally earlier than other estates, to retain the freshness Jean-Paul is looking for. There is 5ha of Altesse within the Marestel cru, 0.9ha of Pinot Noir, 0.7ha of Mondeuse and a little area of Chardonnay, Jacquère and Altesse for Crémant. Some of the grapes are still sold to négociants. The cellars were re-equipped, adding smaller stainless steel tanks, refrigeration and oak barrels.

There are four Roussette de Savoie Marestel cuvées: three are single vineyard selections and Les Tourelles de la Mar is a less expensive blend of young vines with a touch of residual sugar. The single vineyard selections are made as dry as possible to be food-friendly, and they are now listed in many local Michelin-starred restaurants and exported too. Le Golliat is unoaked but spends a year on lees before bottling; Le Verney, from a parcel with older vines, has 30% vinified in oak with malolactic; and La Chapelle, the highest up the slope, is made 50% in oak and can show elegance and richness combined. My limited tasting of these wines has been mixed, consistently the best wine has been Le Verney. These Marestels are released late onto the market, which is no bad thing for Altesse, but I do wonder if the wine quality lives up to its price or the promise of the packaging – the sumptuous rooms may have taken up an unfair share of attention so far in this ambitious project.

Château de la Mar
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Contact: Jean-Paul Richard
Map ref: A3
Vineyards: 7ha
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Vins Million Rousseau

Xavier and his father Michel like nothing better than to welcome visitors to their small tasting room, opened in 1999, from where they sell one-third of their wines, alongside home-made génépi, marc de Savoie and other local liqueurs. The Million Rousseau family is the only vigneron in the hamlet of Monthoux, and they have been waving the flag for this Roussette de Savoie cru for four generations. Xavier's great-grandfather Charles, who made a little wine in what is referred to as the 'old cellar', saw the potential for supplying wine to the tourists visiting Aix-les-Bains and built a 'new cellar' in the early 1930s. After the Second World War, his son Marcel was a mixed farmer and then Michel, the third generation, stopped polyculture in the 1960s and started bottling wines.

Xavier studied wine in Beaune, did work experience in Beaujolais and with Domaine Delalex in Haute-Savoie, and joined his father in 1999. Gradually, father and son have built up the vineyard area and now have about 2ha each of Jacquère, Altesse (exclusively for Monthoux), Gamay and Mondeuse, alongside some Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Some of their vineyards are very steep, so they have also gradually been putting in tracks to make them easier to mechanize. Xavier does not believe it is feasible to go organic – he uses herbicide just below the vine rows. Harvest is always by hand.

Xavier Million Rousseau with his centenarian Mondeuse vines.

The new and old cellars were linked up some time ago and house a mixture of stainless steel and fibreglass tanks, able to handle small volumes. Each wine has its own recipe: indigenous yeasts are used for whites except Chardonnay and in reds only for Mondeuse; Jacquère has its touch of residual sugar; malolactic fermentation is avoided for whites except for two special cuvées, including an acacia-wood-aged Chardonnay. This estate made 10% traditional method sparkling wine before the Crémant de Savoie AOC appeared. As they had used mainly Chardonnay, they made the switch grudgingly and today toe the Crémant line with 40% each of Jacquère and Chardonnay, alongside 20% Altesse to make an easy-going wine with 8g/l *dosage*. Reds are part destemmed, with no oak ageing, and generally are better than the whites. This is a rare estate where you will find two rosés to compare: a Gamay pressed directly and a lovely copper-coloured dry Mondeuse, partially made *saignée*. While the red Gamay is pleasant, Mondeuse is the star, in particular a deep and structured old-vine selection, which is picked late and includes fruit from a few vines that exceed 110 years old.

There are two Roussette de Savoie Monthoux cuvées. I have only tasted one vintage of the Réserve Confidentielle, which comes from a small parcel, goes through malolactic and has an extra year on lees – a 2015 that was a little overblown. But the main Monthoux is consistently good, with minerality showing on the end. This lonely outpost in Monthoux remains an old-fashioned but competent little estate, where visitors can be sure of a lovely welcome.

Vins Million Rousseau
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Email: vinsmillionrousseau@orange.fr
Web: vinsmillionrousseau.fr
Contact: Xavier Million Rousseau
Map ref: B2
Vineyards: 9.5ha
Visits: Tasting room

Vins Perret/Domaine Saint-Romain

Since 1990, when the third generation, Nicolas Perret and his wife Véronique, took over, Vins Perret has developed into one of Savoie's largest négociants, buying from all the main Savoie crus and selling mainly to restaurants over the entire Rhône-Alpes region, with a few exports to the US. A more recent development, Perret's estate wines are from vineyards held in partnership with the Perrets' nephew, Pierre Roissard, and are sold under the name Domaine Saint-Romain. The wines are from nearly 80 parcels in the Jongieux area, with separate vinification cellars in Jongieux-le-Haut.

Nicolas' grandfather, also Nicolas, started the company in 1927, selling wine in barrel. His son Guy Perret planted vineyards in the 1950s, but these were later sold to Edmond Jacquin and Guy focused on the négociant side, being one of the earliest in the area to bottle wine. Nicolas studied at Beaune and in 1984 joined the family business and worked with his parents buying wine in bulk; he and Véronique dreamed of having their own vineyard. Beginning in 2008, through various opportunities, they built up their vineyard estate to its current size and developed a range of estate wines from the best grapes, with lesser grapes going into the négociant range. One of the best sites they have is the Coteau de Miribel in Billième, which is ideal for Altesse.

Domaine Saint-Romain has nearly 8ha of Altesse including just over 2ha on the cru Marestel, nearly 8ha each of Jacquère and Gamay, some of which is now IGP Vin des Allobroges, 3.3ha of Mondeuse and some Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Since taking over the vineyards, which are looked after by one of the former owners, Sylvain Chevallier, they have gradually made the farming more environmentally friendly, for a few years working the soil to encourage the roots to go down further, then grassing down, enabling them to use less herbicide than before; they now also use more organic-approved sprays. Having previously machine-harvested, from 2014 they returned to manual harvesting. Harvest is relatively late as they look for concentration in the grapes. For winemaking, although Pierre Roissard is in charge of the Jongieux cellar, they work very closely with CMC, especially over the harvest/fermentation period, to ensure they produce a range that is easy to sell within the Perret portfolio.

My main experience of tasting the négociant wines is in local mountain restaurants, where they generally show the typicity of their appellations; in the Domaine Saint-Romain range the whites are much better than the reds, but their initial up-front fruit declines rather quickly. Perhaps the best, although I have only tasted one vintage, is Le Coteau de Miribel Roussette de Savoie.

A handful of good Savoie vignerons sell part of their stock to Vins Perret in bottle to sell under the domaine names and you can find these, along with the main Perret ranges and wines from other French wine regions, in their shop outside Yenne.

Vins Perret/Domaine Saint-Romain
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Contact: Nicolas Perret
Map ref: A2

Vineyards: 30ha + purchased grapes
Visits: Tasting room/shop

La Cave du Prieuré

This winery seems to straddle tradition and modernity, and its wines have long been one of the more reliable buys in the ski resorts. About one-third is sold through wine wholesalers or direct to local restaurants and shops; at least a third is sold in the tasting room or at wine shows; about 20% goes to supermarkets; and a little is exported. The tasting room is situated in a 15th-century building that has been in this farming family for many generations and belonged to the Bishop of Belley; the family house and more 'modern' cellars adjoining were begun in the 18th century.

Today's estate was founded by the late Raymond Barlet, who changed from being a mixed farmer to solely having vineyards in 1973. His son Noël, who studied wine at Beaune, joined him in 1979 when the family had 8ha – Raymond managed the vineyards and passed the winemaking on to Noël when he was just 22 years old. Younger brother Pascal arrived in 1986 after commercial studies, work elsewhere and wine studies as a mature student in Beaune. From this time, they increased the vineyard area, reduced sales to négociants, and turned to selling in bottle, developing a local following at the tasting room and in ski resorts. Julien, Noël's son, joined them in 2005 and works on all sides. Noël officially retired at the end of 2018 – although in reality this changes nothing – and Pascal's son Simon will join in 2019, following a vintage at Cloudy Bay in New Zealand. He studied first at Mâcon and then in Changins, Switzerland, where he did a thesis on methods of eliminating herbicide in a large wine estate – tests on their own estate will start in 2019, though Pascal cannot envisage a conversion to organics yet.

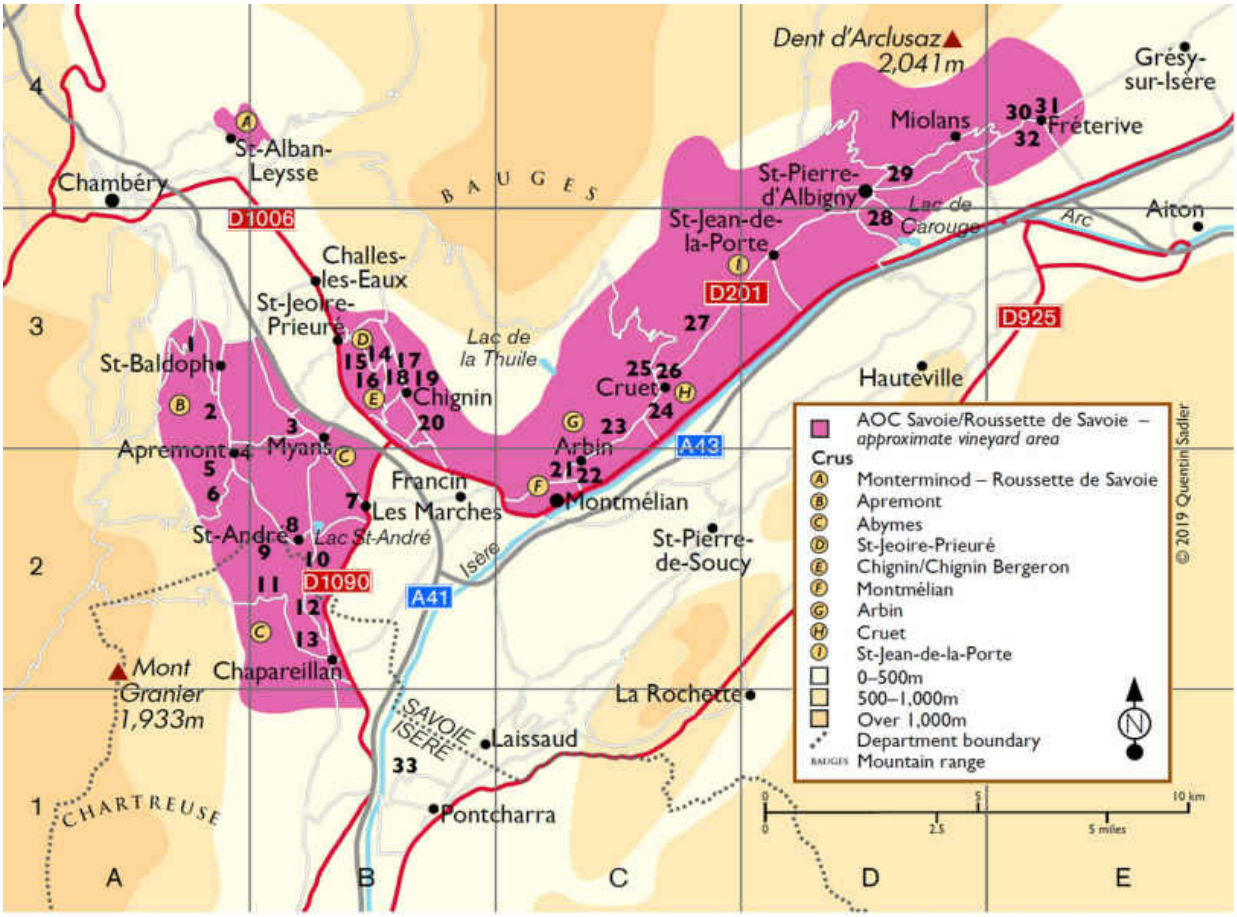
The vineyards have been grassed down since 1995 and include 2ha in Lucey, 5ha in Billième and the rest in Jongieux. There is about 8ha of Altesse (including 4ha on Marestel), 4ha each of Jacquère and Mondeuse, 11ha of Gamay and a little Pinot and Chardonnay. Harvest

is all by hand. The vinification cellar has been gradually updated and includes a large cooling system; barrels for special cuvées are purchased second-hand from Domaine Guigal in the northern Rhône.

As well as a Roussette de Savoie, there are three Marestel wines: as harvest approaches, they check the Marestel grapes as conditions change very fast and they look for, ideally, about 10% noble rot to give richness and concentration, but not too much alcohol. The main cuvée remains in stainless steel with no malolactic fermentation and is bottled in spring, although they urge customers to wait a while before drinking; La Favresse, from 50-year-old vines grown on a prime site in the middle of the hillside below the restaurant Les Morainières, ferments in stainless steel and then has a year in oak – two years after bottling, it can be excellent. But it's the reds I have always preferred: a juicy Gamay (whole bunch), fresh Pinot Noir (destemmed), and attractive Mondeuse (part destemmed), the stars are their special oaked cuvées, a tribute partly to the oak quality, perhaps. La Chapelle is a really Alpine-style old-vine Pinot/Gamay blend with a twist of spice from a year in four-year-old oak, which is used the previous year for the brooding and initially tannic La Compostelle, from 50-year-old Mondeuse. The handover to the next generation, cousins Julien and Simon, is under way under the watchful eyes of Pascal and Noël. With such a loyal local customer base, I doubt much will change very quickly.

La Cave du Prieuré
Le Haut, 73170 Jongieux
Tel: 04 79 44 02 22
Email: contact@caveduprieure.fr
Web: caveduprieure.fr
Contact: Pascal or Julien Barlet
Map ref: A2
Vineyards: 29ha
Visits: Tasting room

Pascal Barlet of La Cave du Prieuré with the Altesse harvest in Jongieux.



Producers – Apremont and Abymes

1 Mathieu Apffel
2 Le Cellier du Palais
3 Philippe & Sylvain Ravier
4 Maison Philippe Viallet
5 Domaine Dupraz
6 Domaine Jean Masson & Fils
7 Domaine du Château de la Violette
8 Jean Perrier & Fils
9 Domaine des 13 Lunes
10 Domaine Blard & Fils
11 Domaine Giachino
12 Domaine Labbé
13 Domaine de l'Epervière

Producers – Chignin

14 Pascal & Annick Quenard
15 Claude Quenard & Fils
16 Jean-François Quénard
17 Domaine Partagé/Gilles Berlioz
18 Denis & Didier Berthollier
19 Adrien Berlioz
20 André & Michel Quenard

Producers – Combe de Savoie

21 Domaine Louis Magnin
22 Domaine Fabien Trosset
23 Domaine Genoux
24 La Cave de Cruet
25 Maison Philippe Grisard
26 Domaine de l'Idylle
27 Cellier de la Baraterie
28 Domaine de Chevillard
29 Domaine Saint-Germain
30 Domaine Jean Vullien & Fils
31 Domaine Jean-Pierre Grisard & Fils

Producers – The Tarentaise and Maurienne valleys

32 Domaine des Ardoisières
33 L'Aitonnement

AROUND CHAMBÉRY AND THE COMBE DE SAVOIE

The heart of Savoie's wine region lies south and east of the department capital Chambéry, on the foothills of the Bauges and Chartreuse Prealpine mountain ranges. The snow-capped Alpine ranges of Belledonne and Mont Blanc are often in view from the vineyards, but it is the distinctive shape of Mont Granier, at the northern end of the Chartreuse, that has become a poster-child for Savoie's vineyards. The geology of the whole region is immensely complicated – it is worth looking back at the geological diagram here.

Below Mont Granier are the vineyards for the crus Apremont and Abymes, the most densely planted areas of Savoie, dominated by the Jacquère grape. The large Savoie négociants, including Maison Adrien Vacher and Maison Philippe Viallet, are based in this area; they also own vineyards and buy grapes from other areas. The valley extending southeast of Chambéry is known as the Cluse de Chambéry: as well as Apremont and Abymes it includes the slope below Château de Monterminod, with its own Roussette de Savoie cru, and Chignin, with its famous white wine, Chignin Bergeron. The other area covered here is the Combe de Savoie, with many fully south-facing slopes, producing the region's finest Mondeuse wines. The Combe offers the greatest diversity of Savoie wines, historically because the valley is home to many vine nurseries; and it is also where Savoie's largest wine co-operative, the Cave de Cruet, is located. All these areas have marked walking routes through the vineyards.

The city of Chambéry has an ancient history. Once the capital of the Duchy of Savoie, it has Italianate influences reminiscent of Turin, with shops and restaurants below its arched walkways. The cathedral is famous for its trompe l'oeil interior, and worth seeing also is the Fontaine des Eléphants, the four elephants (*sans cul*, 'without backsides') looking out from the base of a column bearing a statue of the city's benefactor General de Boigne, who travelled widely in India.

The main wines to expect

Vignerons in the Apremont area offer mainly cuvées of Apremont and/or Abymes, although most have small plantings of Altesse and red grapes and produce Crémant de Savoie too. Although their speciality is Chignin Bergeron, Chignin producers all make a much wider range of wines. Arbin vignerons are focused on Mondeuse, and most make Chignin Bergeron too. In the rest of the Combe de Savoie, the vignerons offer the widest ranges of wines, including from rare grape varieties.

Apremont and Abymes

Mont Granier dominates the scenery as well as the conversation about terroir in the two largest Savoie crus, Apremont and Abymes, designated exclusively for the Jacquère grape. The deadly landslide which occurred in 1248 is discussed here, but it is worth noting that the area on the southern flank of the Cluse de Chambéry was once marshlands: everyone lived up on the slopes, explaining the high casualty figures. Apremont is a small village and the origins of its name may be either 'bitter mountain' or 'after the mountain'. The vineyards eligible for the cru Apremont lie in St-Baldoph, in part of Les Marches (including the hamlet of St-André) and in most of Apremont itself. Confusingly, some vineyards within the Apremont village boundaries are designated for cru Abymes instead, along with Myans, part of Les Marches, and Chapareillan in Isère. There is no village named Abymes: Les Abymes de Myans denoted the area of rubble or scree left behind by the landslide, which reached the church of Myans. Even locally, most vignerons cannot indicate the boundary between the two crus, so there's no help for the rest of us. All the Abymes vineyards lie on the limestone scree, scattered with boulders,

some impressively large, left behind by the landslide; the Apremont vineyards are divided between this terroir and those hillside areas that escaped the landslide and are therefore on ancient soils of primarily glacial origin.

Before phylloxera, this area would have been planted predominantly with red grapes, mostly Mondeuse. Afterwards, it was realized that these cool hillsides, which face mainly east, were more suitable for white grapes, notably the late-ripening, high-yielding Jacquère variety. Today there are around 700ha of vineyards planted between the two areas, at altitudes between 280m and 500m, at least 80% planted with Jacquère. The fresh, floral and low alcohol white wines from the two crus have become the best-known wine style from Savoie, and Apremont is the most recognizable wine name in the ski areas. Altesse for Roussette de Savoie AOC, and other red and white varieties for Savoie AOC without a cru name, are also grown.

In 2007, following years of discussions, the Maison de la Vigne et du Vin was constructed in the middle of Apremont. It housed the local administrative wine bodies, the SRVS and the CIVS, and was intended as a showcase for Savoie wines, with an on-site wine shop. Ten years later, in January 2017, the building burnt to the ground, the fire blamed on an electrical fault, and many of the wine region's archives and records were lost in flames. The plan is for it to be rebuilt and reopen in 2020.

The main négociants are based here, but the former co-operative Le Vigneron Savoyard is now based in Chautagne. This area has numerous small vignerons, many with welcoming tasting rooms. One focal point for the visitor is the small Lac St-André, overlooked by vineyards and Mont Granier, where you can swim, walk or simply rest between tastings, and there is an excellent restaurant.

Mont Granier at dusk, with the boulder-strewn vineyards of Apremont below.

There are many vignerons that could not be profiled here, including the following: Domaine Perceval (web: domaine-perceval.fr) is a négociant and 30ha estate, which includes the vineyards of Château La Gentilhommière. The quality is mixed and owner Pascal Perceval is most renowned for his well-publicized wine stunts: one such is his Vin des Glaces. Overripe Jacquère grapes are pressed and the must transported by helicopter to a refuge on Mont Blanc at around 3,600m, where it freezes, losing two-thirds of its volume. A few weeks later it is brought down to the cellar to make the luscious sweet wine. Of the more traditional producers, both Domaine Marc Portaz and Domaine Richel, run by Christophe and Matthieu Richel, make consistently good Apremont that is exported to the US. Another small domaine is Romain Chamiot (tel: 06 84 85 76 45), who began his estate in 2006 and also exports his excellent Apremont to the US. Among the newcomers, I would cite Adrien Dacquin, who has been running an organic estate part-time for several years, but in 2018 went full-time, growing 3ha of mainly Jacquère, Chardonnay and Altesse with a few red grapes. He makes his wines naturally and was inspired by Jean-Yves Péron, to whom he sells some grapes, to make an orange wine.

Domaine des 13 Lunes

Four months after starting his estate in January 2017, the vineyards of Sylvain Liotard were massacred by three bouts of hard spring frost. The area where Sylvain's vines are located was the worst hit in Savoie and he was looking at a potential crop loss of 75%. Having taken on big loans, he applied for assistance from a foundation linked with the organic certification programme Alpes Contrôles and was awarded 10,000 euros. The foundation, which supports organic agricultural projects, was impressed by the fact that Sylvain helps other organic vignerons around him, for example lending them his dynamizer.

Running a wine estate is a second career for Sylvain. From Grenoble, he was a carpenter for 17 years, then retrained in agriculture and wine and found work for a cooper, restoring wine barrels. He also worked for Thomas Finot and others in the Rhône Valley and eventually found an opportunity to join vignerons Guy and Chantal Tournoud, with a view to taking over when they retired. The Tournouds had tried organics and this made it easier for Sylvain to convert; he applied jointly for organic conversion and to Demeter for biodynamics.

Sylvain has 17 parcels in Abymes and Apremont, with 1.8ha in each cru of Jacquère, along with another 0.7ha of both Mondeuse and Altesse and tiny plots of Gamay and Velteliner Rouge Précoce; most is on the Mont Granier soils. The planting density is high, but he uses a small tractor to work the vineyards as they are not too steep. Sylvain is keen to limit his carbon emissions but working the soil and using the biodynamic preparations are essential for him – he was attracted to these methods as the biodynamic vignerons he met seemed to be the most rigorous and he liked their wines best too. The Giachino family, close neighbours, have given him a lot of help and they make their biodynamic preparations together. Sylvain also makes lots of plant teas, especially horsetail and nettle, and is keen to keep his copper levels down. He works according to the moon phases (the domaine name means 'the 13 moons') but he thinks working with the planetary constellations is a step too far.

Sylvain Liotard with his dog, Milkshake, above his vineyards in Abymes.

When Sylvain took over the winery it included the equipment. He bought a cooling system, along with some unusual barrels with every other stave oak or acacia, made by a small artisanal cooper, Jérôme Fouailly, in Burgundy. Sylvain's aim is to add nothing to the wines but judicious amounts of sulphur: firstly at harvest to eliminate unwanted yeast, and later pre-bottling to avoid any risk of spoilage.

Sylvain makes six cuvées: four whites (all with malolactic) and two reds, including a blend in each colour – Ami-Amis with one-third each of Malvoisie, Altesse and Jacquère, and Le Coeur en Goguette, a Gamay/Mondeuse blend. There is a classic Apremont, and three single varietal wines with evocative names: Une Hirondelle Roussette de Savoie; the beautifully saline La Mise en Abymes (a theatrical expression); and La Nuit nous Appartient ('the night belongs to us') Mondeuse. Full of heart and intent, the wines show superb promise. Sylvain exported 80% of his first vintage to the US, Japan, Germany and elsewhere, as well as selling in Paris and locally.

Domaine des 13 Lunes
Chemin des Abymes, 38530 Chapareillan
Tel: 06 60 31 16 41
Email: liotardsylvain@gmail.com
Web: domainedes13lunes.com
Contact: Sylvain Liotard
Map ref: B2

Vineyards: 5.5ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles and Demeter
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Mathieu Apffel

Already with a fledging négociant business, in 2017 Mathieu Apffel was offered the chance to take over Domaine de Rouzan in St-Baldoph. Created in 1991, the estate belonged to Denis Fortin and Bernadette Bouvier, whose father Louis was one of the founders of Le Vigneron Savoyard. The vineyards were grassed down and had been worked sustainably, and there was a decent-sized winery.

Born in the Jura, Mathieu had no family wine background, but studied wine at Beaune, followed by an oenology diploma at Dijon and work experience with Domaine Pignier in the Jura. He then worked for several large estates, in Australia for Chapoutier, and in Burgundy at Domaine de l'Arlot and Domaine Laroche. Mathieu had often visited Savoie and was inspired by both the landscape and the vineyards. Between 2013 and 2015 he ran a domaine with Matthieu Goury and when they split, he remained in Savoie, working in the vineyards for several organic vignerons. These vignerons supplied him with grapes and somewhere to make wine from 2016. Mathieu took on his St-Baldoph cellars after the harvest in 2017 and that year vinified his own wines exclusively from organic purchased grapes.

To analyze the soil in his new Apremont vineyards, Mathieu Apffel dug this soil pit.

The vineyards are split into two areas, with 3ha in cru Apremont with Jacquère and a small area of Altesse, and 2ha on the other side of the valley in St-Alban-Leysse with 1ha Jacquère and about 0.5ha Altesse, plus some Gamay and Mondeuse. The Apremont vineyards are mainly close to the winery on the older soils of glacial origin, with vines averaging 30–40 years old, some close to 70 years old. He started conversion to organics from 2018, working the soils mostly by tractor, using a horse for the closely spaced vines. He may introduce biodynamics.

The winery has a mixture of stainless steel and fibreglass tanks and Mathieu is looking for a small barrel ageing cellar with more humidity. He aims to make rich and textured wine and is adamantly against any clarification – a back label on the whites states '*voluntairement troublé*', 'deliberately cloudy'; indeed, before bottling, some wines are agitated with the fine lees to both protect and 'feed' the wine. His wines are made with no added sulphur, unless deemed essential pre-bottling.

From the 2018 vintage he has made a white blend, Terroir de St-Alban, with about half each of Jacquère and Altesse – soon after bottling it tasted fresh, floral and mineral. An Apremont is named Léger et Ciselé, a name introduced in 2017 for a very natural-tasting Jacquère from Abymes. The Mondeuse Friand et Juteux is currently mainly from bought-in grapes: the 2017 version was a touch volatile, but had excellent tannic structure and juicy fruit; a newly bottled

2018, very intense and tannic. Mathieu sold his 2017 wines to wine shops in Paris, through natural wine trade shows and to wine shops and restaurants in Haute-Savoie. He exported a little to the Netherlands and Belgium, and has a potential buyer in the US. With some grape purchases too, he hopes to make nearly 50,000 bottles annually. There is a promising future here for this thoughtful, if perhaps over-ambitious, natural vigneron.

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Vineyards: 5ha + purchased grapes
Certification: Alpes Contrôles
Visits: Tasting room, by appointment

Domaine Blard & Fils

Even though Domaine Blard's vineyards lie in very favoured parts of Apremont on the scree of Mont Granier, it was the Pinot Noir and the Altesse from Jean-Noël Blard that first caught my attention. Jean-Noël was one of the earlier vignerons here to diversify into planting these varieties in the late 1990s, and they remain important for son Thomas, now working with his parents. He is keen to show the quality potential of Jacquère too, and in 2018 also took on 0.25ha of Mondeuse in Arbin, which he is ageing in old oak casks for two years. This range is smartly packaged, and the wines are deliberately made to go with food, rather than the better known, easy-drinking styles from this area.

Born in 1930, Pierre Blard, Jean-Noël's father, inherited vines from his father Pierre-Emile and gradually gave up his cows and crops to

focus solely on vineyards from 1973. Pierre sold a little in bottle, and once Jean-Noël joined in 1976, with a wine diploma from Beaune, they gradually took on more vineyards. Of Jean-Noël's three children, only Thomas showed interest in wine. He studied agronomy and worked for various estates, but wanted to work for himself, and realized there was a ready-made opportunity at home. In 2012 he officially joined his father after a couple of years as an employee and an inspiring six months studying wine at the university of Suze-la-Rousse.

There is about 5ha of Jacquère in Apremont and Abymes, much of it over 50 years old; 2.5ha Altesse, 1.5ha Pinot Noir, and a little Chardonnay, Malvoisie (Pinot Gris) and Mondeuse. The vineyards have been grassed down for many years and from 2016 the Blards began eliminating herbicide and using an *intercep*, and are now herbicide-free. Spray programmes are sustainable, using mainly Bordeaux mixture, and from 2019 Thomas has been working a small area completely organically, with help from the Giachinos and Brice Omont. Jean-Noël and his wife Dominique still work on the estate, along with one full-time employee and seasonal workers. Harvest is about one-third by hand. In the simple cellar, with a mixture of stainless steel and oak for various cuvées, they start with indigenous yeasts and add cultured yeast only if fermentation is stalling, as they want completely dry wines.

Jean-Noël Blard on his old tractor, assisted by son Thomas in ploughing their Apremont vineyards.

The Blards applauded the launch of Crémant de Savoie and in 2016 Thomas spent some time in Champagne to further his knowledge on the methodology. Their stony, lemony, leesy Brut Alpin Crémant includes 30% Chardonnay and 10% Pinot aged in oak with malolactic fermentation, blended with Jacquère, without malolactic. It spends 18–30 months *sur lattes*. The Jacquère wines are all bone dry and stony too. The cuvée most often seen outside the region is the somewhat fruitier Apremont Cuvée Thomas, although the most expressive cuvée is Lébraz. For me, the two Roussette de Savoie wines show better, including the very dry but rich Belemnite, with a touch of exotic fruit – there is no oak ageing, but it has malolactic fermentation and remains a year on lees. The Pinot Noir has for several years been one of the best Savoie examples: aged in old oak, the juicy fruit combines with slight smoky spiciness. Malvoisie is used for a *vin de paille* style. With about 60,000 bottles in a productive year, they sell increasing amounts to the US, Luxembourg and Sweden, exports representing 10–15%, and another 15% to Paris and other major French cities. The rest is sold in Savoie, mainly to restaurants and wine shops. This is an important and ever-improving estate.

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Vineyards: 10ha
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Le Cellier du Palais

Béatrice Bernard helped her father René in the vineyards from a young age and went on to study wine in Belleville, officially joining the business in 1991. Always active in the CIVS, Béatrice has quietly promoted the Savoie region and has exported Apremont to the US since the mid-2000s. It is, however, quiet René, at the time of writing in his early eighties, who she still defers to on matters concerning the vineyards. There are records of the Bernard family farming vines here since the 18th century, but Béatrice knows little before her grandfather's time. Léon Bernard farmed cereals and vines, and started some bottling in the 1960s, but he died suddenly in 1973. René had studied agriculture and worked in the transport sector, so in his mid-thirties he made the decision to begin a second career and expand the vineyards.

The winery is close to Apremont's distinctive Eglise St-Pierre, which features on the cover of this book with the backdrop of Mont Granier – the photo was taken from Béatrice's vineyards. René bought and planted various vineyard parcels, and the 6ha of Apremont vineyards lie above and below the cellars. Most is Jacquère, and there is 0.65ha Altesse and 0.4ha Chardonnay. Mainly extremely stony with very mixed glacial and limestone soils, the vineyards reach up to about 450m. For decades, René had also farmed a small and very sunny vineyard, with Jacquère and a little Mondeuse, belonging to a friend. Located on a plateau called La Ronzière, this is on the other side of the Isère at La Chapelle Blanche, within the IGP Vin des Allobroges zone. In 2005, when the friend died, the Bernards took over the vineyard, extended it to 2ha and planted Roussanne.

Béatrice Bernard poses in front of a painting of Savoie scenes by her great-uncle.

For many years, René and Béatrice have managed the vineyards sustainably, grassed down, except in very steep parcels, with herbicide used only below the vine rows. Until about 2017 René did most of the vineyard work, but now they have an employee to help and René lends a hand in the winery. The vinification cellar is in the old stables of the 19th-century house next door. Béatrice has gradually modernized the cellar, replacing large old oak vats with stainless steel vats, adding a heat-exchange system, and a pneumatic press. As the buildings extend down the hill she can work by gravity. Bottling is done at the winery unless there is a large batch.

Béatrice makes two Apremonts: both are characteristically delicate, stony and lemony, with extra length and depth for the Vieilles Vignes, from her grandfather's plantings; this has been consistently one of my favourite Apremonts for 15 years. These are made without malolactic fermentation, which is done in cooler years for the steely Roussette de Savoie. The Roussanne La Ronzière is much fresher and lighter than a typical Chignin Bergeron, with attractive apricot kernel notes. A fresh Méthode Traditionnelle wine is made from the Ronzière Jacquère and there is an ever-improving Mondeuse, made since 2006, which in a fine year like 2015 really sings. Exports are 15–20%, mainly to the US but also to Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland. Most of the rest is sold direct by Béatrice at the tasting room or at wine fairs, with some going through wholesalers. Béatrice has been very encouraging of other young women winemakers in Savoie, such as Julie Portaz of Domaine

de l'Epervière, motivated by many who say the feminine touch can be tasted through her wines.

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Vineyards: 8ha
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Domaine Dupraz

Jérémy Dupraz is organizing a celebration for the family vineyard's 140th anniversary to be held in July 2020. He is inviting the world to join him for Le Plus Grand Apéro du Monde au Montagne ('the biggest mountainside aperitif in the world') and several thousand people are already expected. Generations of the Dupraz family have excelled in shaking up the little world of Apremont, rather than leaving the drama to Mont Granier. Jérémy had worked in the vineyards as a child but did not originally plan to join the family estate. He worked in IT, and when based in London for a year tasted wines from all over the world, turning him into a passionate wine lover. The family have a long history of growing vines in Apremont, but the domaine in its current form was created in 2011, when Jérémy decided to join his father, Marc; in 2017 his younger brother Maxime, who had been working in computing in Grenoble, joined them while doing distance wine studies at Beaune.

When Louis Dupraz was born in 1880, his father François took over the old wine cellars of the Hospices de Chambéry at Le Reposoir. Louis' son Michel, a mixed farmer, bottled some of his wines in the

1950s, but from 1964 the family only farmed the vines and the cellars left family hands. In 1966, Michel's son, Robert Dupraz, was one of the founders and the first president of Le Vigneron Savoyard and was also president of a Savoie technical study group, focused on improving wine quality. After studies in Beaune, his son Marc joined the co-operative and from 1981 took on the role of winemaker. Since 2001, he has also been the mayor of Apremont. Jérémy began with 3.5ha of family vineyards and then Marc left the co-operative in 2014, bringing his 10ha with him, and the family took over the old Reposoir cellars once again to make their wines.

Three generations in favour of the wide-spaced lyre training for Jacquère: Robert, Marc and (on ground) Jérémy Dupraz.

The Dupraz vineyards are all in Apremont, mostly facing west and receiving the sun very early, mainly on glacial moraine, protected from the 1248 landslide by a series of small hills. In the late 1960s Jérémy's grandfather Robert had seen the lyre vine training system used in Valais, Switzerland, and in the Hautes-Côtes de Nuits, and he thought it would be ideal for better quality Jacquère, to combat disease problems and give extra ripeness, while maintaining reasonable yields. Today, about one-third of Domaine Dupraz plantings are on lyre with below 3,000 vines/ha and on other low-density systems. Marc's brother Jean, who remains a member of Le Vigneron Savoyard, has similar training systems in his vineyards, which are likely to become part of the domaine's holdings after his

retirement. The Savoie AOC rule book doesn't allow the low-density vineyards, except for existing plantings, but Jérémy and Marc, with the blessing of Robert (now in his nineties), are battling for a rule change. Marc was one of the first in Apremont to grass down his vineyards and manage them sustainably, and since 2018 the domaine has been officially in conversion to organics with some biodynamic trials. Apart from about 1ha each of Altesse and Mondeuse, the rest is Jacquère. One of the more densely planted plots was planted by great-great-grandfather Louis in 1907 with Jacquère, but it includes about 3% of the old variety Bia Blanc, from which Nicolas Gonin took cuttings for a CAAPG project to rehabilitate this variety (see here).

Marc is the main winemaker with support from his sons, and their aim is to work with ripe grapes picked as late as possible, with few interventions, to make wines with good ageing potential. Although there is some stainless steel they prefer concrete tanks and now have two egg tanks too. Both chaptalization and malolactic fermentation are avoided for most cuvées, and when possible, indigenous yeasts are used with low sulphur additions. There are four Apremonts: the biggest volume is Le Moulin, always a ripe style; Terres Blanches is a special selection from soils that have more marl, made in concrete tanks to give an even richer wine, but still fresh and mineral with some smokiness. Other wines are released at least a year after the vintage. Fermented in eggs, Phoenix is a special selection, not made every year; Montracul is from the centenarian vines and the 2016 had a delightful stony character with superb length. There is a well-structured Roussette de Savoie, named Plantée des Comtes, and a juicy Mondeuse. A little too often I have found a vegetal character in these wines, but it is a young estate and there is great potential. Currently about 10% is exported, mainly to the US and Belgium, about 20% is sold direct and the rest goes to restaurants and wine shops around France.

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Map ref: A2
Vineyards: 12.2ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Domaine de l'Epervière

Epervière is the name of a small yellow flower, the first to emerge from the mountain scree in springtime. This delicate image perfectly represents the young estate created by Julie Portaz and her father Gérard. Clément, Julie's grandfather, was a mixed farmer with about 2.5ha of vineyards, which Gérard continued, while working elsewhere in industry. They sold the wine in bulk, mainly to Maison Vacher, as Julie still does for about half of her production. Julie studied wine in Belleville, Beaujolais, and on her return home in 2008, Gérard bought another 2.5ha of vineyards to help establish the estate – technically retired, he lends Julie a big hand with the vineyard work. Julie's first harvest was 2012.

The vineyards are all on the Mont Granier scree, split between Apremont and Abymes, with Jacquère vines aged between 50 and 85 years old. Julie and Gérard have gradually worked the vineyards more environmentally, now grassing down every other row, working the soil in the other one and using weed-killer only below the vine rows. Gérard handles the spraying as sustainably as possible and they are testing out organics on a couple of parcels. The family wine cellars were re-equipped with temperature controlled tanks; Olivier Turlais of Oeno Conseil consults. The five Jacquère wines are distinctly different, despite using cultured yeast; influenced by Olivier, I suspect, Julie says that it is essential to find the right yeast that allows the juice and wine to express itself. Julie plays classical music in the vinification cellar, which she believes helps the yeast to multiply.

There are three Abymes and two Apremonts, all dry and exuding Alpine freshness, using malolactic fermentation occasionally on certain tanks. Two of the standouts are from her grandfather's original plantings: the Abymes Habanera (in homage to Bizet's *Carmen*) is a high vineyard with excellent exposition and the wine combines richness with a stony lemon character; Apremont Les Jumelles (meaning 'the twins', Julie's twin sister Marie helps a little on the estate) is from the historic Darbé area and is very dry, stony and crisp. Apremont Cuvée Eugenie is the one parcel that is hand harvested; named after the owner of the parcel, it is south facing and has very old vines, giving a broader, more honeyed wine. The Roussette de Savoie Phantasia is from young Altesse, planted since 2011. Julie sells a little wine into the US and is beginning to expand sales in France out of the Rhône-Alpes region – it is good to see a young estate focused on fine old-vine Jacquère.

Julie Portaz in front of her cellar, with Gaby.

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Vineyards: 5.5ha
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Domaine Giachino

The colourful cartoon labels on Domaine Giachino's wines feature a jolly character in different mountain situations. The character puts a smile on your face before you even open the bottle, and these organic wines follow through perfectly, tailor-made for pleasure. This has always been a young-at-heart, joyful estate, run by brothers Frédéric and David Giachino, who were joined in 2015 by Clément, Frédéric's son.

In 1988 Frédéric took over the 1.5ha farmed by his maternal grandfather, Marius Genton, in La Palud, a hamlet above Chapareillan, just off the road to the Col du Granier. Their grandparents were mixed farmers and Frédéric and David had regularly visited in their school holidays, helping with harvest. Marius owned land in the Savoie AOC, some of which was grazed by animals and some planted with Jacquère, but he was better known for making an array of spirits – his old wine cellar is said to have smelt of pastis. With the poor reputation that Jacquère had in the 1980s, Marius tried to put off Frédéric from starting his estate, but he went ahead anyway, doing a course in Beaune, where he met his friend and mentor Jacques Maillet.

For the first few years, Frédéric planted vineyards at the same time as working for Jean-François Thomassin at what became CMC. He gradually shrugged off the methods he was taught at college and

introduced *lutte raisonnée*, 'reasoned fight' or sustainable farming, grassing down the vineyards, using herbicide below the rows, and learning how to control insects by using predator insects. In Savoie he met up with the local vignerons who would later form the organic Pétavins group. By 2004 Frédéric, working with his wife Marie-Dominique (known by all as Marie-Do), had 7ha of vineyards, harvested by machine; he made a decent range of wines, which regularly won medals, but he was uninspired and felt the estate was going nowhere. He decided to convert to organics (certified in 2006) and invited his brother David to join. David had been working for several years as an oenologist for Oeno Conseil and from this point on the pair moved from strength to strength. Through the Pétavins, the Giachinos were close to Michel Grisard, and knew he wanted to find a successor to take on his vineyards in the Combe de Savoie. When Clément joined his father and uncle, having previously worked as a pastry chef (though he had often helped in the vineyards), they knew the time was right, and from 2015 agreed with Michel to rent his 6ha of vineyards and take on the Domaine Prieuré Saint-Christophe name.

The Giachinos' plantings in and around Chapareillan, Les Marches and Apremont include about 4ha of Jacquère – about 3ha in cru Abymes and 1ha in cru Apremont; they also grow Altesse, Mondeuse, Persan, Gamay and an array of rare grapes, including Verdesse, Mondeuse Blanche, Douce Noire and Etraire de la Dui, used in blends along with several other unofficial plantings – Joubertin and more Douce Noire were planted in 2018. The vineyards have been steadily converted from organics to biodynamics, using plant preparations made in a wooden dynamizer. Clément oversees the work at the Prieuré Saint-Christophe vineyards, located in Fréterive and Arbin for Mondeuse, and in Cruet for Altesse.

After converting to organics, their cellar practices, which David manages, evolved too. Although not working so extremely, the brothers were influenced by the natural winemaking methods practised by Jacques Maillet, who used their cellars for vinification from 2007 to 2013. Today they make their wines with indigenous yeasts, malolactic fermentation and a policy of low sulphur additions.

Their straightforward aim is always to make good wines, so if it's a difficult vintage, with some rot, then they will use SO_2 at the press, if not they wait until pre-bottling. They make an incredible array of expressions from Jacquère: a perfectly mineral Apremont; Primitif, a lower alcohol, very pure wine made with plenty of lees contact; the floral and slightly exotic Monfarina, which includes a little Mondeuse Blanche and Verdesse; Don Giachino, simply the most vibrant and balanced 100% Jacquère Crémant I have tasted; Giac' Bulles is an invigorating ancestral method sparkling Jacquère; and Marius et Simone is their answer to orange wine. Named for their grandparents, Marius et Simone shows light tannins and a stony fresh character, originally macerated for a few weeks in fibreglass, in 2018 (not yet tasted) they used part amphora and part barrique. There is an excellent Roussette de Savoie, as well as the Prieuré Saint-Christophe version, which has not yet reached the heights of Michel's best years. All the reds, including for Prieuré Saint-Christophe, are made using whole bunches for a semi-carbonic maceration. The Prieuré Saint-Christophe Mondeuse 2016 showed serous promise, aged in *demi-muids* as is, in part, the acidulated cherry Giachino Mondeuse. There is a vibrant blackberry-like Persan and two lighter, deliciously decadent blends: Ma Douce is based on Douce Noire with Persan and Mondeuse; and Frères Giac, IGP Isère Coteaux du Grésivaudan, is from Gamay, Syrah and L'Etraire de la Dui.

David, Clément and Frédéric Giachino in their Persan vineyard in Chapareillan.

The Giachinos sell 30% on export markets including the US and the UK; 30% direct or in the local area, and the rest through wine shops and organic specialists throughout France. Prices remain reasonable, with the Prieuré Saint-Christophe pair at a considerably higher level. Renowned for helping other vignerons converting to or working in organics and biodynamics, the Giachinos are generous with their knowledge and keen to share experiences. This family makes an extremely enjoyable range of wines. If you don't yet know them, you should.

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Map ref: B2
Vineyards: 15ha
Certification: Ecocert and Demeter
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Domaine Labbé

Alexandra and her cousin Jérôme Labbé's vineyards lie below Mont Granier on the path of its landslide and 80% are classified as Abymes; they have no Apremont vineyards, but they have a small amount of Mondeuse and Pinot, as well as Altesse and Chardonnay. Thanks to early success with a US agent, about 60% (35,000 bottles) of their production makes its way over for distribution across the country, and they also sell a little in Canada and Denmark. The rest is sold close to home in the Rhône-Alpes region, including direct from their tasting room.

The estate was founded by brothers Marc, father of Alexandra, and Roger, father of Jérôme, who had been brought up on a mixed farm, but moved to exclusively farming vines in 1975. The cousins, who took over in 2004, both studied wine at Belleville in Beaujolais, which shows through in the juicy reds they make, mainly from whole bunch fermentations. The cousins work on their own with just seasonal help in the vineyards and aim to keep prices down. Vineyards are worked as mechanically as possible: they are grassed down, and herbicide has been eliminated almost everywhere except on the very steepest rocky vineyards. They work the soil every few years and use an *intercep*, which Alexandra says gives a better root structure, more vigour and more aromatics in the wine. They use a sustainable approach for their spray programmes and share a harvesting machine as part of a CUMA, which they use for all the Jacquère.

The air-conditioned cellar was built in 1995, with a mixture of tanks, using heat-exchangers for cooling or heating as appropriate. In order to bring out the aromatic character of Abymes they believe the optimum fermentation temperature for the Jacquère is 16°C and at the start they will heat above this level to have plenty of yeast activity. They use CMC for filtration and analysis and with the CUMA share bottling facilities to allow them to bottle in small batches – this way they can keep the Abymes on lees to maintain freshness. From vines mainly planted in the 1970s and 1980s, the Abymes is a very well-made example with a stony character on the nose, only just dry, light and fresh, usually retaining some carbon dioxide. The label for the US is deliberately very traditional, whereas they have modernized it for France and other markets. The rosé, a Pinot/Mondeuse blend, is a pretty and fresh wine and of their reds the Mondeuse is particularly juicy. A late-harvest Altesse and a sparkling wine complete the range – the latter is now sold as Vin de France as Alexandra is very much against the Crémant restrictions and concept. These are good-value wines made by two very hard-working people.

Domaine Labbé

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Vineyards: 10ha
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Domaine Jean Masson et Fils

The first vigneron who really believed in the potential of making Jacquère wines to express terroir, to marry with a range of fine foods and to age well, was undoubtedly Jean-Claude Masson. He is an intense man in many senses: intensely proud, intensely focused and intensely passionate about the women in his life: his mother, the matriarch Maria, who worked all her adult life in the vineyards, and his wife, Marie-Noëlle, who works for the Chambéry town council and keeps him grounded, he says.

Jean-Claude's great-grandfather was called Jean, as were his grandfather and his father, and they all had vines and made wines in the cellar used today, dating from the early 1800s. Between the two world wars, Jean-Claude's grandfather, born in 1889, made around 100 *demi-muids* of mainly white wine, as well as some Mondeuse, the biggest volume of wine made in Apremont at the time. By 1945 he was bottling some of it, and Jean-Claude's father, born in 1930, had joined him direct from school. Maria came from a poor family in Entremont on the other side of the Col du Granier and pushed her husband to expand and plant more vineyards. Jean did the winemaking, selling 60% in bottle, and Maria tasted with him, giving her opinions – their Apremont had a good reputation early on. For Jean-Claude, it was never in question that he would join the estate, even if the work was hard. He remembers the horse they used for working the vines and the Massey Ferguson tractor they bought at the end of the 1960s. He studied wine at Beaune, which, he says, opened his eyes to a wider wine world.

Jean-Claude began on the estate with his father officially in 1985, when they had 4.5ha of vines, and they worked together until Jean was about 70. At the time of writing, Jean is sadly fading, but his memory lives on in the cuvée Jean-Claude created in his honour, Collection Jean Masson, made each year since Jean was 65, and originally selected with him. Jean made three Apremont cuvées for different markets, but it was Jean-Claude who began with terroir selections from the late 1980s.

Proud of his heritage, Jean-Claude Masson makes a vast range of Apremont cuvées.

Mostly planted in the 1980s or earlier, the many different vineyard parcels are all on the Mont Granier scree, some on very dramatic slopes across Apremont, with a little in Les Marches. Jean-Claude grassed down the vineyards earlier than most local vignerons, working the soil when needed and until recently using herbicide below the vine rows – that is gradually being eliminated. Contrary to what many write about him, Jean-Claude is adamantly against working organically. He would rather use small amounts of chemical treatments less often than use organic sprays, especially for the problem of *flavescence dorée*. What is key for Jean-Claude is to work with low yields and maximum ripeness. His maxim is when the least ripe grapes are ripe, he will start picking. Everything is hand harvested and if required he does several passes through the vineyards.

In the winery, Jean-Claude seeks to make wines with no make-up to bring out the limestone and stony character, along with a crystalline purity. For years he has kept all the parcels separate, using indigenous yeasts whenever he can, but not excluding cultured yeast if he has a problem. He still uses an old Vaslin press with chains, but he might buy a pneumatic one day… He likes to oxidize the juice to absorb the sulphur he puts in at the start (to control the yeasts). Since the 1990s he has used stainless steel tanks and never wants to go back to oak barrels. Today Jean-Claude keeps all the wine on lees, stirring them if he thinks it's needed.

If you ski in the Haute-Savoie resorts, look out for Jean-Claude's entry-level wine that he blends and sells to négociants, with an old-fashioned label of Mont Granier – it's my go-to ski wine, which expresses simple fruit and freshness. Apart from that there is a series of terroir selections, starting with the pair in homage to his two children – Lisa, citrussy and mineral from a more limestone site, and Nicolas, with rounder, more exotic fruit from a warmer, stonier soil. La Déchirée has what looks like a torn-off label, to represent a steep vineyard, almost torn off the slope, and this is Jean-Claude's choice 'if he has to drink his own wines' – it always has a steely streak of acidity. The cuvées are too many to mention, but others include the richer Collection Jean Masson; the elegant Dames Bise, from a steep vineyard bought in partnership with Sophie Bise, former owner and chef of the Auberge du Père Bise in Talloires, near Annecy; the intense and honeyed Coeur d'Apremont; and the fine La Centenaire. From a small Altesse parcel there is a lone Roussette de Savoie. Jean-Claude has never made reds, citing that it is the wrong terroir.

Jean-Claude stubbornly refused to put vintages on his labels for years, although export markets increasingly insist on them. In his cellar I've sometimes tasted extraordinary Apremonts with a decade or two of age, and at home, Cuvée Lisa or Nicolas have tasted wonderful at five years old. Larger-than-life Jean-Claude makes a superb range of Apremont, no question. Up to a quarter is exported, mainly to the US, and most of the rest is sold to restaurants both locally and beyond. Daughter Lisa has moved away; son Nicolas, a musician and poet, works part-time for the domaine, handling the

computer work and communications along with some vineyard work, but this isn't what he's cut out for. Jean-Claude has employed Antoine Rouvier to help him, particularly on the commercial side, and one hopes Jean-Claude himself can continue for many years.

Domaine Jean Masson et Fils
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Web: domainemasson.com
Contact: Jean-Claude Masson
Map ref: A2
Vineyards: 10ha
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Jean Perrier et Fils

At the time of writing in his mid-seventies and still president of the company, in the 1990s Gilbert Perrier ensured this family wine producer was one of the most active in the region, fighting to keep the quality and image of Savoie wines high. He has been a stalwart of the CIVS too. In more recent years, with support especially from his youngest son, Gilles, he has held together this illustrious family estate and négociant through some very tough times, when the business has shrunk from its heyday. Gilbert's great vision was to realize that the availability of vineyard land in Savoie could become a challenge. In 1983 he began to expand the family holdings in Apremont and Abymes to provide a future for his three sons. From the 2000s, to provide more security, Gilbert bought land in other Savoie AOCs and their own vineyard holdings today supply wines for 70% of the sales of the business.

Gilbert has always been the consummate salesman, achieving listings in top local restaurants including those in the ski resorts. This

talent was certainly passed down through the family. The dynasty began with Catherin Perrier, who started making wines in St-André in 1853; his son Claude-Emile replanted vines after phylloxera and in 1911 built the cellar in the middle of St-André, becoming a well-known wine trader, personally delivering barrels on his horse and cart to local cafés and restaurants. His son Jean, Gilbert's grandfather, gave his name to the business, and then after the Second World War, Gilbert's father, Jean-Victor, was one of the earliest Savoie vignerons to bottle some of his own wine. In 1953 Jean-Victor began the négociant business, with Gilbert joining in 1964, and Gilbert's three sons coming into the business from 1983 to 1993. On the négociant side, originally only finished wine was brought to them to bottle; from 1992 onwards the Perriers would take a mobile bottling line to the properties to bottle there. Things changed from the early 2000s, when the company switched to buying more grapes than wine.

As well as vineyards in Apremont and Abymes, they have nearly 5ha of Chignin Bergeron, a further 3ha for cru Chignin, a small area of Mondeuse in Arbin, and from 2002 a significant part of the Roussette de Savoie cru Monterminod, along with the sole rights to use Château de Monterminod on the label – there is now 5.5ha (1ha newly planted in 2017); further afield near Jongieux they own 3ha in the Roussette de Savoie cru Monthoux and some vineyards in Lucey.

There are three production sites. The vinification cellar for estate grapes is in the middle of the St-André vineyards, near the original family home, and is overseen by Gilbert's eldest son Philippe, aided by his nephew, Alexandre, son of Christophe; Alexandre is also in charge of the estate vineyards. The older winery in St-André is currently where grapes and wines purchased for the négociant are handled, overseen by son Christophe, and also has the bottling line. At the main office on a trading estate in Les Marches is the bottle storage and distribution offices. Sales, managed by Gilles, are all over France, although the local Rhône-Alpes tourism trade remains important with 60%; 10% is exported to a wide range of countries, including Canada, the US, the UK and Japan.

Among their several wine ranges, an inexpensive trio named Pure, in Bordeaux-style bottles, is aimed at a new market: the Gamay rosé

is doing well for exports. The reliable Cuvée Gastronomie is mainly from estate fruit and is the most widely available range in Savoie restaurants and on export markets, with each wine showing the characteristics of both grape variety and cru really well. A Crémant includes 10% Chardonnay with Jacquère, aged for 18 months *sur lattes*. The top level range is a big step up and includes Chignin Bergeron Fleur de Roussanne, Monthoux Fleur d'Altesse, Château de Monterminod Roussette de Savoie and the partly oak-aged Arbin Mondeuse Graine de Terroir, all but the last entirely from estate fruit. Tastings of these over the last decade have always revealed the lower yields and extra care, translating into better intensity, varietal character and ability to age – the standout being the fine Château de Monterminod. Alexandre, who joined the family team in 2015, seems destined to inherit the business and I hope that he will drive this venerable family house ever upwards.

The winery built in 1911 by Claude-Emile Perrier in St-Andre.

Jean Perrier et Fils

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Email: info@vines-perrier.com
Web: vins-perrier.com
Contact: Gilles Perrier
Map ref: /B2
Vineyards: 62ha + purchased grapes
Visits: Tasting room in St-André, preferably by appointment

Philippe et Sylvain Ravier

Producing about one quarter of a million bottles, in 2014 Philippe and his son Sylvain Ravier invested in building a large new winery, which would not be out of place in the New World – it is Sylvain's pride and joy. Sylvain studied wine in Belleville followed by work experience in Chablis; he joined the estate officially from 2011, after working alongside his parents for a few years. The Raviers own one of the largest single estates in this area, having steadily built up the vineyards.

Their previous premises had been an old cheese co-operative, where Philippe's father first made wine. Philippe started in 1982 with 3ha, mainly in Abymes, and today the family farms about 20ha of Jacquère, 8ha Bergeron, 4ha each of Chardonnay and Altesse, along with 3ha Mondeuse, 2ha Gamay and a small area of Pinot Noir. In the mid-1980s Philippe cleared an area of steep land on the borders of Francin and Montmélian to plant vineyards in the cru Chignin Bergeron. Much was planted *sur échalas* and remains labour-intensive, but they have also been able to extend, by planting Mondeuse. The remainder of their red grapes are in Fréterive and St-Jean-de-la-Porte. The white varieties are partly close to the winery in Myans, and partly in Les Marches, close to Lac St-André on the scree of Mont Granier, notably the 3ha Clos St-André. The vineyards are about half grassed down and half ploughed, with weed-killer used under the vine rows, except on the steepest slopes where herbicide is used throughout the vineyard. They are trialling methods to eliminate

this. Overall, they aim to be as mechanized as possible, have their own machine harvester, used for everything except the steepest Mondeuse and Bergeron sites, and they try to achieve maximum permitted grape yields, needing volume to pay for the winery.

The new winery was built in an environmentally sound way with rainfall from the roof recuperated. A pneumatic press was brought from the old winery, and transfer of the grapes is now extremely gentle, there is a sorting table and new thermo-regulated stainless steel tanks of various sizes. Sylvain uses no sulphites at the press and likes to oxidize the juice and saturate the tanks with carbon dioxide; he uses cultured yeasts and Oeno Conseil do a rough filtration early in the process. For whites, Sylvain aims for maximum lees contact in tank with regular stirring. There is a small oak cellar and one concrete egg too, and the Raviers are equipped for bottling.

This is a very competent wine range with the hallmarks of Savoie freshness and floral character showing through in many whites, though they lack some depth. Standouts are two special cuvées bottled later: the vineyard selection Apremont Clos St-André, which spends at least nine months on lees, and the very well balanced Chignin Bergeron Les Amandiers selected from the best tanks and with malolactic. The reds are technically faultless, enjoyable wines, showing the characteristic fruit of their varieties and well-handled oak in certain cuvées. They sell about 10% in the beautiful tasting room, managed by Philippe and his wife Claudine. If you visit, you will also see the experimental vineyard outside, under the auspices of the CAAPG, which consists of different Jacquère clones, alongside many other varieties. With about 10% exports, notably to Japan and the US, the Raviers are fast becoming worldwide standard-bearers for good-value Savoie wines.

The view of Mont Granier from the round window in Philippe and Sylvain Ravier's modern winery.

Philippe et Sylvain Ravier
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Web: vinsravier.fr
Contact: Sylvain Ravier
Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 40ha
Visits: Tasting room

Maison Adrien Vacher

Maison Adrien Vacher is one of the two largest négociants and distribution companies in Savoie, family-owned apart from one-third of Vacher Distribution, which has been owned by Le Vigneron Savoyard since 2011. Charles-Henri Gayet, the director general of Maison Vacher, took over and expanded the vineyards of the Domaine du Château de la Violette in 2002. In 2018, the company added

another 13ha by leasing the vineyards of Chignin producer Charles Gonnet, whose wines they already distributed.

Charles-Henri's father Henri was an electrician from St-Pierre-d'Albigny. When he met his wife, Josette, and asked her father, Adrien Vacher, for permission to marry, the response was, 'If you marry my daughter, you have to marry my business too.' And so he did, as Adrien Vacher died only five years after founding his wine company in St-André in 1950. Henri Gayet was self-taught, and the business involved buying finished wine, bottling it and selling it. Charles-Henri joined in 1978 and took over in 1989. The dynasty continues with daughter Pauline, in charge of the commercial side, including exports. From early this century, the company began buying grapes mainly from Apremont and Abymes and vinifying their own white wines; they continue to buy other wines in bulk following Charles-Henri's extensive cellar tastings early each year and are the largest buyers of Savoie wine in bulk. Nearly two million bottles are sold under the Maison Vacher name, with various brands, in addition to wines from la Violette (about 135,000 bottles) and Charles Gonnet (about 100,000 bottles). Vacher Distribution sells another million bottles, including the wines from Le Vigneron Savoyard and a large range of individual vignerons' wines, under their own names.

The main production site on an industrial estate includes a modern winery, high-speed bottling plant and warehouse, with the winemaking overseen by Thierry Gabert, who joined Maison Vacher in 1993 from the Montmélian co-operative; they work with Oeno Conseil too. The aim is to produce fruit-driven, easy-drinking wines, which express a Savoyard character. Daniel Fustinoni was the well-known owner and winemaker of Château de la Violette in cru Abymes before Charles-Henri took over. On an almost flat, very sunny site, with much clay at the end of the Mont Granier scree, the original 6ha of vineyards are not only Jacquère but also Altesse, Gamay and Mondeuse. Charles-Henri owned 1ha of family vineyards in Apremont and has leased other nearby vineyards to expand the domaine to 20ha. They are farmed sustainably, using weed-killer under the vine rows and limited doses of systemic sprays. Nicolas Burdin has been in charge of the domaine side since 2009 – he studied wine in Mâcon

and worked in Switzerland and Australia before returning to Savoie, where he grew up. Everything for the Château de la Violette range is handled at the château's cellars, including bottling – it's an old-fashioned, but temperature-controlled winery; Nicolas leaves whites on lees until bottling and makes reds with semi-carbonic maceration. Altesse and Gamay are the more successful wines; there's also a Chignin Bergeron and a Mondeuse selection named Sous Les Cèdres, in homage to the big cedar tree in the garden of the fortified château.

Charles-Henri Gayet above the vineyards of Château de la Violette.

Adrien Vacher produces about 200 different wines. Much is sold through the Super U supermarket group, and to mini-supermarkets and delicatessens in the ski resorts. La Sasson is the name found in restaurants, and the same wines under the Cuvée Reservée label are sold elsewhere, including often for exports. These account for about 2%, important markets being the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, the US and Japan. In 2017 I tasted several wines blind and was surprised to find that across the varieties and crus, each time La Sasson was more interesting than the equivalent wine from Domaine du Château

de la Violette, and I can only presume that this is an issue with winemaking equipment or technique. The Charles Gonnet wines have always been a reliable supermarket buy. Charles-Henri Gayet has worked hard for his region, representing it as president of the CIVS for several three-year stints; I sincerely hope that as such an important distributor, the company improves the individuality and quality of its wines to encourage more exports in the future.

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Email: vacherdistribution@adrien-vacher.fr
Web: adrien-vacher.fr
Contact: Charles-Henri Gayet or Pauline Lozano
Map ref: B2
Vineyards: 33ha + purchased grapes
Visits: Tasting room at Château de la Violette, Les Marches

Maison Philippe Viallet

Every region has a Philippe Viallet. The second son of modest vignerons, Marcel and Yvonne Viallet, Philippe became a visionary entrepreneur and could be named Monsieur Acquisition. This is no bad thing when the wines from the once famous, then ailing, estates that Philippe has taken over have shown wine quality improvements after a few vintages. But his purchases of substantial estates are criticized as potentially depriving younger vignerons from setting up or increasing their holdings. In fairness to Philippe, the SAFER, the government agency that controls agricultural land transactions, chose not to intervene. Philippe also owns a wine estate in the Jura.

The Viallet family were from the Maurienne Valley but in the mid-20th century moved close to Chambéry to farm cows. Marcel initially worked for vine nurseries, including for the Bouvet family in Fréterive,

and then in 1965 moved to Apremont to run his own nursery and establish a domaine with 2.5ha of vines. Following a serious accident Marcel died in 1982, aged 56, leaving the estate to be run by his elder son. Pierre Viallet is an important figure today in Savoie as a vigneron and as a key player in the CIVS, having been its president for several three-year stints. In 1985, Philippe joined the domaine after wine studies at Beaune and soon began the négociant business. In 1998 he took over the Montmélian co-operative and created a different type of co-operative, which is more flexible for vineyard owners, called La Fruitière des Vignerons des Terroirs de Savoie – today with about 60 proprietors, this has access to a substantial vineyard area of 300ha, if the Viallet estates are included. Philippe also handles the distribution for several domaines and for the Cave de Cruet, which makes Crémant de Savoie for Maison Philippe Viallet.

Philippe created a state-of-the-art winery in 2003 in Apremont and has steadily upgraded and expanded it, with energy-efficient new buildings using solar panels, and the Viallet brothers manage a vineyard effluent treatment plant on behalf of others in the village. Philippe has a big management team but oversees all the winemaking. I have not tasted many of the négociant or Fruitière wines recently and there is a huge range. However, sales of the estate wines are growing on export markets, therefore I shall detail these estates here. Note that the vineyard extents indicate the whole estate, and some fruit goes into other ranges.

Pierre Viallet has an interest in the whole business and also owns 25ha of the family estate, while Philippe personally owns 17ha – these vineyards are mainly in Apremont, Abymes and Chignin. In 2008, jointly with Claire Taittinger of Champagne, Philippe purchased Les Fils de René Quenard, then owned by Jacky Quenard, one of the pioneers of Chignin Bergeron; in 2014 Maison Philippe Viallet bought out Claire Taittinger and sold the winery buildings. Now with 19ha, Les Fils de René Quenard has superbly sited steep vineyards, run along sustainable lines, requiring much manual labour. The signature wine for decades has been Chignin Bergeron La Bergeronelle, renowned not only for its unusual fat bottle with a pretty yellow label featuring a bird, but also for being totally dry, yet floral and spicy.

From the same estate is the excellently structured and concentrated, part barrel-aged Mondeuse Arbin Clos de la Galèze, which includes fruit from centenarian vines.

The historic Château d'Apremont was taken over in 2015 with 6ha. Then in 2017, following long negotiations, a real prize in the Combe de Savoie was won: Domaine Bouvet, with 36ha. Gilbert Bouvet, who ran a vine nursery and, from 1982, a wine domaine of repute in Fréterive, died in 2002 and the quality of the domaine's wines declined. Domaine Bouvet was particularly known for its unusual Cabernet Franc/Persan blend called Amariva and for its Roussette de Savoie Monterminod. I hope that Philippe will be able to restore its good name. The estate winery is being retained and a tasting room is envisaged. And finally, after vintage 2018, Philippe purchased Les Rocailles, an estate in St-André, which had also seen better days since its heyday when the original owner Pierre Boniface ran it. Pierre was renowned for making his whites with plenty of residual sugar, a style less appreciated today. Philippe plans to convert the winery into a dedicated Crémant de Savoie facility.

Philippe Viallet in his winery in Apremont.

A significant part of the production of Maison Viallet is sold on to other négociants and much is sold through supermarkets and other large distribution networks. Of the 3.3 million bottles produced, exports represent a healthy 12% and are particularly important in the US, but also in Canada, Japan, Scandinavia and far beyond. Philippe Viallet is very ambitious, and his success and the future quality of his

company's wines, as well as its ongoing approach to environmental issues, are hugely important for Savoie.

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Web: vins-viallet.com
Map ref: A2
Vineyards: 118ha + purchased grapes
Visits: By appointment only

Chignin

With its cluster of seven ruined towers, ancient fortifications, breathtaking views of Mont Granier, the Bauges and the Belledonne mountains, and vines carpeting the hillsides, Chignin is the most memorable Savoie wine village. It is divided into several hamlets, including Les Tours, where the towers are located, and Torméry, on the eastern side of the village, adjoining the village of Francin. The cru Chignin Bergeron, designated solely for wines from the Bergeron or Roussanne grape, is restricted to hillside vineyards in Chignin, along with certain areas of Francin and of Montmélian to the east. The cru Chignin is limited to vineyards in the village itself, of which there are almost 200ha – the cru name is widely used for whites from Jacquère and may be used for reds from Gamay, Mondeuse or Pinot Noir.

Many vineyards face directly south or southwest and benefit from sun all day, particularly at the warmer end of the day, and this partly explains the riper-tasting Jacquère wines compared to those from Apremont, for example. The vineyards extend from the main road at around 300m up to the woodlands of the Bauges, reaching 450m in places. There are some awesomely steep vineyards, especially in the

sector from Torméry eastwards below La Savoyarde mountain. Much of the soil is limestone scree, although there are sectors of higher clay and marl content too. Chignin is a beautiful vineyard area to walk in but bring a picnic or be prepared to drive elsewhere for lunch, as surprisingly there is not one bar or restaurant.

The vignerons of Chignin have a history of working together and there has been a CUMA for vineyard equipment for many years. More recently that has included *chenillettes* (tracked vehicles) and an *intercep*, which has helped reduce herbicide use and encouraged more vignerons to convert to organics. Four vignerons working in biodynamics also share equipment. The major négociants own vineyards in Chignin as well as buying in grapes. Two relatively large estates are owned or leased by négociants – one of the Quenards and Domaine Charles Gonnet, run by Maison Vacher since 2017. Also worth noting is Yves Girard-Madoux' estate Vignoble de la Pierre, which was begun by his father René, a pioneer of growing Bergeron in Torméry. Making a classic Chignin Bergeron, the estate is due to be taken over in 2020 by Elie Talaga, currently Yves' cellar manager. A small estate to look out for in the future, which has already exported a little to the US, is Jean-Charles Girard-Madoux.

Two other crus should be mentioned here. Rarely seen on a label, there are less than 20ha left in St-Jeoire-Prieuré, a cru for Jacquère, which is almost a continuation of Chignin to the west. Some kilometres northwest, the closest vineyard to Chambéry is the Roussette de Savoie cru Monterminod. This is an historic and magnificent south-facing vineyard site around the château of the same name, but with less than 8ha planted today. Most is farmed by Jean Perrier et Fils, which has the right to use Château de Monterminod on labels, and by Domaine Bouvet, now owned by Maison Philippe Viallet.

The name Quenard on Chignin wines causes confusion for buyers of Savoie wine as there are many different estates and the families are only distantly related. Historically, those living at the top of the village spelt Quénard with an accent on the 'e'. The estates are listed here to clarify the first names.

- André et Michel Quenard: run by Michel with son Guillaume. See profile.
- Claude Quenard et Fils (La Gerbelle): run by brothers André and Guy, sons of Claude, together with André's son Vincent. See profile.
- Jean-François Quénard: previously known as Domaine Jean-Pierre et Jean-François Quénard, Jean-Pierre being Jean-François' late father. See profile.
- Pascal et Annick Quenard: Pascal's father is retired vigneron Raymond Quenard. See profile.
- Les Fils de René Quénard: was run until 2008 by René's son Jacky. Now owned by Maison Philippe Viallet.
- Bertrand Quenard: a 3-ha estate with a small range of decent wines, including Roussette de Savoie Monterminod from a tiny area of vines. Not profiled here.

Adrien Berlioz

Adrien Berlioz is a second cousin of Gilles Berlioz, who by this time had already made a name for himself and could not have been more supportive when Adrien established his estate in 2006, aged 25. Adrien baptized his estate Domaine du Cellier des Cray, after the old vineyard cabins in the area of Les Cray, where his original vineyard was, but in 2018 he dropped the domaine name to label his wines with his own name. Each cuvée is named after someone close to him – often their nickname – and each has its own colour of wax for sealing the tops. And Adrien puts every bit as much effort into farming his vines and making his wines as he does in packaging them beautifully. In a short time, he has become one of the most talented vignerons in Savoie.

Although he had helped with harvest at his grandparents' vineyard in Chignin, Adrien did not figure out right away that he wanted to be a vigneron. His father was an architect, who died young, but the family kept their vines, selling the grapes to a négociant. Adrien thought he might go into wine sales and studied wine commerce at

Beaune, then later viticulture and oenology. While in Burgundy, he was inspired by organics and soon realized that working in sales was not for him. With support from his family he set about finding enough vineyards to start his estate, adding to the family 1.5ha another 1.5ha belonging to a friend of his grandmother. He had to replant much and so at the same time he rented vines and by 2010 had 5ha of productive vines. He converted everything to organics from the start, becoming certified in 2012, and introduced biodynamic methods early on: from 2018 he has been in official conversion with Demeter.

In a short time, Adrien Berlioz has become a Chignin name to look out for.

His vineyard holdings have changed over the years, but all have been in Chignin, Montmélian and Arbin (some rented from Louis Magnin), mostly on relatively steep slopes, so most of his viticultural practices have been essentially manual. These days about 30% are worked with a horse. He uses the standard biodynamic preparations, and alongside Bordeaux mixture works with plants, and also uses propolis – Adrien's partner Nathalie is a beekeeper. He has no permanent employees and uses seasonal staff, saying that for his vineyard management he needs one person per hectare between

May and July. His aim is to achieve a yield of grapes that is about half the maximum permitted by the AOC rules. He has approximately 2ha Bergeron, just over 1ha Altesse and some Jacquère and Pinot Gris for whites, and 1ha Mondeuse, plus Persan and a little Douce Noire for reds.

Adrien rents a big winery in the middle of Chignin – it has no air conditioning, but he finds ways to cool down the tanks in extremis. He installed a relatively modern press and works with a mixture of mainly fibreglass tanks, oak barrels and *demi-muids*, plus some acacia barrels, but may move away gradually from wood. He uses only indigenous yeast and always encourages malolactic fermentation. Adrien uses low sulphur levels, but after a few years of trials, he is cautious about very low levels, as he is worried about deviant flavours in his wines. Like many other vignerons, Adrien has suffered several difficult vintages, with part lost to hail or frost in recent years, but if he could, he would be keen to age wines longer before bottling.

The large range includes a pair of wines named Cuvée des Gueux, which in 2018 will be a Persan/Mondeuse blend and a Jacquère/Altesse blend (the white was originally made as a joint cuvée with Gilles, from very old-vine Jacquère). Although Bergeron is his main grape, Adrien is a fan of Altesse and has a young plot on glacial moraine, high up in Chignin. The Zulime Roussette de Savoie is aged in tank, lively and expressive, with gorgeous complexity of herbs, spices, flowers and fruit. His four main Bergeron cuvées are Albinum, Euphrasie, Raipoumpou and Grand Zeph, all excellent: Euphrasie, aged in acacia and oak barrels, can be particularly good in warm vintages; Raipoumpou and Albinum, while always dry, can be exceptionally fat; Grand Zeph carries its richness better, with a dry stony character. In reds, there is Cuvée Octavie Persan, aged in *demi-muids*, which can suffer from reduction, but once the bottle is open recovers to show tannic, rich fruit, and there are two or three Mondeuse cuvées, which have varied according to his vineyard holdings, but always express balanced fruit and tannins – never overly firm, usually oak-aged.

Never standing still, Adrien has hatched a plan for 2021 to plant 3ha in Détrier, near La Rochette on the other side of the Isère, on a schistose, glacial soil at the foot of the Belledonne. He is being helped by the village, who want to revive vineyards there, and plans to plant Bergeron, Altesse and Mondeuse, along with the rare Bia Blanc and Joubertin. About 50% of Adrien's production is exported and he wants to limit this; apart from attending wine shows such as the Pétavins tasting in Paris, he uses an agent to sell the rest around France. Adrien is a perfectionist from grape to bottle and it really shows in his wonderfully precise wines.

Adrien Berlioz
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Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 5.5ha
Certification: Ecocert and Demeter
Visits: Strictly by appointment

Denis et Didier Berthollier

When Denis Berthollier explained to me in 2005 that his Chignin Bergeron St-Anthelme was inspired by the rare white Roussanne-based Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape I began to understand that he was aiming high. With his brother Didier, he has continued to push this estate's wines to greater heights.

The Tissot family of Chignin linked with the Berthollier family of Les Marches when Didier and Denis Berthollier's mother, Monique Tissot, married Alexis Berthollier. Monique's great-grandfather Louis began the farm in 1850, selling wines in barrel from his few vines, and his son Laurent replanted after phylloxera – some of these vines survive. Laurent's son Marius continued with mixed farming. Across

the valley, Alexis' father Victor Berthollier was one of the first to bottle Apremont in the 1950s, but another son took on that domaine, so in 1963 Alexis joined his father-in-law Marius in Chignin. Stopping polyculture, Alexis Berthollier soon extended the vineyards to 8ha and became president of the Montmélian co-operative, selling partly through there and partly under his own name in bottle. Denis wanted to work in the family estate from a young age and went to Belleville and Avignon for his wine studies, with work experience in the Rhône. The family had planted its first Roussanne in 1991 on the well-exposed site near the Chapelle St-Anthelme. Denis realized that Savoie ought to be emulating the quality advances in the Rhône Valley wine region, rather than trying to emulate Bordeaux, considered then to be the benchmark. He joined his father in 1995 and was keen to improve quality, wanting to create some oak-aged cuvées, but he soon realized that work in the vineyard, especially to reduce yields, was more urgent. Financially stretched due to the ailing Montmélian co-operative and family issues, improvements seemed impossible. In 1998 help came from Didier, who had been working as a mechanical engineer in Africa and decided, aged nearly 30, to return to Savoie. Shortly after, their father died, and the brothers became official partners from 2000.

Didier and Denis Berthollier in their Bergeron vineyard, trained sur échalas.

Denis and Didier realized that they were unlikely to achieve high-quality wines from most of their existing, intensively farmed vineyards. They took on 2.7ha of very steep vineyard parcels below La Savoyarde mountain, which they cleared and planted with Bergeron in 2001 and 2002. First working the soils and later allowing natural grass cover, by 2011 they had eliminated herbicides everywhere and were working sustainably, with lower yields and better fruit. Inspired by Pascal Quenard's conversion to organics, from 2017 they converted their red varieties, many planted on flatter slopes, and in 2018 the whole domaine was in conversion. Today, they have nearly 4ha of Gamay, Mondeuse and Pinot Noir, some from their father's old plantings, and a little Persan planted in 2017; their whites include about 3.5ha each of Bergeron and Jacquère, with some Altesse and a little Chardonnay. Apart from some Jacquère, harvest is by hand, picking relatively early as soon as grapes are ripe.

Both brothers work in the vineyards with one full-time employee; Didier looks after the financial side and Denis is the thoughtful winemaker. Alongside stainless steel, he has worked with oak barrels, *demi-muids* and, most recently, terracotta jars, the latter to be used in a blend for a Bergeron cuvée. Denis has experimented with using exclusively indigenous yeasts, but to achieve bone dry whites he adds cultured yeast towards the end of fermentation; for reds he makes a starter culture and adds no sulphur until bottling. Unusual in Savoie, most of the cuvées are not bottled until at least a year after harvest.

The excellent range has evolved to include more single parcel selections. Alongside the always good Vieilles Vignes Chignin is the stonier Argile sur Schiste. There's a spicy, part oak-fermented Baron Decouz Roussette de Savoie and the range of Bergerons, all really dry, includes the classically rich St-Anthelme and Les Salins, which as its name suggests has a salty touch from a soil high in limestone. While the whites remain the stars, the reds have improved no end. There is a deliciously easy-drinking Gamay/Pinot blend, Sel de Marius, along with two Mondeuse cuvées, the best grapes going into Les Granges Tissot, which spends 18 months in *demi-muids*. Exports have increased to nearly 10%, including the US and Quebec; direct

sales from the tasting room, which is open long hours, are 25% and the rest is sold to wine shops and restaurants locally and beyond. In just a couple of decades the Bertholliers have elevated this to one of Chignin's top estates.

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Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 12ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine Partagé/Gilles Berlioz

What successful vigneron would ever want to change the name of his estate? Gilles Berlioz and his partner Christine, who founded the domaine in 1990, took on the name Domaine Partagé in 2016. It translates as 'the shared domaine' and for them reflects the years of human encounters and ideas exchanged with those who've worked for them, with other vignerons, and with customers, all of whom helped them to become such a well-known estate. They also share experiences or equipment with local biodynamic vignerons; share a harvest team with Pascal Quenard; have lent a hand to the Curtets in Chautagne; and they even share – or rather sell – a few of their grapes, giving young vignerons a start. Sharing is their way of giving back.

Brought up near Chambéry, Gilles hated school but enjoyed coming to Chignin at weekends to help his father with his 0.8ha of vineyards – his father had three cows too and worked in a factory. Gilles dreamed of becoming a *paysan*, a small farmer, but did not

know how to start – he tried courses on flower cultivation, and on vine breeding, which he preferred, but couldn't get a job, so he worked as a builder instead. After he lost two fingers in an accident he went to recover in a family house in the tiny Chignin hamlet of Le Viviers, and he and Christine decided to settle there and begin the estate. The daughter of farmers from western France, Christine was studying to be a nurse and still works part-time in nursing homes. But she has always been a real partner for Gilles and loves working in the vineyards and presenting their wines at tastings. Gilles worked in landscaping for several years while building up their vineyards – mainly leased – to 7ha. The couple had tried to sell their wines in Paris, but without success, and Gilles wanted to make better wines. He was increasingly unhappy with using chemical treatments in the vineyards and felt that tractors compacted the soil too much. So from the late 1990s little by little he started converting to organics, reducing his area of vineyards to work them on his own, yet trying to retain enough to live from. Ecocert certification for 1.2ha of Bergeron followed in 2002 – their first good vintage, Gilles believes – and then he gradually converted the rest. Gilles became determined to produce top-quality wine, declaring in 2004 to a local journalist that he planned to make the Romanée-Conti of Savoie. Half-joking, as Gilles always is, he was nevertheless taken seriously and news about this domaine spread fast.

Today the couple have about 3ha of Bergeron, 1ha of Mondeuse and a little Jacquère, Altesse and some experimental rows of Petite Sainte-Marie, in three main plots in Chignin. They have used biodynamic techniques for years and 2018 was their first year of official conversion to Demeter. All their vineyards are worked either by horse or manually with a hoe or pickaxe. To control yields they prefer strict de-budding, rather than green harvest. In the very small cellar, the wines are made broadly in the natural way, evolving much over the years, especially in terms of how they are matured. Having used oak maturation for a few years, Gilles stopped completely from 2006, and all the wines have since been made and matured in fibreglass tanks, including more recently fibreglass eggs, which give

better lees contact for the wines. Natural yeasts are a given, Gilles refuses to chaptalize even Mondeuse, and sulphur levels are low.

Gilles Berlioz (on right) shuns machinery, preferring to work with a horse or manually.

The wines have some of the most original and humorous labels in Savoie, and many change each vintage, becoming collector's items – they include a useful technical analysis too. The wine styles vary tremendously with the vintage – often a hallmark for fine producers – and the following are the main cuvées. La Deuse (Mondeuse) is extraordinary, often with a floral bouquet, and from its intense vibrancy, depth of spicy red fruits and supremely balanced tannins almost no one would guess that it is usually below 11% alcohol. Le Jaja is the deliciously light and stony Chignin (Jacquère); El-Hem is the Roussette de Savoie – it is pristine, floral and mineral with great persistence. There are four Bergeron cuvées: Les Filles, Les Fripons, Les Friponnes and Les Christine. These are wonderful, intense and characterful Bergerons, always dry and with the ability to age for five years or more. Most tasters have a favourite, and looking through my recent notes, mine is consistently Les Fripons, which shows the very slightly bitter – apricot kernels – side of Bergeron and is more delicate than the exuberant Les Filles. These exclusive and expensive

wines are effectively hand crafted, from the best Chignin terroirs, by Gilles, Christine, a part-time employee and occasional extra helpers. Around 40% is exported to 35 countries, and much goes to shops and restaurants across France, but Gilles and Christine would like to increase local sales. This couple and their fine wines always put a smile on everyone's faces.

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Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 5ha
Certification: Ecocert and Demeter
Visits: Tasting room, by appointment

Domaine André et Michel Quenard

There are many families who perpetuate traditions in the wine world and so it is at this, perhaps the best known of the Quenard domaines. André, at the time of writing, is in his early nineties and has witnessed over 75 vintages, having started work on the mixed farm managed by his widowed mother in 1944. His son Michel, currently in charge, joined in 1976 and has worked on over 40 vintages; and now his son Guillaume is the winemaker, with ten vintages under his belt since starting in 2009. André's training consisted of short courses at the local agricultural college; Michel went to wine school in Beaune at the same time as the legendary Alsace vigneron Jean-Michel Deiss; Guillaume also went to Beaune and his work experience included time at Domaine Deiss. Each generation progresses: Guillaume followed up Beaune with an

oenology degree at Changins in Switzerland. André was one of the early presidents of the Savoie wine syndicate and having worked on establishing the VDQS, later worked hard for Savoie to be elevated to AOC. Michel has been president of the SRVS since 1999, overseeing the recovery of the region after a difficult period, the push for quality improvements and the introduction of the Crémant de Savoie AOC; surely it can only be a matter of time before Guillaume is on the committee too?

André's father was a mixed farmer, who sold wine in barrel to local restaurants, but he died young and when André joined his mother they had cows and a few vineyards on the steep slopes of Torméry below La Savoyarde, worked by oxen or by hand. He became one of the first in the area to bottle wines from the mid-1950s and sold the cows by the early 1960s. He claims to have been the first to buy a tractor that straddled the vines in 1963 but he is remembered as one of those who fought for Chignin Bergeron to be the quality standard-bearer for Savoie, designated as a specific cru.

Today, the domaine vies with Les Fils de René Quenard (owned by Maison Viallet) for the largest area of Bergeron planted, with 9.5ha. André and Michel expanded the estate together, in the 1980s undertaking an ambitious remodelling of their steep, stony but very well-exposed hillside, building wide terraces to make it easier to work with a tractor. Most of the vineyards are in Torméry, with 8ha Jacquère (this includes an old family vineyard in Abymes), 4.8ha Mondeuse (including 1.3ha in Arbin, taken on in 2015 from Joseph Trosset), along with small areas of Gamay, Pinot, Persan, Malvoisie (Pinot Gris) and Altesse.

For many years, Michel has worked sustainably in the vineyards, although many were too steep to grass down. He also looked for lower yields and proper ripeness. Guillaume and his younger brother Romain (who left in 2019 to pursue a different direction) decided to restore an old *treuil*, in order to work the soils and reduce herbicides. Michel has always been a thoughtful and modern winemaker, producing a very successful range, appreciated by restaurants across the region and far beyond. Guillaume is continuing the trend, but these days is looking for freshness, minerality and what he calls

energy or vitality – he is very much a details man. He uses mainly indigenous yeast and low sulphur levels and for the Bergerons he is unfazed by 4–5g/l of residual sugar – 'if it's there, it's there'. He aims to release the wines ready to drink, bottling as late as feasible.

Michel with his father André Quenard, both stalwart defenders of the AOC Savoie.

The whites include the ever reliable and contrasting Jacquères – the light, steely Abymes and the rounder Chignin Vieilles Vignes – but the pièces de resistance are the Chignin Bergerons: the main cuvée and Les Terrasses are both aged only in tank; Le Grand Rebossan, from over 40-year-old vines grown above Montmélian, is aged in *foudres* and *demi-muids*. The classic, almost luscious Les Terrasses and the spicier Le Grand Rebossan are seriously ageworthy; even the main cuvée can evolve from yellow fruits to more honey and spice over 5–10 years. The reds have always been pleasant, with one of the deepest, most rounded Mondeuse wines in Chignin, the Vieilles Vignes, matured in *foudres* introduced by Michel many years ago; the

Arbin Mondeuse Terres Brunes is firmer. Guillaume is moving away from destemmed Mondeuse towards whole bunch macerations. The domaine makes one of the better examples of 100% Jacquère Crémant de Savoie, increasing in quality as the time on lees lengthens.

Michel's sister Sylvie has managed the administration for many years as well as welcoming visitors to the tasting room as their mother did before her, and the family have a loyal group of employees for the vineyards. They also have loyal customers: the tasting room and other direct sales account for 35%, 10% is exported to various countries, including for many years to Kermit Lynch in the US. The rest is mainly sold to restaurants in the region. It will be interesting to see Guillaume's progress at this classic Chignin estate as the older generations stand back.

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Vineyards: 27ha
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Claude Quenard et Fils

Brothers André and Guy Quenard are totally committed to working organically, biodynamically and as naturally as possible in the winery. André, the eldest, who studied wine in Beaune and joined his father Claude in 1987, is the man who loves the vines and the soil, but rarely talks; Guy, who came to the estate three years later, studied wine technology and commerce in Montpellier and is the man who

loves machines and communications. In 1906 their great-grandfather Claude walked to Voiron in Isère to bid at auction for the farm in Chignin, which belonged to the monks of the Chartreuse monastery. His son Joseph expanded the farm with cattle and vines, taking the grapes to the Cave de Cruet. André and Guy's father Claude concentrated more on vines and from 1966 started to sell in bottle. Some 15 years later he stopped cereal farming and expanded the vineyards further, soon joined by his sons. Claude died young in 1993, by which time they had decided to farm sustainably and grassed down their vineyards, then 14ha. André and Guy began organic tests in 1998, with official conversion beginning in 2000. By 2007 the whole estate was converted to organics, at that time by far the largest organic estate in Savoie. Biodynamics came next and they were the second Savoie estate to be certified by Demeter, after Florent Héritier of Frangy, beginning official conversion in 2016.

Guy Quenard with his latest harvesting machine.

The vineyards stretch from St-Jeoire-Prieuré to Arbin, with most scattered across Chignin, including around 8.5ha of Jacquère, 3ha each of Bergeron and Mondeuse, and smaller plantings of the other main Savoie varieties. Working in biodynamics, they believe in encouraging microbial life through a combination of letting the natural vegetation grow and working the soil, and they use many plant preparations. André is widely respected for his vineyard management. Guy is a firm believer in machine harvesting and

bought his first machine in 1990, regularly replacing it with newer models as technology has improved. He works on contract for others, and despite Demeter not recommending it, machine harvest is used throughout their estate except for Pinot Noir and the steep slopes with Bergeron. Grapes are sorted when they come into the winery.

They have used indigenous yeasts for decades and Claude was one of the first to favour malolactic fermentation in the late 1970s, using very little SO_2, something André and Guy have continued. They chaptalize rarely. André is in charge of winemaking and now works with his son Vincent, who joined the estate in 2016, after studies at Beaune. I have tasted the range regularly at the annual Pétavins tastings in Paris, and the quality has been disappointingly inconsistent, including Sansoufrir, the zero-added-sulphur Jacquère made since 2012. The most consistent quality white has been the delicate Chignin Bergeron, which in most years is made with about 20% oak ageing, and has great freshness; the most interesting red is Matéria Rouge, a very juicy blend of Gamay, Pinot Noir and Persan, aged for one year in *foudre* and made to drink young. In their large winery, Vincent has also created an organic microbrewery, Brasserie Quardin, and made the estate's first orange wine, Chignin Les 1ers Récoltants, which I enjoyed tasting in 2017. Much of the production is sold through organic shops and wholesalers, about 25% is sold direct, 25% to shops and restaurants, and exports are increasing, representing about 10%. Guy and his partner offer bed and breakfast rooms, and the next plan is to create a proper tasting area.

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Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 20ha

Certification: Ecocert and Demeter
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Domaine Jean-François Quénard

The cellars of Jean-François and Catherine Quénard are in an idyllic location next to the vineyards and the ruined towers, and there have been Quénards (with an accent) in this higher part of Chignin since 1644. Jean-François' grandfather was a mixed farmer and made wine from vines planted early in the 20th century, his son Jean-Pierre followed and in the 1970s focused on wine and started bottling with about 4ha of vines.

As a child, Jean-François did not pay much attention to the vineyards and began his studies in dairy production and cow breeding. But aged 18, he wanted a change and went to Beaune to study wine, and was inspired by work experience with the legendary Beaujolais négociant Jules Chauvet. He loved Chauvet's scientific approach to wine and describes him as a purist, who favoured no chaptalization, indigenous yeasts and carbonic maceration, as well as low SO_2 levels. Jean-François continued his studies with an oenology degree in Dijon, and also enjoyed three months working in a wine laboratory in Bordeaux. He returned to Chignin to join his father, officially taking over in 1987; Jean-Pierre gave him carte blanche in the winery, while he continued working the vineyards. Also in 1987, Jean-François and Catherine met at Domaine Bourgeois in Sancerre – although she didn't work in wine, Catherine is the daughter of Muscadet vignerons.

Jean-François rented land to clear and plant Bergeron and other varieties on the limestone scree hillside below the Bauges, as well as on the more marl-limestone plateau by the towers. From early this century, he began grassing down and working more sustainably, and a few years ago began an organic trial on 4ha of Jacquère vineyards, but the mildew attacks of 2016 pushed him to save the harvest with a chemical spray. In 2018 he sought official organic certification for conversion of the 4ha of red grapes (2.5ha of Mondeuse plus Pinot,

Gamay and Persan) and plans to convert the rest in the next couple of years. Currently there are 5ha of Bergeron, 1.4ha of Altesse and 6.3ha of Jacquère (likely to be reduced), with another 0.9ha dedicated to Crémant production. Of these, about 3ha are on a wonderful high slope in St-Jean-de-la-Porte (mostly red with some Altesse), rented from Alain Carle, who used to take the grapes to the Cave de Cruet. Alain also runs the Ateliers de Maurienne vineyard project.

Jean-François comes to life in the winery. I have tasted his wines regularly for over 15 years, and his winemaking expertise has always shone through. He introduced temperature control early for the region, having converted a cow stable to make a bigger vinification area in 1990. He has used almost exclusively indigenous yeast for many years, although if fermentation looks likely to stop before a wine is dry, he adds some neutral cultured yeast. He limits sulphur additions, with none used in reds until bottling. Jean-François has long experimented with different oak sizes and types, first buying Burgundy 228l barrels, later *demi-muids* including, in 2009, some from the Austrian cooper, Stockinger. He has also worked with two different sizes of concrete egg tanks, first for white wines, but now using them for Mondeuse, and is experimenting with plastic eggs and amphorae.

There is a big range of wines, expanded over the years, with some cuvées named after the couple's four daughters. The range includes one of the best examples of Crémant de Savoie, from Jacquère with 20% each of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The ever-reliable Anne de la Biguerne Chignin is from the older vines of Jacquère, made with malolactic fermentation; the classy Anne-Sophie Roussette de Savoie is dry and rich, part oak-aged in the Stockinger *demi-muids*. There are three outstanding bone dry Chignin Bergerons, which have changed names over the years – the reliable Eboulis, meaning scree, is the former Les Damoiselles ('young ladies'… who have now grown up); Au Pied des Tours, with just a little oak ageing, is the most classic, from vines planted in the 1980s; and the deeper, more complex Comme Avant, released later, is from later-picked grapes, matured in old oak. The quality of the reds has

evolved well and includes Les 2 Jean Persan from young vines, and two Mondeuse wines, most notably the consistently excellent and intense cuvée Elisa from part Chignin, part St-Jean grapes, aged in *demi-muids*. In a nod to Jules Chauvet, in 2018 Jean-François made two cuvées with no added sulphur named La Déroutante: a Jacquère with some carbon dioxide spritz for protection and a Chignin Mondeuse aged in egg and amphora.

Catherine looks after the office, while two or three full-time employees help Jean-François. Exports are above 8% and they have sold to Charles Neal of California for many years; direct sales are about 10% and the rest goes to restaurants and shops, some through wholesalers. The couple are overjoyed that their third daughter, Anne-Sophie, is set to join the domaine after studying wine at Beaune and then Changins in Switzerland. She will be with them for harvest 2019 and hopes to work the next harvest in the southern hemisphere. The future seems assured here.

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Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 17.5ha
Certification: Ecocert (part)
Visits: Tasting room, by appointment

Jean-François and Catherine Quénard in their vines below one of Chignin's towers, close to their winery.

Domaine Pascal et Annick Quenard

It was while listening to Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony that Pascal realized he really didn't want to be a banker and, aged 22, he came to work for his father, Raymond. Today, you could not find anyone more attached to his vineyards than Pascal, but unlike many vignerons in this book, Pascal did not feel he should follow the family dynasty – there was a history of fathers and sons not working well together. Born in 1930, Pascal's father Raymond, now frail, is still considered a great personality in Chignin and one of those who raised the quality image.

Although Raymond helped in the vineyards at weekends, he only took over his father Marcel's estate in 1977, having worked previously as an animal food sales representative. Marcel had concentrated on vineyards from the 1960s and sold much of his wine to négociants, although Pascal tells me that the family still drink the 1947 vintage every Christmas. Raymond moved to bottling, selling his wine to the top local restaurants. Pascal grew up in Chambéry and preferred

hanging out with his friends to working the vines at weekend… until Beethoven pushed him in the right direction. From 1982 to 1987 Pascal worked for Raymond as an employee and then could take it no more. He set up his own winery, helped with equipment by his father, but rented vineyards. When he married Annick in 1994, he insisted on putting her name on the label too – radical, at the time.

From 2004 Pascal gradually took over his father's vineyards. Today, three-quarters of his holdings are family-owned and all in Chignin, with 2.5ha Jacquère, 2.7ha Bergeron, 1ha Mondeuse and 0.3ha Gamay. Raymond, like many of his generation, believed that chemical weed-killers saved the Savoie vineyards, but Pascal viewed things differently and studied how he could eliminate herbicide and convert to organics while still earning a living. He took his time, but he got there in the end, becoming fully certified by Ecocert in 2016, the proudest moment of his career, he told me. He works increasingly with biodynamic methods, and as a close friend of Gilles Berlioz shares equipment and a harvest team.

I was lucky to discover Pascal's wines long ago and they were always among my favourites. He has branched out with new cuvées, but his winemaking principles remain broadly the same. Apart from in the occasional late-harvest Bergeron cuvée, he aims for no residual sugar and full malolactic fermentation, enabling him to use lower doses of sulphur in his whites; his reds are whole bunch fermentations, with SO_2 added only pre-bottling – and the daring Mondeuse Lunatique has no added sulphur at all, just some carbon dioxide to protect it. It is one of three Mondeuse cuvées, a grape that Pascal increasingly enjoys working with. Lunatique is from a parcel on lower, red clay slopes, close to Arbin, and is the most precise and enjoyable Savoie red with no added sulphur that I have tasted. The main cuvée, La Sauvage, is sappier and vibrant, from vineyards near the Chignin towers on white marl; the more structured L'Etoile de Gaspard, from the same terroir as Lunatique, is destined for longer ageing and is sometimes aged in *foudre*. Most of Pascal's wines are made in concrete or metal tanks. His Jacquère Chignins combine minerality with the hallmark ripe fruit of good Chignin, often citrussy; the stand-out 1903 cuvée includes 40% of vines planted in 1903 by

his great-grandfather Jean Quenard, today the vineyard is worked by horse. Pascal's main Chignin Bergeron is labelled Sous les Amandiers and is simply elegant, floral, fresh and more food-friendly than many; Cuvée Noé is from later-picked grapes and is a more powerful, richer example.
Soils and grape varieties on the hillside of the Combe de Savoie

Above Chapelle St-Anthelme, Pascal Quenard dreams of Chignin becoming 100% organic.

Pascal exports nearly 20%, mainly to the US, Canada and the Netherlands; the rest is sold partly direct and partly to shops and restaurants, including his 1903 Chignin, sold to the Bistro 1903, run by Jean Sulpice on Lake Annecy. Pascal's dream is that all the vineyards of Chignin become organic and he is known for encouraging others. In his generation, Raymond Quenard had a big impact here and I think that in his more modest way, Pascal does too.

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Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 6.5ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

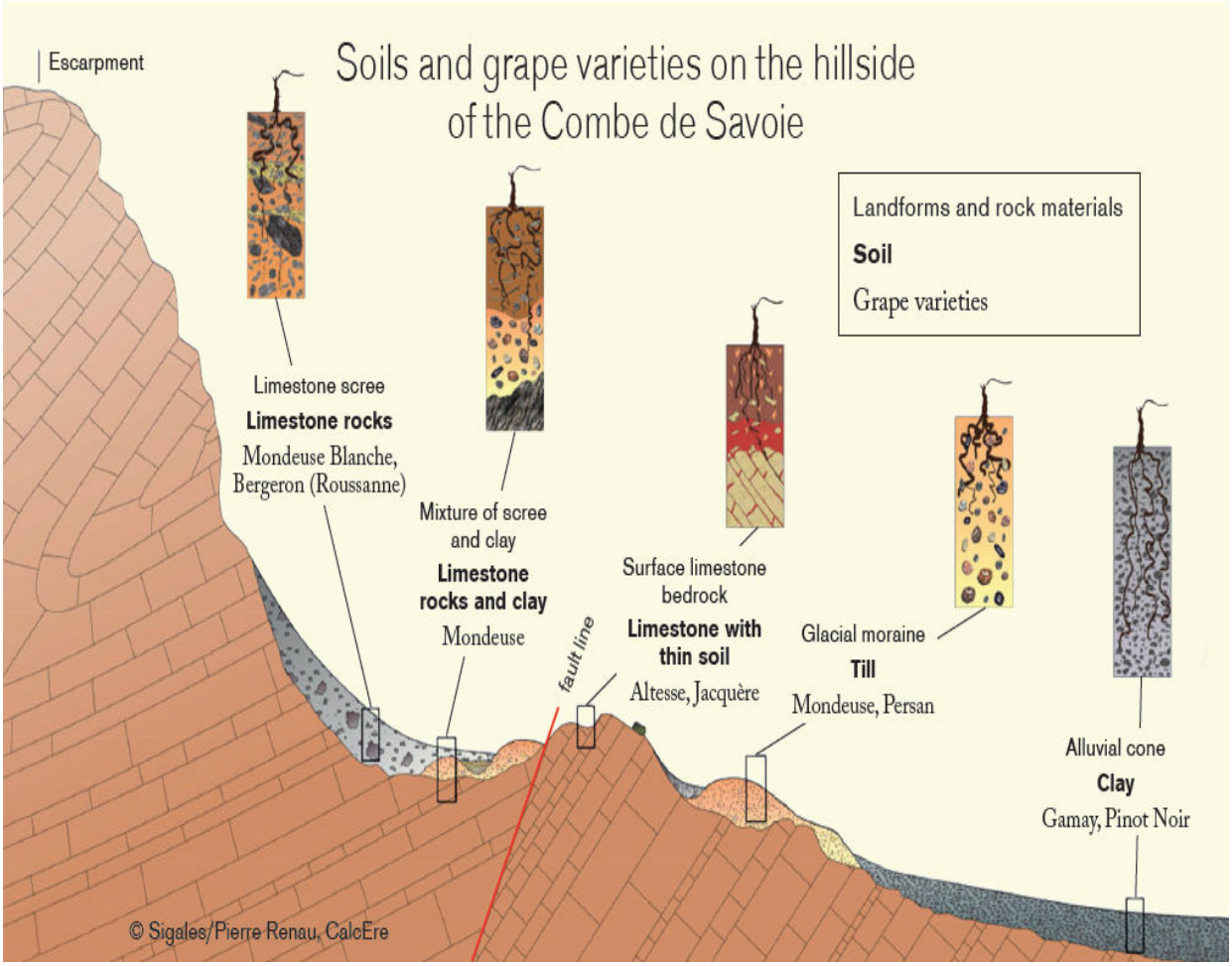
Combe de Savoie

With nearly 450ha, over 20% of Savoie's vineyards lie in the Combe de Savoie, which in wine terms runs between Montmélian and Fréterive, with the Isère river along its base. The AOC vineyards lie on the valley's northern side, below the Bauges mountains; on the other side of the Isère, near St-Pierre-de-Soucy, there were historically many vineyards and today you will still find some, with wines sold under IGP Vin des Allobroges.

Where the Cluse de Chambéry meets the Combe de Savoie is the strategically placed fortified town of Montmélian; from here on, many of the vineyards face south. The cru Arbin, with about 40ha, is the designation given to Mondeuse from the eponymous village, and also some vineyards in Montmélian and Cruet on either side. Moving east, as the pressure for housing close to Chambéry eases, the vineyards become denser, with Cruet (a cru for Jacquère) and St-Jean-de-la-Porte (a cru for Mondeuse) facing more east, and then, facing southeast, St-Pierre-d'Albigny and Fréterive, where many vine nurseries are located. In the commune of St-Pierre-d'Albigny are nearly 200ha of vineyards, many of the grapes going to the Cave de Cruet. The majority of vineyards along the Combe lie between about 330m and 450m altitude, with a few lower, and some, especially in Arbin, stretching up to 500m. There are many very steep slopes. The soils are extremely varied, as shown in the illustration opposite. It is worth emphasizing that for the deepest, longest-living Mondeuse, the warmer, clay-dominated limestone scree soils are preferred.

From Arbin, you can take an attractive minor road, the D201, winding through the vineyards via the town of St-Pierre-d'Albigny to

Fréterive. The villages are all quaint and sleepy, but you will see a fair number of once-important strategically placed châteaux. By far the most dramatic of these is the part-ruined fortress of Château de Miolans, built between the 11th and 16th centuries. The vineyards are within the Bauges natural regional park, a gentle mountain area worthy of exploration. For somewhere truly peaceful, head up to the Lac de la Thuile.



This diagram is a general representation of the Combe de Savoie hillsides above the Isère river between Chignin and Fréterive, rather than a specific location. The five soil samples, which come from vineyards owned by Philippe Grisard, represent different parts of the slope, indicating the nature of the underlying rock as well as the soil on the surface. The choice of grape variety grown in each part of the Combe de Savoie is influenced by several factors, including the soil, the altitude and the aspect or inclination of the slope.

Until the 1990s Montmélian had a wine co-operative – its demise was partly caused by members not having to supply the co-operative exclusively, so many kept their best grapes for themselves. As well as the 13 producers profiled in this section, the following deserve a mention. In Arbin, Charles Trosset (born in 1913) was already a well-known Mondeuse producer by the 1980s and his sons, Joseph and Louis, continued farming his vineyards part-time and selling the wine under the name Les Fils de Charles Trosset, maintaining a very high reputation. Today, Louis Trosset still makes a small high-quality production from just over 2ha. Also in Arbin, established in 2011, Céline Jacquet has gradually built up her estate to 4ha, while her husband Damien, a cousin of the Trossets, farms 3.5ha, but is contracted to the Cave de Cruet until 2020. Céline is a thoughtful winemaker and her range, just appearing on export markets, includes three Mondeuse cuvées showing excellent promise for the future. Another young estate (also a vine nursery) is Domaine Vendange in St-Pierre-d'Albigny: its first sales in bottle were from the 2016 vintage; Benjamin runs the nursery and the vineyards, while his wife Diane is the main winemaker; the first vintages were very clean and correct.

When planning your visits, it is worth noting that Brice Omont of Domaine des Ardoisières has his winery in Fréterive. Since his most famous vineyard is in the Tarentaise Valley he is included in the next chapter, but he also owns vineyards near St-Pierre-de-Soucy, plus 1ha in St-Jean-de-la-Porte. His St-Jean vineyard is next to those of Nicolas Ferrand (Domaine des Côtes Rousses) and Matthieu Goury (Domaine de Chevillard), profiled below, and the three friends work closely, all organically. Several vignerons on the other side of the river sell their IGP Vin des Allobroges wines locally.

Cellier de la Baraterie

There are few vignerons who start a winery from scratch at only 21 years old, but Julien Viana seized the opportunity to establish his own estate in Cruet, the village where he grew up. His parents were not farmers, but as a child he loved gardening and even made fruit

liqueurs. Agricultural studies were followed by wine studies in Belleville and then a diploma in sustainable agricultural and environmental studies in Montpellier, with a thesis on biodynamics. Combining sensitivity and forceful energy seems to work for Julien – he uses a ladybird adorned with the Savoie cross as a logo, yet his other passion is rugby. In 2013 he won an under 21s rugby championship and in December took on 0.8ha of vineyards in three parcels, and he was off to a flying start, with his first vintage, 2014, lauded by French magazine *La Revue du Vin de France*. For 15 months, covering the harvests of 2014 and 2015, he also worked for Oeno Conseil.

While looking for vineyards, he discovered that Cruet vigneron (and one of the last mobile distillers) Serge Bouchez was keen to pass on his vineyards and an old farm plus equipment, enabling him to begin with a ready-made winery. Along with other parcels Julien now had 5ha along the Combe de Savoie, which he converted to organic viticulture. And then, in 2018, he jumped at the chance to take on another 4.5ha in Fréterive from a Cave de Cruet member. At the time of writing he makes wine only from his original, now fully certified organic, vineyards with Jacquère, Altesse and Pinot Gris (Malvoisie) for whites; and Gamay, Pinot Noir and Mondeuse for reds – he has twice as much red as white. Grapes from the newer holdings, in conversion, are sold to a négociant until he can extend his cellar.

All the vineyards are fully grassed down, and most are mechanized; for the more difficult plots with closer spacing, he goes through with a strimmer. He is also converting to biodynamics to create more life in the soil: he uses cheese whey ('the more bacteria in the vineyards, the better,' he insists) against oidium, and Bordeaux mixture in alliance with plant preparations. After manual harvesting, his winemaking is simple, in a mixture of stainless steel and fibreglass tanks, and he has only ever used indigenous yeasts. For whites, all stay on fine lees until bottling, to maintain a reductive element, allowing him to use few SO_2 additions. He uses a small proportion of barrel fermentation for the Malvoisie. Reds are Beaujolais-inspired, using whole bunches for a semi-carbonic maceration for about two

weeks. There is a delicious Gamay Montassoulaz; more serious are the two Mondeuse wines – the Arbin is the more accessible, a tougher St-Jean-de-la-Porte, potentially for longer ageing, is part aged in old barrels.

Julien Viana and his dog, Nino, outside his cellar.

I first discovered Julien's wines in a Paris wine shop, tasting his delicious, sour-cherry, easy-drinking Paroxysme, a blend of Pinot and Gamay with a touch of Mondeuse. His precise whites all have full malolactic and are good too, especially the Roussette de Savoie. His wines have gone down a storm in Japan, where in 2018 he travelled around the country – his exports are nearly 40%, including some to the US. With just a wine student to help him part-time, it's hard to imagine how Julien has time to manage everything, and now he has taken over 30ha of cereal crops, converting them to organics with a view to eventually using the land for an organic vine nursery. This young winemaker should go far.

Cellier de la Baraterie
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Email: cellierdelabarateriе@gmail.com
Web: cellierdelabarateriе.com
Contact: Julien Viana

Map ref: C3
Vineyards: 10ha
Certification: Certipaq
Visits: Tasting room, by appointment

Domaine de Chevillard

Matthieu Goury created this estate in 2015; it combines a sense of old-style tradition with a young approach. Matthieu settled in the atmospheric 1703 house and cellar he bought in the sleepy hamlet of Chevillard, where his grandparents and parents still live. His grandfather had been a mixed farmer with some cows, tobacco and a few vines, whose grapes went to the Cave de Cruet, and Matthieu had enjoyed spending time with him. He always wanted to farm either cows or vines and chose the latter, studying wine in Beaune, then business in Tours. He worked for Chapoutier in the Rhône Valley and in Australia, where he also worked for Jasper Hill, and then returned to work for Maison Vacher for three years, both for the négociant and for Château de la Violette. In 2013, he and Mathieu Apffel created an estate together, but two years later separated – the vineyard leases were in Matthieu Goury's name.

Gradually Matthieu has acquired numerous vineyard parcels and particularly looks forward to taking on the 2ha of family vineyards, leased to someone else until 2023 – his parents were not farmers, but never wanted to sell these vineyards. Most of the vineyards are in St-Jean-de-la-Porte, St-Pierre-d'Albigny and Fréterive, and he has over 1ha in Apremont and Abymes. With Nicolas Ferrand (Domaine des Côtes Rousses) he shares Altesse vineyards in Monthoux. Overall, this gives him about 40% Jacquère, 20% Altesse and 40% Mondeuse – there's a tiny amount of Mondeuse Blanche and Pinot Noir too. All the vineyards have been converted to organics, and he is trialling some biodynamics. With a high average vine age, most vineyards are fully grassed down, controlled with a strimmer where the slope is steep. He has one full-time employee and part-timers in the summer.

For Mondeuse, green harvest is a priority, but he likes to avoid overripeness and would rather chaptalize if needed.

Matthieu Goury in his atmospheric cellar, which dates from 1703.

After hand harvesting, Matthieu aims for limited movement of juice and wine and uses only indigenous yeast. For very slow pressing, he bought a rare, vertical hydraulic press (made in 1972) for white grapes, and has restored his grandfather's centenarian manual press for his reds. Matthieu wants to make whites to age and looks for reduction, acidity and length. After pressing they go straight to old barrels, aiming for zero residual sugar, and remain in barrel for nearly a year – from 2018 the Jacquères are in very old *foudres* from Alsace. The Abymes comes from 50-year-old mass selection Jacquère and is the opposite of exuberant – 'made as grandfather would have made it', he says. And there's an expressive, lemony and herbal Roussette de Savoie, where the oak just creeps through in the taste.

Matthieu is not a fan of whole bunch pressing and doesn't want to risk herbaceous flavours, so he destems all the reds. The result is a delicious Pinot Noir from two parcels of vines in St-Pierre, planted in 1962 and 1981, made with a two-week maceration and gentle, occasional pump-overs. He makes two Mondeuse cuvées, using the same method, but with somewhat longer maceration and aged for a year or more in old barrels – the best is sold under the St-Jean-de-la-Porte cru, giving a classic blueberry character and fine tannins, along with freshness. Matthieu uses modest doses of SO_2. Reds are kept in bottle for at least six months before sale – the sober labels

emphasize the serious approach of this young estate. He already exports 70%, mostly to the US and Scandinavia, with most of the rest sold to top local wine shops and restaurants through Vacher Distribution.

Domaine de Chevillard
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Tel: 06 33 01 12 21
Email: domainedechevillard@yahoo.com
Web: domainedechevillard.com
Contact: Matthieu Goury
Map ref: D3
Vineyards: 10ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: By appointment

Domaine des Côtes Rousses

With his obvious dedication to his craft, clear-thinking attitude and a wine quality that has been evident from the start, Nicolas Ferrand has earned genuine respect very quickly. Nicolas' grandfather, born in 1907, farmed cows in the Bauges mountains and owned some vines in St-Pierre-d'Albigny. In the 1960s he moved his family to farm in the hills north of Chambéry in La Motte-Servolex. And it's in this rambling farmhouse that Nicolas makes his wine, having insulated the old cow stable to become a vinification cellar. Family remain crucial in this project – Nicolas' father helps with the vineyard machinery, his uncle does some woodwork, his mother prepares the orders and Marielle, his wife, lends a hand at weekends.

Nicolas did a masters in countryside development planning but soon realized office work wasn't for him. He tried out dairy farming in the high pastures, then worked for a few months for Jean-Pierre Grisard and had vineyard work experience with the chamber of

agriculture. In 2013, Matthieu Goury of Domaine de Chevillard encouraged him to take on 1.5ha of vineyards in St-Jean-de-la-Porte, and Nicolas was suddenly a vigneron. He named his estate Côtes Rousses after the vineyard location in Champ Roux, itself named for the russet clay soil. Meantime, he did some short wine courses in Beaune, worked with Pascal Quenard and took over other small vineyard parcels. Most are on steep slopes in St-Jean, with nearly 2ha Jacquère, plus Altesse, Mondeuse and a little Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. He also planted a 0.15ha plot of Bergeron in Montmélian and made a promising first vintage in 2017, called Verre-tige, fermented in old oak. In 2018 he made a Roussette de Savoie Monthoux from the Altesse plots he shares with Matthieu Goury.

Nicolas converted all his parcels to organics – he works the soil twice a year, using either an *intercep*, a strimmer or increasingly calling on the services of Pierre Gallet to plough by horse, especially for his plot of 60-year-old mass selection Mondeuse, planted at 10,000 vines/ha. He works with the phases of the moon and from 2018 introduced other biodynamic techniques; for weeding, he also uses sheep, shared with Matthieu Goury and Brice Omont. In the winery, Nicolas works with the lunar cycles too – he works in the natural way, using no SO_2 until just before bottling and then only if necessary. Nicolas is gradually replacing his second-hand fibreglass tanks with concrete eggs or sandstone jars – he also has some clay amphorae and barrels.

Nicolas' three Jacquères show different sides to this often-maligned grape. A real mountain wine, made in tank only, the stony Armenaz (named after the high pastures where grandfather grazed his cows) is grown at 580m above St-Jean, ripening three weeks later than the rest of his grapes; La Pente is a steely, citrus blend, with 30% fermented in oak; and Troublant is an orange wine aged in amphora. In whites he also makes Mon Blanc, a relatively fat but stony Chardonnay-dominant blend, and the excellent part barrel-fermented Ensemble Roussette de Savoie. For reds, Piste Rouge is an exuberant blend, with no added SO_2, and there are three distinct St-

Jean-de-la-Porte cuvées of Mondeuse. He uses mostly whole-bunch grapes, with some destemmed for the more intense cuvées. Les Montagnes Rousses is tannic, stony and vibrant; from the 60-year-old vines, grown on glacial moraine, is a cuvée simply named with the cru, aged in old barrels to give a very intense and mineral character; finally, Coteau de la Mort is from a steep red clay vineyard, historically farmed by the monks of the St-Philippe monastery – when young it is as uncommunicative as the monks might have been – a devout and serious wine.

Nicolas Ferrand's branding represents the russet colour of the vineyard soil in St-Jean-de-la-Porte.

Nicolas found ready markets for his wines in Paris, and locally he sells well to wine shops and restaurants in Haute-Savoie and in Lyon, but he shuns the ski resorts. He exports 20–25% mainly to Quebec, Sweden, Italy and the UK and does not want to increase. Providing he avoids too many risks with his low-intervention winemaking, Nicolas' wines should become a staple in every Savoie wine lover's cellar.

Domaine des Côtes Rousses
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Tel: 06 62 52 70 64
Email: lescotesrousses@gmail.com

Web: lescotesrousses.com
Contact: Nicolas Ferrand
Vineyards: 5.5ha
Certification: Qualisud
Visits: By appointment

La Cave de Cruet

This was the first wine co-operative in Savoie, established in 1939, and eight decades later it remains the largest, with 85 members delivering the grapes. The roughly 220ha of vineyards extend from St-Jéoire-Prieuré to Fréterive and include some in the IGP Vin des Allobroges zone across the Isère. Most members now live from their vineyards alone – some own vine nurseries and bring the harvest from their 'mother vines'. As a comparison, in 1990 the co-operative had 360 members, cultivating 320ha. Cave de Cruet has had its ups and downs, but from 2013 was confident enough to invest in updating the winery equipment to improve quality and help with handling smaller quantities – about half the volume of 1990.

Apart from grapes for Crémant and some Mondeuse destined for whole bunch fermentation, much is machine harvested. After a gap of more than a dozen years, I toured the winemaking facilities in 2017 and the modernization was encouraging. The vinification cellars are just off the D201 vineyard road and underground pipes take the wine down the hill to a second facility for bottling and storage, where the tasting room is located. The grape reception area includes the latest inspection technology to sort for disease. Small stainless steel tanks are used for the best wines, plus some *demi-muids* for top-of-the-range Altesse and Mondeuse. Winemaking consultancy and analysis are provided by Oeno Conseil, and the co-operative has invested hugely in Crémant de Savoie, with a cool room for the fermentation in bottle, and a bank of automatic riddlers; CMC comes to them for disgorgement.

Up to half of the production is sold in bulk to négociants, much is filled into boxes, and about 800,000 bottles are produced. Of this

about 60% is sold direct via their tasting room, wine fairs or to restaurants and hotels; 25% is sold through a network of Savoie cheese co-operative shops, mainly in ski resorts; 10% is sold to négociants for own-label sales, and the rest goes to supermarkets via Maison Viallet – there are no exports at present. In recent years, I've rarely given these wines a poor note: they offer good value and I feel that the Olivier Turlais touch pays off here. There are several cuvées of Mondeuse: Arcluzia, from two plots in Cruet, made with semi-carbonic maceration, shows real promise. Early vintages of their two Crémants show good balance, helped by 20–40% Chardonnay added to Jacquère and Altesse, and have proved a success, now accounting for 8% of sales. This co-operative is a much-loved local institution, and even if the range lacks some excitement, it is vital for the region that Cave de Cruet thrives.

The tasting room of the Cave de Cruet.

La Cave de Cruet
57 Place de la Gare, 73800 Cruet
Tel: 04 79 84 28 52
Email: cavedecruet@wanadoo.fr
Web: cavedecruet.com
Map ref: C3
Vineyards: 220ha

Visits: Tasting room

Domaine Genoux

The name Alexis Genoux first appeared on Arbin Mondeuse bottles in the 1960s. He was from Thoiry in the Bauges mountains, as was his wife Marie-Louise, whose father was one of the founders of the Montmélian co-operative and owned a few vineyards in Apremont. Alexis worked initially as a mixed farmer and then for various vineyards. He also joined the co-operative and was one of the earliest to bottle his wine. At the eastern end of Arbin, Château de Mérande was built in the 13th century as a noble's castle, it later became a stronghold and finally a simple farm with a wine cellar. The property, with land and vines, was purchased by Marie-Louise's family in 1949. Over the years, the buildings became hard to maintain and with complicated inheritance issues the château itself was sold.

The sons of Alexis and Marie-Louise, André and Daniel, bought back the château, as a wreck, in the year 2000. They had been brought up in Arbin, near the family winery, but they had fond childhood memories of playing at the château. In 2001 they moved the winery to Mérande and André gradually restored the living quarters, where he now lives with his family. André and Daniel had always helped in the vineyards, but their parents had actively tried to put them off a career in winemaking, as in those days it was a very hard way to make a living. André was a teacher until 2016 and Daniel a nurse, a profession that he continues part-time. In 1998 Daniel also joined his parents on the estate and after their parents died, André became more involved. Daniel cleared land high up on the Mérande slope to plant Altesse and Mondeuse, creating some spectacularly sited vineyards. Today Mondeuse reigns supreme, with 7ha within cru Arbin – about half in Mérande and the rest further to the west and in Montmélian. Also in Montmélian is a steep 2.5ha plot of Bergeron, planted in the early 2000s; they have 1.5ha of Altesse at Mérande and a little Gamay, Persan and Jacquère.

Alexis had never used chemical weed-killer and the family had always ploughed the soils, but in the 1980s they used chemical sprays. In the early 1990s, after Daniel became unwell, they decided to move towards organic growing. In 2008, they formed a partnership with Yann Pernuit, who helped the Genoux brothers convert officially to organics to achieve Ecocert certification in 2012. They were also interested in biodynamics and gradually introduced it into the vineyard, becoming certified with Biodyvin in 2015. Until he left in 2018, Yann oversaw the vineyards, with Daniel the main winemaker, and André in charge of administration; André now runs the vineyards too, with two full-time employees. Overall the vineyards are extremely steep and labour-intensive, worked with two *chenillettes* (small tracked vehicles), a *treuil* (plough on a pulley) and sometimes a horse.

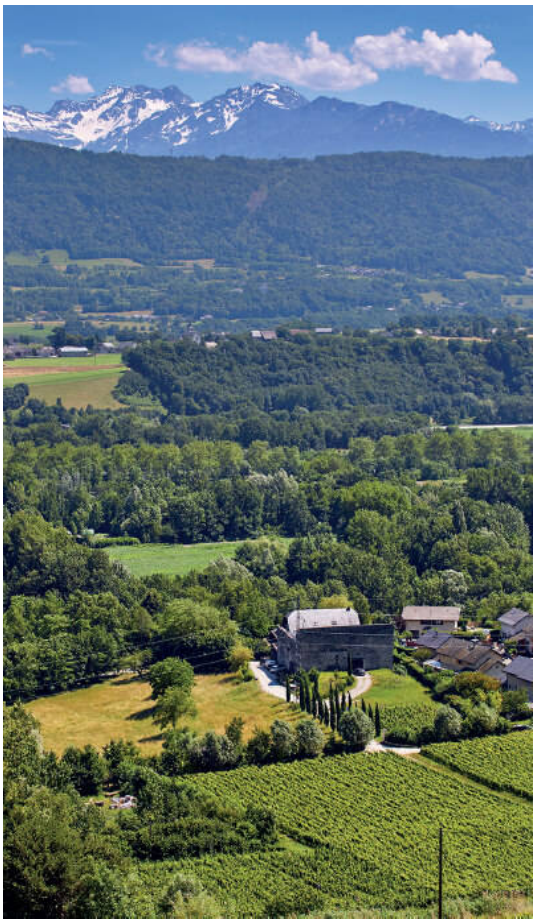
Daniel is an enthusiastic winemaker, keen to experiment, and there is a fine range of wines. He uses the biodynamic calendar, indigenous yeasts, chaptalizes only in extremis, and adds sulphur only at bottling, under the watchful eye of Oeno Conseil. There is a mixture of stainless steel and fibreglass tanks, along with 500l *demi-muid* barrels, purchased new in 2011, some barriques, a small *foudre*, and in 2018 some concrete eggs were added to the fleet.

The understated star of the whites is the mineral and bright Apremont 1248 (the year of the Mont Granier landslide), which is from a 0.15ha plot planted in 1919 by Marie-Louise's father. There have been two Roussette de Savoie cuvées for some years: the excellent Son Altesse, and from older vines the barrel-aged Comtesse Blanche; these were joined in 2017 by a concentrated and spicy cuvée named Arvi Pa ('good-bye' in Savoie dialect) from mass selection Altesse (from Domaine Dupasquier) planted in 2013, aged in old barrique. The main Chignin Bergeron is the unoaked Le Grand Blanc, dry, stony and, yes, 'big' as in the name.

There are several Mondeuse cuvées: 60% of the production is the easy-drinking La Belle Romaine, aged simply in tank, exuding crunchy red fruit; Comte Rouge is from older vines, aged for up to a year in barrel; and there are smaller special cuvées from lower-yielding vines, sometimes whole bunch, and matured in different oak sizes

and ages, including the deep, foot-trodden La Noire. In 2017 Daniel added Intégrale, vinified in barrel with six months' maceration, giving a very spicy and creamy result. In recent vintages, the quality of the fruit from these well-cared-for vineyards has shone through.

A significant 40% of sales goes through the tasting room; exports are currently at 15%, mainly to the US, UK, Quebec and various northern European countries, and the Genoux would like to increase this; the rest is sold through local organic shops, and elsewhere in France to independent wine shops and restaurants. The brothers are keen to move towards retirement, so I hope the work continues at its recent high level. Daniel's son Pierre, also a nurse, works part-time on the estate, and Pierre's younger brother Elie is currently studying wine and working at a biodynamic estate in Alsace, so may join in future. André has a young son too.



View from the top of the Mérande vineyards of Domaine Genoux, with the fortified château below.

Domaine Genoux/Château de Mérande
Chemin de Mérande, 73800 Arbin
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Email: domaine.genoux@wanadoo.fr
Web: domaine-genoux.fr
Contact: André Genoux
Map ref: C3
Vineyards: 12ha
Certification: Ecocert and Biodyvin
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine Grisard

The original Grisard family vine nursery and wine estate were retained by Jean-Pierre and Philippe when their older brother Michel left to create his own estate in 1982. And in 2010, Philippe left to set up separately too. Their grandfather Antoine had started the vine nursery and their father Pierre, a mixed farmer, who died young in 1972, was bottling some of the wines from about 2ha of vineyards. Today it has become a relatively large estate, and Jean-Pierre and his wife Marie-Jo were joined by their son Benoît and his wife Laetitia in 2011 – Benoît had previously worked as an electrical engineer but had always lent his parents a hand at weekends. Laetitia worked in sales.

The vineyards are split between Fréterive, St-Pierre-d'Albigny and St-Jean-de-la-Porte, with some in Chignin from 2018 to make a Chignin Bergeron. Mondeuse and Altesse are the largest plantings, and alongside the other main varieties they have a wide range of rare grapes, most recently planting Petite Arvine, Verdesse and Douce Noire. Benoît also plans to plant a small experimental area of resistant grape varieties that are being trialled around the world. He appreciates the scientific side of vineyard work, checking the detailed weather reports to help make the best decisions for when to treat the vines or to plough the soil. In Fréterive the soil is worked; the other vineyards are grassed down and mown. An *intercep* is used except where the vineyards are too steep and there, herbicide is used below the vine rows.

Machine harvesting is used only if there is an urgency to pick, and due to the range of varieties hand harvesting may take up to five weeks. The practical winery is equipped with cooling facilities and stainless steel, and there is an atmospheric underground cellar with more tanks and some old barrels. Indigenous yeast is used whenever possible and Benoît takes advice from both CMC (for sparkling wines) and Oeno Conseil, bottling everything before the next harvest – they keep large bottled wine stocks, enabling them to offer for sale several vintages. The white wines lack a little character but there is a consistent Roussette de Savoie and an interesting Mondeuse Blanche.

In the Mondeuse range, it is usually the St-Jean-de-la-Porte that tastes best, with depth and richness to the fruit – some others are a little oaky. Domaine Grisard was among the earliest to offer a varietal Persan from plantings in 1998 and it is usually excellent, with a brooding plummy character. The first vintages of Etraire de la Dui (labelled Etraire de l'Adui) and Douce Noire showed promise and for these rare varieties alone it is worth a visit to the vaulted tasting room.

As the wine estate has grown, the vine nursery has diminished to 20% of the size it once was. Its advantage is that it gives work to the five full-time employees at times when there is less to do in the vineyard. This proud family offers one of the widest ranges of wine in Savoie, with more than 30 cuvées. Sales are mainly local, with about one quarter sold at the tasting room, and a tiny amount of export. It would not take a big stretch for Benoît to lift the standard of the wines.

Domaine Grisard
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Tel: 04 79 28 54 09
Email: gaecgrisard@aol.com
Web: domainegrisard.com
Contact: Benoît and Laetitia Grisard
Map ref: E4
Vineyards: 28ha
Visits: Tasting room

Michel Grisard

Michel Grisard retired as a vigneron after the 2014 vintage, but his long-lived wines under the Domaine Prieuré Saint-Christophe label still appear at tastings and on top restaurant lists. From 2015, his vineyards and domaine name were taken over by Domaine Giachino.

Among the vignerons of his generation – he was born in 1948 – he has been the most innovative and controversial in Savoie and his legacy continues in many different areas.

The eldest son of Pierre and Marie Grisard, who were mixed farmers, also running a vine nursery and making wine (see Domaine Grisard), Michel remembers with fondness his father's Mondeuse wines, as well as his adversity to certain chemicals. Michel studied agriculture and describes himself as being from the NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium) generation, when chemical fertilizers and pesticides were considered the answer to everything in farming. A year after Michel joined the family business in 1971, his father died and Michel, at 23, had to run the nursery and the wine estate, soon joined by his brother Jean-Pierre. In 1976 he planted Mondeuse for a small personal vineyard, named La Basine, on a reputed terroir in the Fréterive forest; he created a home nearby with his wife Roselyne by restoring the St-Christophe priory, where later he established his barrel ageing cellar.

In 1982, after his younger brother Philippe also joined the family estate, Michel left, wanting to pursue a different direction. He had no vineyards apart from La Basine, but was allocated space in the family winery for vinification. He planted more Mondeuse in Fréterive, ending up with 3ha there, and then in 1985 planted 1.4ha of Altesse on land he cleared in Cruet; between 1992 and 1995 he planted nearly 2ha of Mondeuse in Arbin. Originally, although Michel worked the soils of his vineyards, he used herbicide and chemical sprays. His road to Damascus moment came in 1994 when, through Rhône producer Michel Chapoutier, he met biodynamic consultant François Bouchet, who helped him convert to biodynamics (the first in Savoie) and organics, becoming certified by Ecocert in 1997. Although not certified by Demeter, he developed a close relationship with Pierre Masson.

From his first vintage in 1983, Michel made his Mondeuse wines differently from others, using lower yields, longer macerations and ageing in barrels, aiming to make a high quality wine to age – his inspiration was always Bordeaux. After early sales in the most famous restaurants around the lakes and in Chamonix, he achieved a listing

in Paul Bocuse's restaurant in Lyon, the sommelier there helping to spread the word. In 1991 his fame was sealed when he spent a month selling to top Paris restaurants. He only ever exported a little.

Michel made two main wines: Roussette de Savoie, fermented and aged in new or nearly new oak barrels; and Mondeuse Tradition, which, apart from 2009, was always chaptalized, aiming for about 12% alcohol, and aged in slightly older barrels. Originally, he macerated whole bunches, using the submerged cap method, then in the 1990s he destemmed and later used semi-carbonic maceration; from 2005 he stopped oak ageing. Usually yeasts were indigenous, and Michel always added judicious amounts of SO_2 – he remains adamantly against sulphur-free wines. Michel's Mondeuse Prestige was made solely from the grapes at La Basine and only in top years, the first vintage being 1989 – these wines combined power with fine-grained tannins and incredible finesse. The ageing potential of all three wines has been legendary, especially – for me – his Roussette, which combined mineral freshness with a herbal intensity and gentle oak spicing; his 1997 tasted in both 2017 and 2019 was astoundingly alive and kicking.

Michel Grisard at home in Fréterive.

In the late 1990s Michel began the monumental project of bringing to life the abandoned vineyards of Cevins, which became

Domaine des Ardoisières. And he was also one of the founders of the CAAPG, making it a mission to rehabilitate rare Alpine grape varieties. His own vineyards became increasingly neglected, which attracted criticism, and his wines were often refused the appellation, but he never cared, naming his 2005 and 2006 white 'Son Altesse le Refus'. His final Mondeuse, labelled M…14, is full of pure, delicious acidulated red fruit with rounded tannins behind, but for me, his 2010 Mondeuse Tradition was his final classic vintage; tasted in 2019 it had a wonderfully attractive cranberry crunch.

Michel is a fiercely proud, highly cultured man, who from his mid-thirties began a new wine-related project each decade. He continues to crusade for change, as well as to preserve history. The world of Savoie wine would be much poorer without him and owes him a bigger debt of gratitude than is evidenced today. I salute you, Michel.

Michel Grisard (Retired)
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Maison Philippe Grisard

Philippe, the youngest of the Grisard brothers, hesitated between joining the family business, crop farming and sheep farming, but chose to study wine in Beaune. He eventually joined the family estate (see Domaine Grisard) and was the winemaker for over two decades, as well as working on sales for the vine nursery. Having left the family estate, in 2010 he took over the vines and winery of Gilbert Bouchez in Cruet, who had died in a tractor accident. Although at nearly 60 years old Philippe is still ambitious, in his words, he prefers to be realistic, rather than a dreamer. Yet, in a short time, he has built up his wine estate, adding the 8ha in Cruet to his own personal 4ha in Fréterive and St-Jean-de-la-Porte, and took on a further 5ha, a small part of it across the river above Les Molettes in IGP Vin des Allobroges. He replanted many of the vineyards with local varieties,

especially rare grapes, and he also buys the equivalent of 6ha in grapes. He created a welcoming and informative tasting room, an original logo and label, and a useful website. Philippe is excellent at gathering good people around him and has five key employees, with several others part-time.

His largest plantings are Mondeuse and Altesse, and Philippe has over 1ha each of Mondeuse Blanche and Persan. He is also the first vigneron to specifically plant and bottle Mondeuse Grise, a variant of red Mondeuse, and has planted Verdesse, Bia Blanc and Petite Ste-Marie. He is a great believer in treating each plot differently, so when he took over the vineyards, he either re-worked the soil or grassed it down in order to reduce herbicide to a minimum, and hopes to eliminate it by 2020. He is very defensive of sustainability being the correct approach, rather than full-scale organics. He uses systemic sprays before and after flowering and focuses the human labour on vine training to limit disease, as well as yields.

Harvest is mainly manual, with sorting at the vine and sometimes two passes through the vineyards. Philippe uses Oeno Conseil for bottling and knows Olivier Turlais well, and although not officially contracted to him for consultancy he has great respect for his advice. He likes to get fermentation going quickly and uses cultured yeast if needed, with stainless steel or barrels as appropriate.

Philippe has created a large range of wines, which improve year on year. I prefer the unoaked whites and would single out the particularly delicate and floral Belle Lurette IGP from very old Jacquère (planted in the 1940s) blended with Chardonnay and Pinot Gris; and the Originelle Mondeuse Blanche becomes more expressive each year. Philippe's Fougueux Persan and his Mondeuse cuvées are very true to their grape varieties, with the latter also expressing well each individual terroir. My consistent favourite is his floral but structured Audacieuse St-Jean-de-la-Porte. Some Altesse, Mondeuse Blanche and Mondeuse bottles are held back to sell older vintages.

Philippe Grisard in his vineyards below the Château de Miolans.

Philippe considers working in wine to be 'a human adventure' and said that it was travelling through other wine regions for the vine nursery that made him realize Savoie had everything going for it. He is now close to his brother Michel, and Philippe has worked hard in helping the CAAPG to rehabilitate rare varieties. So far, just a tiny amount of his wine is exported, but Philippe has built his tasting room sales up to 35%. The rest is sold directly to restaurants and shops in Savoie and Haute-Savoie. Nadène, the youngest of Philippe's three daughters, is studying wine at Montpellier University and may one day join the domaine.

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Map ref: C3
Vineyards: 17ha + some purchased grapes
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine de l'Idylle

The Tiollier family inspire loyalty. For over 70 years they supplied a restaurant near Chamonix that Sylvain Tiollier's great-grandfather Albert Tiollier delivered to in barrel. And since 2001 they have dealt with the same UK importer, Yapp Brothers, inspiring them to commission the cartoon postcard illustrated here. I have enjoyed taking friends and wine tour clients to taste with them since the mid-1990s, for their warm welcome and consistent range of wines. Brothers Philippe (technically now retired) and François have been real ambassadors for the region and were joined by Philippe's son Sylvain in 2011.

When a previous François Tiollier built the house and planted vines and fruit trees around it in 1840, he baptized the estate Domaine de l'Idylle. It was Sylvain's grandfather André and his wife Henriette who began to transform the estate, starting with about 4ha of vineyards, bottling some of their production from 1958, but still delivering barrels to restaurants in their Peugeot 203 van. Their sons, Philippe and François, joined the estate in the mid-1970s and from 10ha more than doubled the vineyard area. They have about 4ha of vineyards in Arbin, mostly of Mondeuse, plus a little in Fréterive, and the rest of the vineyards are in various parcels around Cruet.

Philippe loves the outdoors and the mountains and has been in charge of the vineyards, which have been partially grassed down for many years; in some vineyards the soil is worked every other row, swapping each year. In the flatter areas the Tiolliers use an *intercep*; elsewhere they still use herbicide under the vine rows. They use systemic sprays and some Bordeaux mixture, and since 2018 have been certified HVE. Sylvain is reluctant to go organic as it would push the prices up, risking losing many long-term clients. François and Philippe made the wine together, with Mondeuse being a particular passion of François, inspired by his time working in both Burgundy and Bordeaux. Now Sylvain is the winemaker, after studies in Montpellier and an oenology degree in Toulouse. Among other work experience, he worked in 2013 for Domaine Carrau in Uruguay and Odfjell Vineyards in Chile. The winery was extensively updated in

2010 for better temperature control and to avoiding pumping. More recently, a new grape reception area allows whole bunch macerations for some reds.

The harvest is mainly by hand; yeasts are cultured for whites, and mainly indigenous for reds. For some years they have used Olivier Turlais for consultancy, as well as bottling, and CMC for their sparkling wines. Their wine range was technologically consistent earlier than many estates here, and now needs to evolve. Among whites, one of my regular 'Alpine house wines' has always been the Cruet Vieille Vigne (unusually with no 's' on the end: it translates as 'old vineyard' – about 60 years old – rather than 'old vines'). Bottled later than the basic Cruet, with longer lees contact, about 20% goes into oak, to give a light, lemony and mineral dry Jacquère, with a hint of creaminess. Their best wines are Mondeuse, including the basic blend, which is fruity and enjoyable very young; the Arbin Prestige La Saxicole, from a particularly steep parcel selection, made with a long maceration and gentle micro-oxygenation for a year; and the oak-aged Arbin Chartreuse de Lourdens, which is excellent in a good vintage. Pétille Idylle is a good Crémant with a base wine blend of 20% each of Altesse and Chardonnay with Jacquère; Sylvain will increase the Altesse for future cuvées – it accounts for about 7% of production.

Philippe, François and Sylvain Tiollier are known for their Mondeuse wines.

Most is sold in bottle and about 17% is exported to the US, Quebec, the UK and beyond. Around 20% is sold direct at the tasting room, and the rest is split between mini-supermarkets in the ski resorts and wholesalers, and direct sales to restaurants and wine shops around France. The lovely Tiollier family deserve their loyal customers and could get new ones too, if they just inched up the fruit quality.

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Map ref: C3
Vineyards: 23ha
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine Louis Magnin

It was a fine Mondeuse Vieilles Vignes, from vines planted by Louis Magnin's grandfather, which made me realize Savoie wines could be of serious quality. And since the early 1990s, I have regularly visited Béatrice and Louis Magnin's little tasting room in Arbin – the development of their estate has almost seemed like a microcosm of the whole Savoie wine region. Today, after working hard for over 40 years, the Magnins are winding down, retaining just a small vineyard area that they can manage.

Louis' grandfather, another Louis, started the estate; his father, Emile, was part of the Montmélian co-operative until 1973, by which time he was bottling his wines, mainly Mondeuse with some Jacquère. Louis joined in 1975 after military service and Beaune wine school. Soon after, he planted some Altesse and then Gamay, the

latter because Mondeuse was hard to sell back then. By 1980 Louis was running the estate and was soon joined by Béatrice. Louis changed the way the Mondeuse was made, buying a destemmer… 36 years later, in 2016, he made whole-bunch Mondeuse again, 'returning to grandfather's methods'. Louis and Béatrice built up the estate to 8ha, planting Bergeron in Montmélian in 1986 and making wine in the old family cellar. Selling the wine was their big problem, neither enjoying the process. But from 1984 their wines were taken on by a well-known merchant selling to restaurants in Haute-Savoie, and when they won an award for their Chignin Bergeron, their reputation spread.

Their vineyards had always been farmed sustainably and, inspired by other local vignerons, they did some biodynamic tests in 2007 and began official Ecocert organic conversion in 2010. They have continued biodynamically in the vineyard ever since, working the soils in all but the two steepest plots and loving the fact that the soils smelt alive in a way they never did before. They regularly test ways to fight mildews and are great believers in vitamin C for disease prevention, both for humans and for vines.

When they built a new winery in 2006 – a practical set-up with mainly stainless steel tanks and some oak – I believe the wines made a big leap forward. However, Louis regularly experienced problems using only indigenous yeasts, and using cultured yeast precludes Demeter certification; and he has always believed in the benefits of chaptalizing Mondeuse by at least half of one percent. For many years Louis made his two Mondeuse wines in tank only, but then in 2000 bought new oak for a cuvée called La Brova – today this spends two years in mainly two- to four-year-old barrels with just 10% new oak. Later there was a sumptuous Mondeuse made in 30hl wooden vats, named La Rouge. At one point there were several Chignin Bergeron cuvées with varying amounts of residual sugar, but fruit from their best parcels mainly went into the dry, rich and honeyed cuvée named Grand Orgue – today this also includes the wines that went into Verticale, a chiselled Chignin Bergeron from a specific steep parcel, which was the first worked in biodynamics. There has always been a fine partially oak-aged Roussette de Savoie too.

The most consistent and memorable wine, with fabulous ageing potential, has been their Vieilles Vignes Mondeuse from 0.7ha of vines planted in 1902 and 1903 by the original Louis Magnin. In 1990 some vines were replaced, but none since. From the late 1990s to 2008 the Vieilles Vignes was matured partly in tank and partly in *demi-muid* and then, having transformed its name to Tout un Monde, from 2009 it was matured fully in two- to three-year-old *demi-muids*, purchased from Yann Chave in the northern Rhône.

For a while the Magnins tried to find a buyer as their sons weren't interested in the estate, but one of them, Serge, a landscape gardener with no wine experience, has now joined them to help in the vineyards. After giving up their leased vineyards, for some years they worked with the 6ha of vineyards they owned, and then from 2015 started leasing parcels to organic colleagues. Dismissing rumours that they were giving up, Louis officially retired in 2017, with Béatrice in charge. Since 2018 they have continued to farm 3ha including 0.8ha Bergeron (for Grand Orgue), 0.2ha Altesse and 2ha Mondeuse from which they now make three cuvées: the jubilant La Fille d'Arbin (first made in 2016, from whole bunch grapes), the ever-improving La Brova and the inimitable Tout un Monde. Over the years, the Magnins developed an unusual policy of keeping bottles back for at least one year before selling and despite having wound down, they have several vintages still to release. About 20–25% is exported and the rest is mainly sold within Savoie and Haute-Savoie to shops and restaurants. One part of me hopes Louis and Béatrice finally get a rest, and the other hopes that their pleasure in sharing their wines continues for another 15 years, along with their ancient vines, until their keen young grandson is ready to take over.

Louis and Béatrice Magnin have been making their wines in Arbin for four decades.

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Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 3ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Domaine Saint-Germain

The smile of Raphaël Saint-Germain's teenage daughter Louise lights up a room when she serves her father's wines at tastings. Pursuing a programme of wine studies, she will surely be running this fine organic estate one day. Raphaël has not had an easy time, bringing up Louise on his own after her mother died very young, but his own smile, his philosophy and persistence gets him through. Raphaël's brother Etienne took over their uncles' vineyards after wine studies at Beaune and after two years delivering the crop to the Cave de Cruet, in 1999 he started the estate, building a small winery. Raphaël joined him in 2001, at which point the pair had 3.5ha of vines. Their father had been a builder, but their grandfather, Albert Saint-Germain, had made Mondeuse, Gamay and Jacquère wines until the 1970s, selling locally and in Valloire, a ski resort in the Maurienne Valley, where he took barrels on the train. Although Raphaël had always been drawn to the vineyards, he chose to do a degree in plant biology. He travelled, in particular spending time in neighbouring mountain valleys, Switzerland's Valais and Italy's Aosta Valley.

The brothers put huge energy into building up the estate, quickly reaching 10ha, and they soon gained a good local reputation. Raphaël had always been keen to embrace organics and they began conversion in 2009 with full certification in 2012. Sometime after this, Etienne, a talented winemaker, ran out of steam and has since taken a back seat, leaving Raphaël in sole charge. The vineyards are almost all in St-Pierre in various plots below the jagged Dent d'Arclusaz mountain, many in sight of the imposing fortress, Château de Miolans. There is a 0.6ha plot in St-Jean-de-la-Porte and in 2017 Raphaël took on 0.4ha of Bergeron from Louis Magnin (recently farmed by Adrien Berlioz). Raphaël enjoys offering a big range of wines and champions Alpine and rare grapes. He has about 4ha of Mondeuse and just over 2ha of Altesse, along with other classic Savoie varieties. Among the rarer varieties are 1.6ha of Persan plus small plantings of Velteliner Rouge Précoce, Mondeuse Blanche, Verdesse, Petite Arvine and Douce Noire. Raphaël's priorities in the vineyard are to adapt to climate change and encourage long, slow ripening of the grapes. He tries to create maximum biodiversity,

keeps copper use as low as feasible and aims to keep the soil alive, so biodynamics and plant preparations play a key role.

Raphaël Saint-Germain is a fervent supporter of organic wine-growing in Savoie.

Fabrice Bouché is the main winemaker and also works at Oeno Conseil. Originally from Champagne, Fabrice came to Savoie for paragliding, but he has 30 years' winemaking experience and is very much a right-hand man for Raphaël. And in 2016 Philippe Gazet became a partner too, focusing on the vineyards. He has worked for years in Savoie vineyards and also looks after an organic garden for Château de Miolans. In addition, there is a permanent team of three women who work in the vineyards – Raphaël is convinced they have a gentler touch with the vines than men. Raphaël is everywhere at once, leading the team, trying to anticipate issues, questioning everything.

In the winery Fabrice works with cool temperatures and, to keep sulphites to a minimum, saturates the tanks with carbon dioxide before filling. Rather than buying commercial CO_2 gas bottles, he recycles the gas released in the fermentation process. He uses only indigenous yeasts, with chaptalization only if necessary, mostly for Mondeuse. The latter is partly destemmed, partly whole-bunch, depending on the cuvée. The main winery is a clutter of different

tanks, and there is a barrel cellar up the road. From 2019, barrel ageing will be in the 17th-century vaulted cellar of Château de Menjoud, where Raphaël is creating a tasting area too. Housing a convent for many years, a private buyer purchased it from the town in 2016. The new owner was keen to renovate and to find new uses for the property; Raphaël proposed planting a 2ha vineyard in the main walled *clos* as well as using the cellars and developing wine tourism.

Domaine Saint-Germain makes a range of classic varietal wines and, increasingly, blends. Most of the wines need time in bottle. For years I have enjoyed Raphaël's whites, especially the way Altesse develops into a harmonious, herbal style after three or more years in bottle. As for the reds, I have been consistently impressed by the light-structured Pinot and the two main Mondeuse cuvées, aged only in tank: the earlier-drinking Les Taillis and the fabulous, brooding Pied de la Barme both evolve beautifully. The plummy, rounded Persan is one of the best examples – the first vintage, 2006, tasted superb from magnum ten years later. The deliciously easy-drinking pair of blends labelled Crac Boum'Bu are Raphaël's cheeky response to those shunning the local ski resort trade. The Gamay-dominated red features a mountain biker on the label; the Jacquère-dominated white (pictured here) shows a skier. More serious blends, which reflect Raphaël's ongoing interest in the grapes of the Valais and Aosta, are the pair named Par Delà les Versants (roughly, 'the other side of the mountains'): a sumptuous white, vinified in oak from Petite Arvine, Roussanne, Mondeuse Blanche, Viognier, Marsanne and Altesse; and a firm, acidulated red from Gamaret, Pinot, Mondeuse and Persan grown on a dramatic hillside named La Perrouse (the oaked Mondeuse cuvée La Perrouse is being phased out). The first tiny cuvées from the young vines of Domaine du Clos de Menjoud will be released in 2019.

The labels may be challenging but they are printed on environmentally friendly paper, made partly from grape bunch stems, and adorn lightweight bottles. About 40% is exported, mainly to the US, Canada and Scandinavia. About 10% is sold direct and the rest to restaurants and wine shops, mainly locally. Raphaël has not ceased to

evolve and expand the estate; he helped start the Pétavins group and works hard to promote organics and Savoie as a fine wine region. Louise may have a busy future ahead.

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Map ref: D4
Vineyards: 14.5ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Domaine Fabien Trosset

Avalanche is the name of a vineyard road in Arbin and the name chosen by this young Trosset domaine for its main Mondeuse cuvée. Fabien Trosset and his partner Chloé farm 14ha of Mondeuse in cru Arbin – more than one-third of the cru's vineyards. Fabien's father, Jean-Louis, who died young in 2011, had 8ha of vineyards and was a member of the Cave de Cruet, following his father Albert, the brother of the legendary Arbin vigneron Charles Trosset. Fabien went to wine school in Beaujolais and returned to Savoie with Chloé, working with several vignerons, notably Philippe Grisard, who describes him as a very hard worker. After his father died, Philippe encouraged Fabien to establish his own estate and then when Joseph Trosset retired in 2013, Fabien took on 2ha of his vines too, soon adding around 6ha from another Arbin vigneron, the late François Perrin.

For whites, there are 3ha of Bergeron in Montmélian and 1.15ha of Altesse, and in 2018 Fabien planted 0.3ha of Mondeuse Blanche. Chloé has worked full-time on the estate since 2016 and somehow the couple manage everything with just one full-time employee and

eight seasonal vineyard workers. Originally, they worked in a small winery in the middle of Arbin, and sold some of their grapes to négociants, but in 2017 they built a large air-conditioned winery on a small industrial estate.

In the vineyards, every other row is grassed down, with the soil worked in the other, and until recently they used herbicide under the vine rows throughout. When I visited in 2016, Fabien could not envisage it being cost-effective to go organic with such a large vineyard area. However, now Chloé feels they need to start conversion, so since 2018 they have an *intercep* and are testing organics on 2ha, with the aim of increasing the area each year. The winery has stainless steel tanks plus 500l and 600l *demi-muid* barrels for some of the Mondeuse. After some trials, since 2018 Fabien has used only indigenous yeasts; he decides whether to destem the Mondeuse grapes according to the year and the cuvée.

Chloé and Fabien Trosset farm the largest area of Mondeuse vines in Arbin.

Of their two whites, La Dévire Roussette de Savoie stands out for me, exuding mineral freshness, with creaminess from lees contact and malolactic fermentation. From their Montmélian Mondeuse vineyards on very stony limestone scree, with vines mainly under 20 years old, they make the lighter, fruity Les Eboulis, aged in tank. Avalanche is from slightly lower yields of vines averaging 50 years old in the more clay-rich vineyards of Arbin, with about 10% aged in the *demi-muids*. Widely available in the region, this Mondeuse is really

enjoyable young, with fresh acidulated red fruits and a spicy edge, but it seems to have the seriousness to age well. Finally, there is the cuvée 1952, named for Jean-Louis' birth year: it is from 90-year-old vines, with most of the wine spending a year in *demi-muids*. Having tasted 2016 and 2017 vintages I reserve judgement on this cuvée as the firm and unyielding tannins certainly need time.

There's a smart tasting room at the winery and the couple hope to increase sales there. Exports are between 5% and 10%, mainly to Norway, Ireland and the US – their US importer, Charles Neal, was kindly passed onto them by Louis Trosset, when he no longer had sufficient wine to export. Other sales are through local distributors. It is vineyard work that Fabien enjoys best, nurturing his precious Mondeuse vines, but he's grown to like winemaking too, helped along the way by Olivier Turlais. There should be a fine future here.

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Contact: Fabien and Chloé Trosset
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 20ha
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Domaine Jean Vullien & Fils

Jean Vullien, now in his seventies, is from one of the earliest families in Fréterive to run a vine nursery, begun in 1890 by his grandfather. When Jean joined his father Marcel in 1964, the number of grafted vines they produced was doubling each year, until 1973, when the oil crisis threatened sales. This encouraged Jean to diversify and plant vineyards to make wine, establishing his estate with Jeannine, his

wife, and joined for a while by his younger brother Marc (who from 1989 created a separate estate, Domaine Les Tartères). Today, as well as the nursery, which remains important, commercializing about one million grafted vines annually, the family have the largest privately owned estate in the Combe de Savoie. Since 1984 the winery and spacious tasting room have been housed in what was once a silkworm factory in the middle of Fréterive. Jean's sons David and Olivier joined in the late 1990s, having both studied wine at Beaune.

Jean Vullien with grafted baby vines, ready to plant.

Domaine Vullien's vineyards have been farmed sustainably for many years and are stretched along the Combe, with the largest areas in St-Jean-de-la-Porte and in Montmélian, where they have over 7ha Roussanne on steep limestone scree. The St-Jean vineyards include 1.5ha next to Château St-Philippe, and in the 1990s Jean purchased the rights to use the name of the château from a previous owner – the situation is more delicate with the new owner… As well as about 8ha Mondeuse, 4ha Altesse plus some Gamay and Jacquère, unusually for Savoie they have nearly 5ha Chardonnay and 4ha Pinot

Noir, which reflects these grapes' importance for the nursery. Most is machine-harvested. The winery was updated in 2009 and is impressively modern, including four stainless steel vats with auto-punch-down systems for the start of the Pinot Noir and Mondeuse fermentations. There's also a temperature-controlled barrel cellar.

I have tasted the range over many years and the same wines stand out. There are better Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines here than from most other estates, and I would single out the Pinot Noir Jeannine, aged in François Frères barrels, from vineyards planted mainly with low-yielding clones. There are usually three Chignin Bergerons, including a late-harvest version – the main cuvée, Les Divolettes, is always good and just dry, but the stand-out is Harmonie from the best grapes, picked later, by hand, in several passes: dry, but very rich, with malolactic fermentation blocked to give it better balance. The Mondeuse wines can be a little hard, but Château St-Philippe shows well given time.

All is sold in bottle and 10–15% is exported, with the US taking about half, the rest going to Benelux, the UK and elsewhere. The tasting room represents 15–20% of sales, and the balance is sold to shops and restaurants directly by the Vulliens within Savoie and Haute-Savoie, and through distributors further afield. This is a big family business, with David, Olivier and their brother-in-law Jérémy along with ten full-time staff and another ten who work nine months of the year. Retired now, the genial and helpful Jean still comes into work each day and can be proud of what he has built up over the years.

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Map ref: E4

Vineyards: 37ha
Visits: Tasting room

Bernard and Marido Bachellier led the revival of wine-growing in the Maurienne Valley; their vineyards at Aiton have been partly taken over by Maxime Dancoine (see l'Aitonnement).

THE TARENTAISE AND MAURIENNE VALLEYS

The Tarentaise and the Maurienne are two parallel intra-alpine valleys. By the end of the 19th century both valleys were extensively industrialized, which led to the decline and near-extinction of the vineyards. Neither valley was included in the delimitation for the Savoie AOC.

The Tarentaise Valley, with the Isère river running along it, leads from Albertville to the most famous French ski resorts, including Courchevel, Val d'Isère and Tignes. Many of its slopes are too steep to plant vineyards, though there are some above Albertville and at Cevins, which are visible from the main highway to the winter sports

resorts; there are also small private vineyards in Aime. The much warmer Maurienne Valley, with the Arc river running along it, ends at the Fréjus Tunnel, one of the main routes to Italy. At its peak in the 19th century it had around 2,000ha of vineyards, with an excellent reputation for its wines. As well as phylloxera, it was the huge aluminium industry that led to vineyards being abandoned – and in the 1950s the largest company, Pechiney, hammered in the final nail, paying subsidies to vineyard owners to uproot their vines. For reasons that echo some of those explored here, a small revival of the vineyard area is taking place near St-Jean-de-Maurienne. There are also now small commercial vineyards in Aiton, near where the Arc meets the Isère.

L'Aitonnement

Maxime Dancoine, widely known in Savoie as an oenologist for Oeno Conseil, named his fledgling estate for the village of Aiton, in the Maurienne Valley, where his vineyards lie. His grandfather, who had worked in the food business, passed on his love of wine to Maxime – the family is from Lille on the Belgian border. Maxime progressed from wine studies in Beaune to an oenology degree at the Swiss wine school in Changins. He came to Savoie in 2010 and worked for the chamber of agriculture for three years, and then for a year with Domaine Louis Magnin before joining Oeno Conseil, for whom he still works part-time. Maxime is a keen member of the CAAPG and through the association he met teachers Marido and Bernard Bachellier in late 2015.

In 2002 the Bachelliers had replanted some vineyards on a mainly abandoned slope in Aiton, farmed only by weekend vignerons. The vineyards are steep and south-facing, and the little topsoil lies over limestone with some schistose rocks. Marido and Bernard took on a few old parcels and planted Altesse, Mondeuse and – with the support of the CAAPG – Douce Noire, soon converting to organics. Their estate is called Les Sartos du Bec (web: sartosdubec.fr) after the house and cellar they restored, which is made up of six linked *sartots* dating back to 1728. Among other wines, their deliciously

light and juicy *nouveau*-style Douce Noire has been sold exclusively locally.

Maxime Dancoine in his Aiton vineyard.

Maxime took over 0.5ha of the Bachelliers' vineyards in 2016, and since then he has taken on all their Altesse and Jacquère vines, some Mondeuse and a little Douce Noire. He has also planted a little each year, including the rare Blanc de Maurienne (aka Rèze) and Joubertin, along with Mondeuse and Altesse. By 2019 he had about 1.5ha and hopes to end up with 3ha. Family and friends help him work the vineyards, which to him is an important part of the project. He made his first two vintages at Brice Omont's winery in Fréterive, but from 2018 the wines have been made in Pontcharra, where Maxime is also a partner in Des Vins d'Envie. Maxime has introduced various biodynamic treatments and likes to work with moon phases, if he can. In the cellar, he works oxidatively at the start and all his wines are vinified and aged in *demi-muid* barrels with indigenous yeast and added sulphur only pre-bottling.

The whites begin with the lemony Genesis, from various parcels of 80-year-old Jacquère, continue with the more intense Big Bang, a pure expression of half Jacquère with half Altesse, and end – for now – with Solar, a wonderfully stony Altesse of great intensity, allied with fresh acidity: it is a crackingly good range. The Dark Side is from plots of 15–80-year-old Mondeuse, the grape Aiton was once best known for. Maxime's example is powerful, tannic and mineral; somewhat too natural for me, but it will evolve, as will all the range,

given time. Maxime is not afraid to put a high price on his wines and at least half goes to export markets, with most of the rest sold in northern France. Maxime is a fine ambassador to join the Bachelliers in keeping this vineyard hillside alive.

L'Aitonnement
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Map ref: B1
Vineyards: 1.5ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles
Visits: Strictly by appointment

Domaine des Ardoisières

At the time of writing Brice Omont has 16 harvests under his belt from the magnificent vineyard slope overlooking Cevins in the Tarentaise Valley. The history of how this hillside came to be replanted from the late 1990s by Michel Grisard to become Domaine des Ardoisières is explained here. The two men worked together from 2003 until 2010 (Brice became an official partner in 2005), since when Brice has run the estate on his own, gradually adding other vineyards in Savoie, making all his wines under the IGP Vin des Allobroges designation. Domaine des Ardoisières' wines earned a fine reputation very quickly, which Brice has maintained and even raised, through determination and astute decision making, despite not entirely following Michel's original vision.

Brice came from a farming family in northern France but had no interest in commercial crop farming. After a degree in agricultural engineering, he worked for a Champagne house, and met Michel,

who was looking for a trainee vigneron to work with him at Ardoisières. Brice liked the sound of this ambitious project and was keen to learn about biodynamics, of which Michel was a fervent practitioner.

The 6ha of vineyards at Cevins lie on poor stony soils, with a predominance of mica-schist, reaching up to almost 500m altitude. They were mainly planted between 1998 and 2002 with about two-thirds white grapes – primarily Altesse, Roussanne and Jacquère, with a little Mondeuse Blanche and Pinot Gris; the reds, on the most southerly-facing slopes, are Persan and Mondeuse. The hillside is terraced in steps, going around the hill's contour rather than in rows, with the vines at a density of 8,000/ha, trained *sur échalas*. It is incredibly costly and difficult to work, with everything needing to be done manually. Brice had begun questioning the benefits of biodynamics versus organics by the time Michel left, taking the dynamizer with him. He believes in good composting, but no longer uses the key biodynamic preparations, although he uses plant preparations to help limit copper use and follows the lunar calendar when he can.

Brice Omont rests at a restored sartot in the Cevins vineyards.

Due to the high costs of work at Cevins, the wines have always been sold relatively expensively and Brice was keen to offer more accessibly priced wines too. In 2009 he leased 3ha of vineyards in St-Pierre-de-Soucy and neighbouring villages, above the left bank of the Isère within the IGP Vin des Allobroges zone (the main Combe de Savoie vineyards are opposite). These had been run organically by Yves Carron, who had sold his wine locally and was retiring. A neighbouring vigneron, Jean-Paul Finas, who made an impressive Mondeuse Blanche from the first modern plantings in 1985, was more sceptical about organics. Brice helped Jean-Paul with organic conversion and then on his retirement in 2014 was able to lease his 4ha too. The St-Pierre vineyards are mainly on west-facing slopes at around 400m altitude, with some schist, but with a greater clay component, and much easier to work by machine. As well as Mondeuse Blanche, there is Jacquère, Chardonnay and, for reds, Gamay with a small planting of Persan. To augment his red grapes, in 2016 Brice took on 1ha of Mondeuse at St-Jean-de-la-Porte on a

classic limestone scree slope. It is from these vineyards above the Isère that Brice makes his Argile Rouge and Argile Blanc blends (*argile* means clay). In 2015 and 2016 Brice also planted 1.5ha of Roussanne, alongside Chardonnay and Mondeuse Blanche, on an abandoned vineyard slope nearby at Laissaud, below a privately owned château. The first vintage will be made in 2019 with the wine going into Argile Blanc. Brice has five full-time employees to work on all the vineyards, as well as seasonal workers.

The low yields of the Cevins vineyards and the warm mica-schist soils mean that ripening there is about one week ahead of the other vineyards. From 2010 Brice created a winery in a large warehouse in Fréterive. His winemaking is simple: he never destems and uses very soft pressing to limit damage; he will chaptalize if he feels he needs to, never adds cultured yeast, and doesn't add any sulphites until before bottling. He encourages malolactic fermentation naturally. Barrels are bought mainly second-hand (some new for Quartz Altesse) and they include some Stockinger *demi-muids*.

The three emblematic wines exclusively from the Cevins grapes are Améthyste red (60% Persan, 40% Mondeuse), Schiste white (40% Jacquère, 30% Roussanne, 20% Pinot Gris and 10% Mondeuse Blanche) and Quartz Altesse. Argile Blanc is usually 40% each of Jacquère and Chardonnay (aged partly in old barrels), with 20% Mondeuse Blanche – year in, year out, it is a delicious stony, herbal, tangy and quintessentially Alpine white. Since 2016, Argile Rouge has been 65% Gamay, 25% Mondeuse and 10% Persan, and after a semi-carbonic maceration, the blend is aged in old barrels – juicy and earthy, it is for the die-hard lovers of rustic Alpine reds. So indeed is Améthyste, which spends a little longer in barrel and in my view requires a warm year to show really well – then it can be a star, with ability to age too. Schiste and Quartz, in their very different ways, are outstanding and have been right from the start when Michel made the wines, both able to age many years. This is not about winemaking: I really believe that Brice is simply a shepherd, herding the grapes from that amazing hillside to present their best – both ally richness with a stony character, showing more steeliness in Schiste, and a creamy smokiness in Quartz. Given time, these wines prove

that Alpine vineyards can provide complexity and depth, when worked with the inspiration given by Michel at the start, and the dedication brought to it by Brice.

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Map ref: E4
Vineyards: 15.5ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Strictly by appointment

Jean-Yves Péron

In his quiet and measured manner, Jean-Yves Péron pursues his personal vision, and proves that there is no single way to be a successful Savoie winemaker. His wines, born of long macerations and all of them made and bottled with no added SO_2, are sold under the Vin de France label. With an annual production of around 20–25,000 bottles, about 80% is exported around the globe, and the rest sold to natural wine lovers in France.

Brought up in Paris, Jean-Yves planned a career in pharmaceutical research and studied biochemistry in Bordeaux. But he wasn't happy, and chance led him to study oenology. He knew little about wine, but his studies, and wide-ranging tastings with other students, gave Jean-Yves the bug. He worked two harvests in the New World – with Willakenzie in Oregon, somewhere he feels he could happily settle, and at Trinity Hill in Hawkes Bay, New Zealand, less to his liking. On his return in 2002 he worked with Thierry Allemand in Cornas, in the northern Rhône Valley, and when his harvest was over, Thierry

recommended Jean-Yves continued harvest in Alsace with Bruno Schueller. The latter became Jean-Yves' inspiration to make skin maceration white wines, a style for which Jean-Yves is one of the French pioneers.

Jean-Yves' choice to come to Savoie was partly because he loves mountains and likes white wines with good acidity and partly due to family circumstances. His mother's family was from Savoie and they shared a holiday home, an old farmhouse in Chevaline near Lake Annecy, where he could not only live for a while, but also make wine in the cellars. Jean-Yves began looking for vineyards that were easily mechanized, as he's not the biggest fan of vineyard work. But when he discovered the vineyards of the medieval village of Conflans, the opportunity to help keep some of Savoie's wine heritage alive appealed. In 2004 he took on a few parcels of mainly red grape vineyards on an almost-impossible-to-work vineyard slope. After making his home in Conflans, for the 2017 vintage he built a daring winery into the rock, taking his barrels away from the family farmhouse, an hour's drive away.

Above Albertville, the Conflans vineyards are on the foothills of the Beaufortain mountains above the Tarentaise Valley. At its peak there were around 80ha of vineyards owned by numerous families. Today almost all that remain are farmed by Jean-Yves, with 3ha between Conflans and Farette on granitic, schistose soils at 400–500m. Some of the vineyards are old parcels, with vines of 60–100 years old, trained *sur échalas*, notably the south-facing Côte Pelée with Mondeuse. Jean-Yves also planted some Altesse and Roussanne. The biggest challenges with this site are the steepness and the rain, but it gets plenty of sun: 'I often prune in a T-shirt' says Jean-Yves. He also has 1ha of vineyards in Fréterive, which are much more easily mechanized, and for both vineyard areas he has a partnership deal with Raphaël Marin, a mixed farmer in Conflans, who enjoys working the vineyards but does not want to make wine. Jean-Yves works organically, although he has never sought certification. He buys some organic grapes within Savoie and has dabbled with buying white grapes from other areas, such as Riesling from Alsace; at the time of writing Piemonte in Italy has grabbed his interest.

Jean-Yves Péron sits on a large schistose rock in his Côte Pelée vineyard in Conflans.

Jean-Yves picks his grapes very ripe, especially checking that the stalks are ripe – he never chaptalizes and works with whole bunches, essential for long macerations. He spends more time in the winery than in the vineyard – his type of winemaking requires five solid months of cellar work, he claims, monitoring the barrels, doing punch-downs, and protecting the wines with inert gas. In the Chevaline cellar there was no air-conditioning and there is none in the new cellar either, but it is very well insulated, with the barrels placed at the back into the rock. The atmosphere is much drier than at Chevaline, so the wines age differently – reduction or oxidation is something Jean-Yves is constantly juggling.

The wines vary every year: Jean-Yves uses tanks, small barrels, *demi-muids* and recently some larger wooden vats and large amphorae. The whites are usually barrel-fermented, spending anything from a few weeks to six months on skins. I have really appreciated his steely Jacquère cuvée Côtillon des Dames, had mixed experience with La Grande Journée Altesse and loved the spicy apricots of the Barrieux Roussanne, which expresses its variety best. These maceration whites exude Alpine freshness and great

drinkability. Jean-Yves' reds are exclusively Mondeuse and he divides his cuvées into those made partly with carbonic maceration and just a short period of punch-downs, and those destined for longer ageing, with longer maceration times to create less astringent tannins. In lesser-quality vintages, like 2017, Jean-Yves uses a shorter maceration period for Mondeuse than for, say, 2016 and 2018. The four Mondeuse cuvées progress from the fruitiest Maison Rouge from Fréterive grapes, through Champ Levat, with fruit from both vineyards handled in the two ways, to the longer-ageing Le Pas de l'Ours from Fréterive and consistently fine, intense, tannic but floral Côte Pelée from the oldest Conflans vines. In latter vintages, these last two wines have spent two years in barrels, as does the Barrieux Roussanne. A tasting with Jean-Yves is a confusing race through barrels and cuvées, but the few tastings of his wines in bottle have surprised me, usually in a very good way. This most thoughtful winemaker enjoys challenges, as well as challenging the world of Savoie wine.

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Vineyards: 4ha + purchased grapes
Visits: Strictly by appointment

A revival in the heart of the Maurienne

The dedication of a few people to bring vineyards back to the heart of the Maurienne Valley has impressed me since I first attended a little harvest festival in 2012 in St-Julien-Montdenis. There, high up above the valley floor, were remnants of low stone walls, with young vines planted within each *clos* or

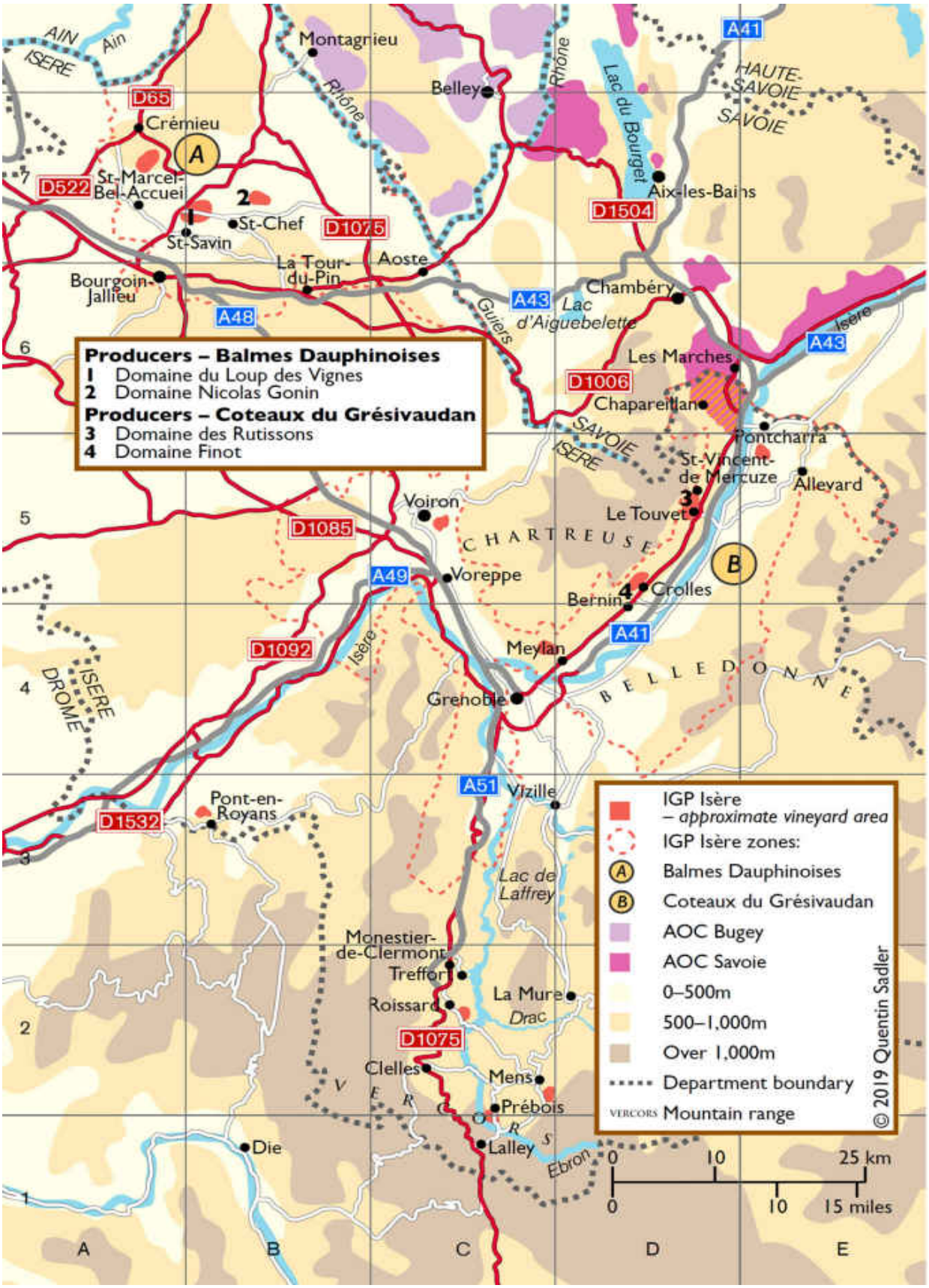
walled area, and yet all around were the ugly scars of a recent industrial past.

The association Solid'Art Maurienne (renamed Les Ateliers de Maurienne) was originally formed to create a massive outdoor art installation, which honoured the history of the aluminium industry. The 15-year project gave work to previously unemployed locals to build L'Aura, a horseshoe-shaped installation that includes 42,000 pieces of aluminium, each one engraved with an individual message. Once it was completed in 2007, Yves Pasquier, founder of Solid'Art, looked for a new project and discovered, through Michel and Philippe Grisard, that the CAAPG had rehabilitated the two emblematic grape varieties of the Maurienne – Persan and Blanc de Maurienne. The plan to replant vineyards with a focus on these and other rare grapes was hatched.

There are three vineyard sites, making up about 2ha, all close to the town of St-Jean-de-Maurienne and farmed organically, with some biodynamics. The first was planted in 2008 in Hermillon, with Persan and a little Mondeuse and Douce Noire; and in 2009 with Blanc de Maurienne, Altesse, Mondeuse Blanche and Chasselas. In 2010, the same varieties were planted above St-Julien-Montdenis, which in the mid-19th century had 250ha of vines. And a small vineyard was planted exclusively with Persan above St-Jean, near Bonne Nouvelle chapel in the *lieu-dit* of Princens, pictured here, where Persan is thought to have originated and the name evolved. Today the CAAPG has vineyard conservatories at Bonne Nouvelle for Persan, and at two sites in St-Julien, one for a range of Alpine varieties, and the other for very rare grape varieties at risk of extinction. A further 1.5ha were planted in 2018 at St-Julien, with a plan for a young vigneron to take them over. These vineyards lie on rocky, limestone-based south- or southwest-facing slopes at between 600m and 650m on the foothills of the Vanoise range of the Alps. As the southernmost Savoie

valley there are warm Mediterranean influences on the climate, and the Lombarde winds coming from Italy help keep disease at bay.

Originally Michel Grisard made the wines; later Solid'Art set up a small winery; and today, Alain Carle, a retired vine nursery owner from Fréterive, is in charge. There are three wines, sold locally: a blended white, Moraine Blanche, a blended red, Prince de Babylone, and a Persan, Bonne Nouvelle, all matured in old oak. The two blends exude Alpine freshness and character, and bottles from the first vintage, 2010, tasted in fine form in 2018; I have not tasted the Persan.


Producers – Balmes Dauphinoises
1 Domaine du Loup des Vignes
2 Domaine Nicolas Gonin
Producers – Coteaux du Grésivaudan
3 Domaine des Rutissons
4 Domaine Finot
IGP Isère
– approximate vineyard area
IGP Isère zones:
A Balmes Dauphinoises
B Coteaux du Grésivaudan
AOC Bugey
AOC Savoie
0–500m
500–1,000m
Over 1,000m
Department boundary
VERCORS Mountain range
© 2019 Quentin Sadler
0 10 25 km
0 10 15 miles
Montagnieu
Belley
Crémieu
St-Marcel-Bel-Accueil
St-Savin
St-Chef
La Tour-du-Pin
Aoste
Bourgoin-Jallieu
Aix-les-Bains
Chambéry
Les Marches
Chapareillan
Pontcharra
St-Vincent-de-Mercuze
Allevard
Le Touvet
Voiron
Voreppe
Crolles
Bernin
Meylan
Grenoble
Vizille
Pont-en-Royans
Lac de Laffrey
Monestier-de-Clermont
Treffort
Roissard
La Mure
Clelles
Mens
Prébois
Lalley
Die
CHARTREUSE
BELLEDONNE
VERCORS
Rhône
Isère
Drac
Ebron
Guiers
Lac d'Aiguebelette
Lac du Bourget
AIN
ISERE
DROME
SAVOIE
HAUTE-SAVOIE
A41
A43
A48
A49
A51
D65
D522
D1075
D1504
D1006
D1085
D1092
D1532

ISÈRE

The capital of Isère is Grenoble, the largest city within the French Alps, known for its universities, technology companies and its location, surrounded by mountains, an ideal base for lovers of winter and summer Alpine sports. In France people might also associate the surrounding countryside with walnuts, but few associate Grenoble with wine.

Isère's most famous vineyards are to the west in the northern Rhône Valley, just south of the Roman city of Vienne – wines such as Côte Rôtie and Hermitage (both Syrah), Condrieu (Viognier), and the nearby IGP Collines Rhodaniennes, none within the scope of this book. In the far east of the department are the vineyards in the village of Chapareillan, below Mont Granier – these are included in the AOC Savoie, and produce the delicate white Jacquère wines of Abymes. In between these areas, and extending south of Grenoble, there are numerous hillsides that were once planted with vines. In the mid-19th century Isère had 30,000ha of vines, more than Savoie and Haute-Savoie combined, but between the catastrophe of phylloxera and the industrialization of the region, the vineyards declined dramatically, mostly planted with inferior hybrid varieties grown for local consumption.

The IGP Isère includes two specific zones, Balmes Dauphinoises and Coteaux du Grésivaudan, which are described in this chapter, along with selected producers. In the southeast of Isère is the Trièves, a high-altitude plateau, which at its pre-phylloxera peak had 300ha of vineyards and is now undergoing an exciting, albeit tiny, revival.

Also worth noting is a new vigneron, Antoine Dépierre, who has revived a small vineyard at his family home on the western foothills of the Vercors, near Pont-en-Royans. Antoine worked for a decade as a sommelier and hotelier internationally and manages his vineyards at Domaine Mayoussier along organic lines, ploughing with a horse – he organizes an annual wine fair, Le Salon du Vin à Cheval, inviting

vignerons working with horses from all over France. And even the city of Grenoble itself now has a vineyard: the historic restaurant Chez Le Pèr'Gras, on the city's Bastille hill, planted 1ha of Chardonnay and Verdesse vines in 2017 on a hillside where until the 1970s there were 5ha of vineyards providing wine for the restaurant. The vines are farmed organically.

The revival of these vineyards is promising, but it is very much in its infancy with at most 60ha in commercial production at the time of writing. Nearly all of the producers behind this revival are interested in preserving the heritage of the area as a once-great wine region by focusing on its rare grapes, and most farm organically too.

Coteaux du Grésivaudan

Having flowed down the Combe de Savoie, the Isère cruises on towards Grenoble, dividing the Chartreuse Prealpine mountain range and the higher Belledonne Alps. The departmental boundary between Savoie and Isère falls in the vineyards of Abymes and technically the Grésivaudan valley begins there. The area between Pontcharra and Grenoble has always been the most planted area of the Grésivaudan, but when the IGP geographical limits were set the zone was also extended south and west of Grenoble on the northern and eastern foothills of the Vercors, where there are small vineyard areas.

Once a region much respected for its wine quality, over the past century vine plantings have declined to next to nothing for a multitude of reasons. Indeed, in 2018, the last wine co-operative of the valley (once there were seven), in Bernin, stopped making wine; local vigneron Thomas Finot takes the grapes from the 3ha still owned by co-operative members to make wines for his négociant label. While Thomas Finot and Domaine des Rutissons, both profiled here, battle to keep this valley alive with vines and wines, the biggest problem is the pressure from real estate, tempting landowners to sell their old family vineyards to house-builders. The value of constructible land can be more than 60 times the value of vineyard

land (up to 5€/m2 for the latter, compared to 300€/m2 and more for constructible land).

There were originally many plantings on the more humid eastern side of the Isère river, especially around Allevard, but today the sole commercial vineyards are a couple of hectares owned by Domaine Chevalier Bayard near Pontcharra. On the Chartreuse foothills there are scattered plantings south from Chapareillan to the northern suburbs of Grenoble, but the densest area of plantings is in the area of the Manival stream, between St-Ismier and Bernin, on an alluvial cone, whose soil is more propitious for vines than for building. With vineyard altitudes varying from 300m to a little over 500m, this is a very hot and sunny area in summer, but the cold air comes down from the peaks at night, creating a favourable diurnal difference. The soils are mainly classic stony clay-limestone scree and extremely well drained, which helps combat the very high rainfall in this area, higher than in the Combe de Savoie, for example.

An old vineyard of Domaine des Rutissons above St-Vincent-de-Mercuze, with Le Grand Manti in the Chartreuse mountains behind.

As well as the two profiles below, mention must be made of Michael Ferguson of Le Mas du Bruchet in Meylan. A South African, working in technology in Grenoble, he was a pioneer in growing,

making and bottling Verdesse in his 1ha vineyard at his house (also a bed and breakfast), planted in 1998. He has been making several thousand quality bottles, vinified in oak, Burgundy style, since 2003. Another pioneer is Sébastien Bénard, who has planted a small vineyard near Voiron. He makes natural wines from a range of local and rehabilitated grape varieties, mostly labelled as Vin de France.

Domaine Finot

Since establishing his estate in 2007 the laid-back vigneron Thomas Finot has experienced somewhat of a moving feast with his production levels and wine range. Some years have presented climate challenges, especially affecting his young vines, and he keeps losing older vineyard parcels he has leased as the owners decide to sell their plots to property developers.

Thomas' winery is located on a small industrial estate north of Grenoble in a garage-type building, a former microbrewery and previously a car repair business. It's a wine hipster's dream, but you might wonder why it appealed to him once you know that he was brought up in the vineyards of Crozes-Hermitage. As always, to understand a vigneron, you need to visit his vineyards. Drive just five minutes up the hill towards the jagged limestone cliff of the Dent de Crolles and you find yourself in wild parkland, full of hikers enjoying the dramatic views across to the Belledonne mountains. Interspersed among the forest are Thomas' vineyard plots, some with very old vines, others newly planted and scattered across several nearby villages.

Audrey and Thomas Finot with the Belledonne mountains beyond.

When young, Thomas stayed close to home, studying wine first in Belleville, Beaujolais, and then in Vienne, while working in Crozes-Hermitage (today he has taken on the small plot of family vines, with assistance from an employee, and makes Crozes wines under the Domaine Finot name). But after his studies he worked in Corsica and later Switzerland. He loves exploring the mountains and it was on his regular drive back home from Switzerland that he discovered the Grésivaudan vineyards. He moved to Savoie and worked for a while with Michel Grisard in Fréterive and at Domaine des Ardoisières; he learned about organic and biodynamic viticulture, along with rare grapes, and decided to do his own thing, if only he could find vines in the Grésivaudan.

His early vineyards included Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris, but 2018 marked the last vintage as these are some of the vineyards he's lost. He retains Chardonnay and Viognier along with some old vines of local varieties, and he started planting Verdesse, Altesse, Persan and Etraire from 2010. Thomas' most exciting white variety is Verdesse, of which he has 1.7ha (including 0.3ha of old vines). For reds there is

still some Gamay, 0.8ha of Etraire de la Dui (spelled Dhuy by him and including 0.25ha that is nearly 60 years old); and 1.2ha of Persan, including 0.35ha planted in 1994 by Daniel Zegna, a well-known local grower who worked to preserve the old varieties. In 2015 Thomas planted the very rare red Serénèze de Voreppe variety, rehabilitated by the CAAPG; once it has been classified with a new name, he hopes to plant the local white Ste-Marie-de-Biviers. He is certainly a fan of these old varieties, but is a realist too, and feels that international varieties provide an important visiting card, proving Isère is capable of making good wines.

Thomas converted all his vineyards to organics and became certified in 2014. He ploughs every other row and lets the natural vegetation grow in between; he uses plant preparations such as nettles and horsetail, alongside organic treatments. In his – frankly funky – cellar, Thomas has metal and plastic tanks, alongside barrels of a mixture of ages, bought second-hand from, among others, Philippe Bouzereau of Château de Cîteaux in Burgundy. He works in the cellar by instinct and tasting, though he is given an outside viewpoint at least once a year by his elder brother, Matthieu, who since 2003 has lived in Virginia, US, working as winemaker for King Family Vineyards. There are no recipes here, even though for reds he prefers punch-downs to pump-overs, each wine is treated differently: some reds are whole bunch, some are part destemmed; some whites have malolactic, some don't; there are different oak uses and a skin-fermented Jacquère in the making. For Thomas, indigenous yeasts are essential, and he likes to keep low final sulphur levels.

Matthieu is an off-site partner in Finot Frères, the négociant side of the business. From partly bought-in grapes, not always organic, the Tractor range is blended to reflect the area, with some grapes from nearby Savoie, Ain or Collines Rhodaniennes. Tractor Blanc is usually made from Jacquère and Chardonnay, sometimes with Pinot Gris; Tractor Rouge is usually Gamay, Pinot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Tractor Rosé is Gamay. They are well-priced, simple, joyous wines for drinking young and with 15–20,000 bottles a year account for nearly half the volume of wine Thomas sells; this is likely to

increase from 2018 with the extra fruit from the old Bernin co-operative growers.

The key wines under the domaine name are Verdesse, Persan and Etraire de la Dhuy. The Pinot Noir was consistently delicious, and Thomas makes his Etraire in a similar style, never chaptalizing, and one could say it's a more Alpine and tannic version of Pinot, very much reflecting the vintage too. His Persan is more serious stuff for ageing, made more like his Crozes-Hermitage wines. Up to 2017 Thomas' Verdesse has been bottled in 50cl as a late-harvest, off-dry style – showing characteristic grapefruit notes, along with a honeyed richness and stony character. With a greater quantity in 2018, a dry version is in the making, with nearly 15% alcohol; it is a splendid grape, and if anyone can tame it, and other rustic Isère varieties too, Thomas can. He works with a good team – Christian, his assistant, has worked with him since 2012, and Audrey, his wife, also teaches about wine and is the perfect leveller for Thomas' ideas. At present exports stand at about 20% and they don't look to increase this, preferring to sell to the pinnacle of restaurants and wine shops around France.

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Vineyards: 5.5ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Domaine des Rutissons

Laurent Fondimare is from Normandy, has no wine training and no family background in agriculture, but that was what he chose to

study in Bordeaux, making many friends who later became vignerons. Moving to Isère he took up a career in agricultural real estate, something he still works in full time, but he harboured a dream of producing something from the land. In 2010 Laurent seized the opportunity to lease a hectare of old vineyards from Michel Bozonat, the grandfather of a friend of his children. In his eighties, Bozonat, a legendary vigneron in St-Vincent-de-Mercuze, was still farming cows, corn, walnut trees and some vines; a member of the now-defunct Le Touvet wine co-operative, he made his own wine too. He was of great help to Laurent in making his first wines. After five years building up his tiny wine estate, Laurent was joined by local friend, Wilfrid Debroize, a builder who was seeking a career change and was prepared to work full-time on the estate.

The project had begun as a real community venture: local residents assisted Laurent and later Wilfrid in every major step, from planting the vines to harvesting the grapes – today they still enjoy helping with harvest. In 2015, the pair received support from a local association, who found them a decent building to create a winery suitable for their growing production and it remains owned by the community. Thomas Finot and several Savoie vignerons, such as the Giachinos (who passed on a plot of Gamay they no longer wanted to farm), also helped them. Over the years Laurent and Wilfrid have planted several small plots with varieties historic to their area, grapes which fascinate them – Verdesse, Etraire de la Dui (spelled Dhui by them) and, more recently, Persan.

Having converted the vineyards to organics, the pair's attitude is to limit the risks of crop failure; biodynamics interests them, but they realize this may be a step too far at the moment. In the rustic winery they do everything themselves, sometimes with borrowed equipment. The winemaking uses indigenous yeasts and low sulphur additions. Oeno Conseil do the analysis, but they bottle their own wines.

Laurent Fondimare and Wilfrid Debroize, the beasts of Domaine des Rutissons, pose in front of their 'La Bête' cuvée.

Five wines are produced regularly: two whites – M. Leblanc (a light fresh Alpine wine from Jacquère with up to 20% Viognier) and a pure, very grapefruity Verdesse; and three reds – Mes P'tits Gars, an early-bottled juicy Gamay, La Bête, a rustic mountain beast made from a field blend from the old vineyards (the blend includes Mondeuse, Persan, Peloursin, Gamay, Etraire de la Dui, Alicante and the odd hybrid), aged in old oak, and a pure Etraire de la Dui, aged for up to a year in three-year-old barrels and representing this variety well. The whites are joined in some years by a cuvée named Les Ailés from late-harvested Viognier with around 20% Verdesse. As Verdesse represents almost half their plantings, in future they plan to make several different cuvées, possibly including a sparkling and a Burgundian-style oak-fermented wine – they note how flexible this grape is with its excellent levels of both sugar and acidity. The latest red wine release is Lettre R, first made in 2015 from 85% Etraire with 15% Verdesse, in a homage to Côte Rôtie (where Syrah may be blended with a little Viognier) – it is a little over-oaked to my taste but may well calm down. From the 2018 vintage they will make their first Persan.

Although they sell a little further afield, Laurent and Wilfrid would like nothing better than to convince the locals that their Grésivaudan

wines are worth buying and drinking – to that end they participate as much as possible in local wine and gourmet fairs.

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Vineyards: 5.5ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Balmes Dauphinoises

Known to most people simply as northern Isère, Balmes Dauphinoises translates as the 'little valleys of the Dauphinois'. The area lies north of the towns of Bourgoin-Jallieu and La Tour-du-Pin between Chambéry and Lyon. Lyon was a major market for sales of Balmes Dauphinoises wines in the 19th century, as was Bourgoin, once an important silk- and textile-manufacturing town – Hermès has a factory there today. In the mid-19th century, St-Chef (a town also known for its tenth-century church and Roman-Byzantine frescoes) had about 1,000ha of vineyards and even in the 1940s there were 150ha, growing in particular Altesse, with very few hybrids.

Between the Alps and the southern end of the Jura mountains, this area is effectively a prolongation of Bugey: Montagnieu is located just to the north. Its soils are similar, of glacial origin with clay-limestone and a mixture of sandy loam, gravels and *molasse* on a series of mainly south-facing hillsides with vineyards at a relatively low altitude of 250–350m. Slightly northwest of the hills is a plateau area known as Isle-Crémieu, on limestone from various periods, most suited to white grapes – Nicolas Gonin has planted a small vineyard

in this virtually abandoned area. The climate in Balmes Dauphinoises is continental, with cold winters and very hot days in summer, similar to the northern Rhône Valley (Côte Rôtie is only 50km away as the crow flies). However, the proximity of the Alps leads to very cool nights in summer and high rainfall, and it is even windier than Savoie or Bugey. Grapes here ripen earlier than other Isère vineyards.

There is no wine co-operative and just a handful of growers: the two most prominent and interesting are profiled below. A couple of other, longer-established vineyards sell locally, with a focus on sparkling wines.

Domaine Nicolas Gonin

When it comes to grape varieties Nicolas Gonin has a mantra, which is that everyone should grow 'only grapes that are traditional to their region' and the rarer they are the better. After his oenology degree in Dijon Nicolas wanted to establish his own estate near his family home but initially could not find enough vineyard parcels or suitable land. So he worked for wine estates including Château Gillette in Sauternes, Domaine Tempier in Bandol and California's Ridge Vineyards and during this time discovered various old books on grape varieties, catching the rare grape bug in a big way. In his spare time, he learned about ampelography and the identification of grape varieties from two of the world's top ampelographers – Thierry Lacombe and Jean-Michel Boursiquot – based at INRA (the French agricultural research centre).

Today, Nicolas' studies into rare grapes, especially those once planted in the vineyards of Isère, are almost all-consuming. He is a vice-president of the CAAPG and spends every spare moment ferreting in back gardens to discover rare vines that might help preserve vine biodiversity. And he loves to travel the world spreading the word about Isère's wines and its rare grapes.

Nicolas' father Maurice, whose family has lived in Isère for over 500 years, farmed tobacco and vines; his uncle, Gaston Gonin, farmed 1ha of vines and Nicolas was able to take these over when he established his estate in 2005, at the same time taking on another

20-odd disparate parcels of bare land or vineyards, which he has replanted. Although originally he made Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Gamay and Pinot Noir, the last were grubbed up in 2015 as Nicolas wants to retain or plant only rare or traditional varieties. For whites he has Altesse, Verdesse, Jacquère and Viognier – the latter planted because there were so few local whites and he found evidence of it being grown traditionally, but he confesses that here it is at its northern limits; the reds are Mondeuse and Persan, plus 0.3ha of the ultra-rare Mècle de Bourgoin, a local variety which he helped rehabilitate and which resists drought well, hence thought of as ideal for the future. The first tiny production was in 2018. Mècle is the first really rare grape he has worked with personally and he hopes to plant Bia Blanc and Servanin soon.

Nicolas Gonin's vineyards above St-Chef.

Most of Nicolas' vineyards are in St-Chef, with the principal one being a steep, south-facing gravelly slope, Coteau de Trieux, which he has replanted with Altesse and Mècle. In the more calcareous soil of the Isle-Crémieu at St-Marcel-Bel-Accueil he has planted Verdesse and some Jacquère at very high density. Allowing the natural grass to grow throughout the vineyards and simply cutting and strimming,

converting to organic farming was a priority for Nicolas and the estate was certified from 2012. Although he uses some plant preparations, his scientific mind makes him sceptical of biodynamics. In the vineyards his father gives him a hand, along with some seasonal workers.

Nicolas built a winery in 2005, installing simple equipment, mainly a series of old metal and fibreglass tanks; he has no interest in using oak barrels, saying they are against his religion and his banker is against them too. He is open to advice and in 2017 took on an oenologist from the Rhône Valley to provide extra feedback on his wines. Nicolas himself enjoys what he calls 'wines of the north' and this means he looks for acidity, so he often picks on the early side, especially as he likes to encourage malolactic fermentation. He says that the fact that his vineyards are grassed down gives better pH levels as well as a long finish to the wines.

Nicolas Gonin with his metal wine tanks.

In a decent year, Nicolas makes around 20,000 bottles, of which normally just under a third is his white blend, which changes over the years according to what grapes he has. The 2016 is 60% Viognier with 40% Altesse, and in 2017 the wine wasn't made as all the Viognier was destroyed by frost. From two different vineyards, his pure Altesse can be very precise and elegant; the characterful Verdesse is very vintage-dependent in flavour, varying from the citrus

character of a Jura Savagnin *ouillé* (and yes, it is likely to be related) to in warmer years a plum *eau-de-vie* character, but the key is the grape's high natural acidity. Nicolas makes a delicious rosé from 100% Mondeuse, and a very light unchaptalized red Mondeuse. Despite the light alcohol – often below 10% – it has weight of flavour, showing the grape's spice and red fruit flavours in equal measures. The deep-coloured Persan is prone to reduction so needs air to open it up, but it is Nicolas' real pride and he exports it widely, believing it to have the most potential for the future. Overall, Nicolas sells half in Lyon, Grenoble, Annecy and other local markets, 40% to export markets, mainly the US, but also Canada, Japan, Norway and Switzerland, and the rest to top restaurants elsewhere in France.

Nicolas is a man on a mission and can alienate others – so much of his time is spent in bureaucratic fights to prove a rare vine's heritage and rehabilitate it that he can be over-protective – I have worried that his own estate might suffer too. But for now, Nicolas' wines are deservedly the most visible around the world and France too, waving the flag for Isère.

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Vineyards: 5.5ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room, by appointment

Domaine du Loup des Vignes

Bubbly Stéphanie Loup (*loup* is the word for 'wolf' in French) grew up in St-Savin and studied wine at Belleville in the Beaujolais. She went

on to work for Domaine de Méjane in Savoie, where she met her partner Mario Amaro Rabiço, a Portuguese who had emigrated to Savoie in 1998. In 2003, the couple took over an existing wine estate in her home village, with 6.5ha of vineyards. On a single steep slope, named Coteaux de la Rémonde, it rises from 260m up to about 350m, with a slope of 50% in places. Originally planted in the 1970s, today about two-thirds of plantings are Chardonnay with various other grapes – whites on the clay-limestone; reds (with a predominance of Pinot Noir) on the gravel. The large, rambling farmhouse where they live just below the vineyard slope has plenty of space not only for their young family but also for the winery and a tasting room. Today they make 30–40,000 bottles, sold almost exclusively direct to local consumers buying at the cellar and at local wine shows.

In the vineyards, they work manually and with a tracked vehicle, letting the grass grow between the rows and using herbicide underneath the vines once or twice a year; they limit treatments as much as possible. Winemaking is simple, using native yeasts and rarely chaptalizing except occasionally for Mondeuse and Syrah. Two versions of Chardonnay are made at different sugar levels: even the so-called dry version has some noticeable residual sugar, which appeals to their clients. There is another intriguing, exotic, off-dry, rich white, A Pas de Loup (meaning 'at wolf's pace'), which is usually a blend of late-picked Velteliner Rouge Précoce (Malvoisie) and Viognier (a variety that Stéphanie likes and has planted more recently). The varieties are harvested together at a slightly raisined stage, giving a white that provides a powerful reflection of their warm vineyard site and is the most interesting wine from the domaine.

Stéphanie makes Pinot Noir by crushing but not destemming the grapes and giving around a week's maceration with pump-overs. The result reveals decent fruit character, if a touch hard. Also spoilt a little by hard tannins is La Meute (an old name for wolf), a Mondeuse/Syrah blend, which shows a lovely mineral character to the fruit. A medium rosé and a range of sparkling wines are also made.

All Domaine du Loup des Vignes' vines lie on the Coteaux de la Rémonde in St-Savin.

Stéphanie and Mario are doing a wonderful job in keeping alive an important vineyard hillside of the Balmes Dauphinoise and Stéphanie is an excellent ambassador for Isère wines. I get the sense that if they chose to make a leap forward in various aspects of both farming the vines and making the wines they could have a much greater wine quality, warranting higher prices and wider markets.

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Vineyards: 7.5ha
Visits: Tasting room open daily except Wednesdays and Sundays

Trièves

If there is one area in this book that has tried hard to steal my heart, it is the Trièves. Located southeast of Grenoble near the borders of the Drôme and Hautes-Alpes departments, this remote, high-altitude, sparsely populated plateau lies between the Vercors and the Dévoluy Prealpine ranges at an altitude between 700m and 800m. Unlike the other Isère wine areas, the Trièves lies just into the southern Alps, with a hint of Provençal air. With no big towns or industry nearby, it is a haven for environmentalists and mountain lovers.

Samuel Delus in his young Onchette vineyard.

The story of the revival of the Trièves vineyards tells of the dogged determination of a group of individuals to bring their vineyard area back to life and in doing so create a sustainable living for others. They also wanted to save an emblematic grape variety, Onchette, which was on the brink of extinction. In the middle of the 19th century there were about 300ha of vineyards in the Trièves – all the locals grew vines for family use – but by 2007 there were just 8ha owned by 50 people, mainly growing hybrids. Today there are new plantings by five vignerons of about 12ha of *Vitis vinifera* destined for commercial production and since 2015 a few hundred bottles of wines have been released. An association of local individuals and businesses, presided over for many years by Gilles Barbe, is largely responsible for this success.

However, the first would-be pioneer was Samuel Delus, now president of the association. In around 2000 Samuel decided to give up his audio-visual technology career in Paris to return with Naomi, his English wife, to Prébois, where he still had family and had indeed met Naomi, who had been working at the local ecology centre, Terre Vivante. His plan was to establish a wine estate in Prébois, and due to the paucity of good vineyards available to buy, he needed to plant, for which you need permission and a track record. Samuel retrained in wine, worked at an uncle's vineyard in Provence, and sought advice in nearby Savoie, but despite repeated requests the authorities blocked him from planting due to restrictions on planting rights in France, especially outside AOC areas.

At first unbeknown to Samuel, just down the road in Mens, an enthusiast of the local agricultural heritage, Gilles Barbe, a hydroelectric engineer by profession, was galvanizing the locals, with whom in 2008 he formed the association Vignes et Vignerons du Trièves. Their idea was to work together to preserve what vineyards still remained, make the wines communally, create a conservatory of old vines and eventually create employment too. Preservation of the local environment and its biodiversity was important to them, and one inspiration was the French author Jean Giono (1895–1970), who had a mountain home in the Trièves and had often written about the local wine's impact on the rhythm of life here. Samuel was able to work for the association, planting new vineyards from 2010 (the association could obtain permission to plant experimentally, on the basis that the wine is not sold for profit). He was also able to help them set up and make wine in a communal winery the association established in Prébois. The CAAPG assisted with rehabilitating the local Onchette variety and with identification of other traditional varieties, which include Douce Noire, Persan, Joubertin and Durif for reds; and Verdesse, Bia Blanc and Altesse for whites. Philippe Grisard of Savoie was a great mentor to Samuel.

Nearly all the vineyards on the plateau are now farmed organically, with care taken to maintain biodiversity with fruit trees and other crops around. Among the highest altitude vineyards in France, the climate is one of extremes, with frost a big risk, though

the middle of the plateau, where most of the vineyards are, is usually spared hail. With the issue of planting rights having been somewhat relaxed, there is a more positive future and the area may apply for the right to use the IGP Isère label too – currently wines have to be labelled Vin de France.

View of the Dévoluy range from some of Samuel Delus' vineyards in Prébois.

The Trièves pioneers

Domaine de l'Obiou

Web: domainedelobiou.fr

Samuel Delus gave this name to his estate in homage to the highest mountain of the Dévoluy, which dominates the plateau. His own first vineyards were planted in 2012, originally under the association auspices, and he now has just under 2.5ha in Prébois, not yet all in production, organically certified by Ecocert. On a predominantly limestone soil, with some glacial till, he grows all the local grape varieties mentioned above, along with Pinot Noir, Gamay, Gamaret, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay and Viognier, and from this large range makes red and white blends. Samuel has created a vaulted winery underneath his old family village house, originally where sheep were kept. He works with indigenous yeast and low sulphur levels, and

ages both colours in old oak for at least a year after six months in stainless steel. Samuel is wary of high acidity and is convinced he needs long ageing to soften the wines; I loved the mountain freshness and rustic character in two vintages I've tried of his Conservatoire red from about half Gamaret with Persan and Onchette. For now, the whites do not reflect their Alpine origins so much, but these are early days in this estate's development.

Gilles Barbe in one of Domaine Les P'tits Ballons' vineyards in Mens.

Domaine Les P'tits Ballons

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Les P'tits Ballons is the 1ha estate of gorgeously sited vineyards around Mens, run officially by Pascale Barbe, formerly a librarian and the wife of Gilles, now retired, who of course lends a big hand. Originally association vines, they have Onchette among many other varieties and use the association winery in Prébois to make their wines, first released and sold locally in 2018.

Domaine Jérémy Bricka

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Jérémy Bricka is someone to look out for in future. With the aid of the community of Roissard, who wanted to have a vineyard again in

their village, between 2015 and 2018 he has planted 4ha on a steep marl and schist slope above the Ebron river and aims to build up the estate to about 5ha. Jérémy worked for eight years for Domaine Guigal in the northern Rhône, giving him excellent experience in working on steep slopes. In 2011 he came to the Trièves as one of the founders of the Domaine des Hautes Glaces whisky distillery and fell in love with the area. He sold out of the distillery in 2015. There is a hectare each of Altesse and Douce Noire, along with Verdesse (a small first harvest in 2018); other varieties planted are Mondeuse Blanche, Persan and Etraire de la Dui, farmed organically. Jérémy's small winery is at his home in Mens.

Others who have established small vineyards commercially are Jérémy Dubost and Maxime Poulat.

BUGEY

Bugey is the historical name for the southeastern part of the Ain department and gives its name to the department's main wine region. With less than 500ha of AOC vineyards, it is often – in books, magazines and wine lists – wrongly subsumed into Savoie, yet some wine producers feel closer to the Jura, just to the north, than to Savoie to the east. The region's wines and wine producers deserve exploration, if possible in situ, for this is a gorgeous area to spend a few days. It is a land of low mountains and villages with stone-built houses, often with distinctive stepped roofs covered in *lauzes*, stone tiling. A notable and attractive feature is the small vigneron buildings scattered across the vineyards, here named *grangeons*. A few are being restored.

In Vongnes, the tasting room of Caveau Bugiste is in a restored village house, with its distinctive lauzes-tiled roof.

Both geographically and wine-wise, the story of the region is a tale of two halves, northern and southern Bugey. Geologically, Bugey is part of a southern extension of the Jura mountains, which peter out here in a series of fingers stretching south towards the Isère department. The similarity to the Jura wine area is more visible in the landscape and villages in northern Bugey, which lies not far east of the Ain capital, Bourg-en-Bresse. Its speciality is the sparkling rosé Méthode Ancestrale wine Bugey Cerdon. Southern Bugey includes the town of Belley, which is situated just above the Rhône and is the wine region's administrative centre. The vineyards and wines here have more in common with Savoie in terms of growing conditions and grape varieties. However, Chardonnay (especially used for brut traditional method sparkling wines) and Pinot Noir outstrip the Savoie grapes in terms of quantity.

This chapter is divided into a part on northern Bugey, a second on southern Bugey and a final small section on the IGP Coteaux de l'Ain (this IGP label may be used by producers within the AOC Bugey areas too).

The village of Cerdon and La Grande Côte vineyard slope. To the left are some of the steep vineyards of Mérignat.

Bugey AOC figures (2016 vintage)

Production levels for vintage 2016 represents a reasonable average of the past decade; vintage 2018 appears to be similar, whereas vintage 2017 overall was over one-third lower compared to 2016 due to frost damage, with Cerdon production being 42% lower than in 2016.

Area under vine: 466 hectares, of which Bugey Cerdon is 177ha

Volume produced: 26,015 hectolitres (approximately 3.5 million bottles)

(% of production)

Cerdon	47%
Other sparkling wines	18%
White still wine	21.5%
Red still wine	10.5%
Rosé still wine	3%

Main grape varieties (% of total Bugey):

Gamay	43% (mostly for Cerdon)
Chardonnay	33%
Pinot Noir	6.5%
Altesse	6%
Mondeuse	3.5%
Poulsard	3% (for Cerdon)

Négociants and co-operatives

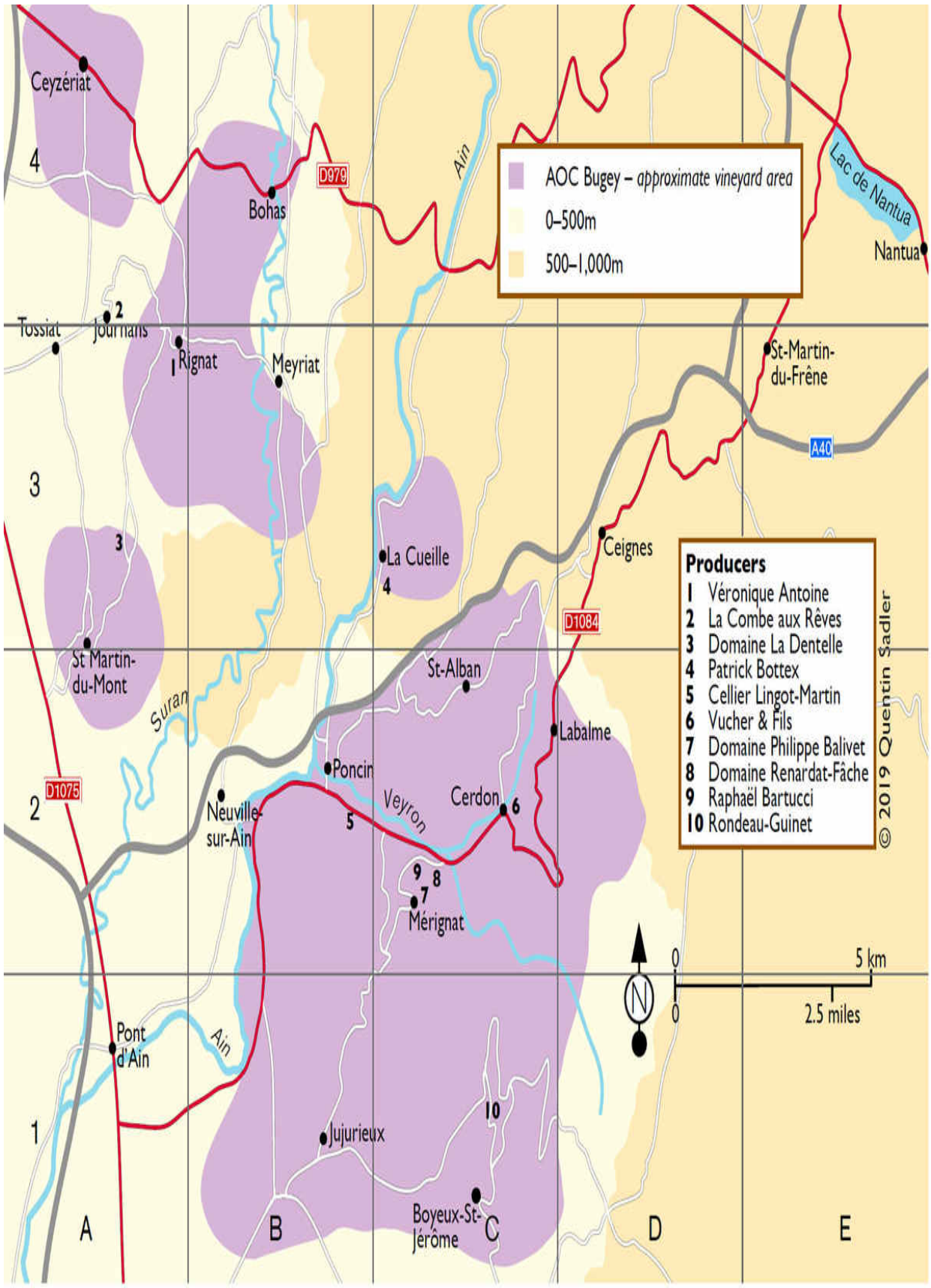
There is no major négociant in Bugey; however, several producers have négociant status and buy in grapes from other growers. In the Cerdon area these include Lingot-Martin (the largest northern Bugey producer), Renardat-Fâche, Vucher and La Dentelle. In southern Bugey the largest buyer of grapes is Caveau Bugiste (the largest

southern Bugey producer); others who buy some include Yves Duport and Maison Guigard, which is not covered in this book and buys somewhat less each year. Some Savoie négociants, including Philippe Viallet and Adrien Vacher, buy a little Bugey wine in bottle; Maison Mollex in Seyssel sold much Bugey wine in the past. From 2018, Des Vins d'Envie in Savoie has bought some organic grapes from Bugey. There has never been a wine co-operative in the Bugey area: both Lingot-Martin and Caveau Bugiste are often wrongly designated as co-operatives by writers or other wine trade visitors.

Where the wines are sold

The vast majority of Bugey wines are sold in the region and big efforts have been made to sell in the nearby city of Lyon. Despite these efforts, it can be hard to find a variety of Bugey wines in shops; often the only solution is to buy direct from the producers. Beyond these areas a few producers participate in wine fairs around France, selling direct to consumers; organic producers in particular are finding markets beyond the region. Exports are estimated as representing 5–7% of sales.

Bugey is using various initiatives to encourage wine tourism to increase both sales and recognition of the region. The annual spring festival Le Printemps des Vins du Bugey and the activities held during Le Fascinant Weekend every October (see details about both here) aim to attract visitors to come to meet the Bugey vignerons in the wine region and taste their wines, often alongside local foods. Tasting rooms are increasingly open at weekends too.


AOC Bugey – approximate vineyard area
0–500m
500–1,000m
Producers
1 Véronique Antoine
2 La Combe aux Rêves
3 Domaine La Dentelle
4 Patrick Bottex
5 Cellier Lingot-Martin
6 Vucher & Fils
7 Domaine Philippe Balivet
8 Domaine Renardat-Fâche
9 Raphaël Bartucci
10 Rondeau-Guinet
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Ceyzériat
Bohas
Ain
Lac de Nantua
Nantua
Tossiat
Journans
Rignat
Meyriat
St-Martin-du-Frêne
A40
La Cueille
Ceignes
D979
D1084
St Martin-du-Mont
Suran
St-Alban
Labalme
D1075
Poncin
Neuville-sur-Ain
Veyron
Cerdon
Mérignat
Pont d'Ain
Jujurieux
Boyeux-St-Jérôme
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0
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1
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4

NORTHERN BUGEY

Just southeast of Bourg-en-Bresse, the Autoroute des Titans ('the Titans' Highway', so named by France's late president François Mitterrand because of the massive supports required to allow the motorway to pass across the gorges and valleys between the mountain tunnels) runs right through northern Bugey. Along it drive trucks and tourists' cars heading to Italy via the Mont Blanc tunnel or to the Alpine ski areas, oblivious, as I was for many years, that there are vineyards directly below. Before Mitterrand opened the section in 1989, the main Lyon–Geneva road passed through the Cerdon vineyard area, which benefited from those stopping to pause at a local restaurant and stock up with wines. Now the Cerdon area has become another of those sleepy, albeit beautiful, French backwaters. Outside summer there are few places to eat or to stay and apart from at the largest wine producer, Lingot-Martin, based on the main road through Poncin, you'd better make sure you have an appointment for a tasting.

The small town of Poncin serves as the district's administrative centre. Most of Poncin's vineyards are south of the motorway, stretching east towards St-Alban, and to the north there are also some at La Cueille. Cerdon itself is a quiet village full of interesting buildings, alleyways and fountains, and once had an important copper factory, which doubled as a museum. In 2017 Ain's tourism organization took over the buildings, which had lain dormant for some years, with a view to re-opening a visitor centre. Viewed from the hills above, Cerdon is fascinating, lying in a *reculée* or blind valley, one of the classic features of Jura mountain geology; the village is dominated by its steep, south-southeast-facing calcareous vineyard slope, called La Grande Côte (the big hillside). Between the vineyards, a few of them still terraced, are crumbling stone walls, *grangeons* and little *celliers* (vineyard huts).

Head up the hill just a few kilometres from Cerdon to the even quieter vineyard village of Mérignat to arrive in another world, almost

in the woodlands, with vineyards reaching up to 500m altitude and views towards Beaujolais, 60km to the west, and in the other direction towards the Alps. Home to three of the producers profiled in this section, Mérignat has almost reached the status of organic-only vineyards, contrasting with Cerdon itself, where most growers find it easier to use herbicide. From Mérignat you can meander south to Jujurieux, which boasts 13 châteaux, dating from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, as well as the old Bonnet silk factory, now a museum. Between here and Boyeux-St-Jérôme the landscape is one of abrupt Jurassic cliffs with green pastures below, small hamlets and vineyards in between.

Geologically speaking – and visually – this part of Bugey is an extension of the Revermont area of southern Jura and this is most noticeable in the less-planted sector of scattered vineyards northwest of Poncin around St-Martin-du-Mont, Journans and the group of villages named Bohas-Meyriat-Rignat. Indeed, the southernmost Jura AOC vineyards in St-Amour are only about 30km to the north. Around the hamlets of Soblay and Gravelles, near St-Martin-du-Mont, the vineyard slopes have more marl than limestone, particularly suited to Poulsard.

There are many very small vignerons here (not all profiled) and due to the technical challenges and expense of the ancestral method, the Cerdon district has several CUMAs – agricultural co-operatives that allow growers here to share the expensive equipment needed for bottling and for the transfer to remove the sediment and re-bottle. One of the first was set up in the early 1970s in Mérignat by Philippe Balivet, who was soon joined by Raphaël Bartucci and Patrick Bottex (from La Cueille) among others. This CUMA uses the direct bottle-to-bottle transfer system and regularly updates its equipment. Today it is able to process 6,000 bottles a day with three people working the line, whereas the previous line managed only 1,000 bottles a day with seven people working.

The main wines to expect

Producers offer one or more cuvées of Bugey Cerdon, the sweetish pink sparkling wine made by the Méthode Ancestrale from Gamay with occasionally Poulsard. Some may also offer Bugey Brut and Bugey AOC still wines too, mainly from Chardonnay. There are also cheaper carbonated sparkling wines made.

Véronique Antoine

The story of Véronique Antoine provides a lovely example of the many tiny producers within the Bugey Cerdon AOC. Originally from Belfort in Franche-Comté, with no family connections with the world of wine, in her mid-thirties and mother of three children, Véronique was keen to change from office life to work in the open air. She decided to retrain to be a vigneron, and after studies in Belley and Mâcon, she and her husband, an electrician from nearby Bourg-en-Bresse, settled in an old house with a cellar in the small village of Rignat. Little by little Véronique bought and rented small plots of old vines, making wine from some, pulling up and replanting others to build up to her current (still tiny) vineyard area. She gained a local reputation for her wines and in 2015, on the site of one of her vineyards on the edge of Rignat, the couple built a new house with a purpose-built cellar, including a tasting room. In 2017 she sought official certification for organic conversion.

While waiting for the Gamay and Poulsard vines she planted in 2006 in the Cerdon AOC zone to become productive, Véronique's first sparkling wines were made using the ancestral method from grapes grown in old vineyards situated outside the AOC and sold as Vin de France Pétillant. Her main Cerdon plot is on a very stony clay-limestone slope, exposed east, not as steep as Cerdon itself and going up to 400m altitude. She chose to plant still wine clones rather

than those usually destined for sparkling wines in order to give smaller yields; she retains the natural vegetation between the vine rows and farms entirely organically, benefiting from some friendly advice from Raphaël Bartucci. Working organically has made it easy to sell direct from the cellar door and at local markets and she has exported to Japan.

Véronique Antoine's rural and remote vineyard is now run organically.

After crushing, the red grapes macerate for a while in her old Vaslin press and are then fermented in old milk tanks. She uses her local CUMA for the transfer and a mobile bottling service. Véronique's first Bugey Cerdon AOC was from 2009 and in a typical year she makes about 5,000 bottles plus 500 half bottles. It is a really strawberry-like Cerdon, not very sweet, with maximum 30g/l of residual sugar.

In years when the badgers don't take the grapes, as they did in 2016, Véronique makes an ancestral method sparkling Jacquère, and her one still wine is a simple, minerally Bugey AOC Chardonnay, first produced in 2015. Véronique wants to keep her estate small and it is obvious she loves the work of a vigneron from A to Z; she is one of Cerdon's most active online marketers.

Véronique Antoine
281 En Reculet, Rignat, 01250 Bohas-Meyriat-Rignat
Tel: 04 74 51 85 13/06 67 13 00 86
Email: vinpetillant.veroniqueantoine@gmail.com
Web: cerdon-antoine.fr

Map ref: A3
Vineyards: 2.6ha
Certification: Qualisud
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Domaine Philippe Balivet

Louis Balivet, a mixed farmer, would leave one barrel of his red wine, made from hybrids, outside over winter. He knew the yeast would keep working despite the cold and also that, with luck, at some point fermentation would stop to leave a slightly fizzy sweet wine, balancing the naturally high acidity. His son, Philippe Balivet, founded the wine estate in 1967 and was for several years the mayor of Mérignat. He was instrumental in establishing the important CUMA in the village and installed his first refrigeration unit in 1991.

Philippe believed that the availability of Cerdon wine would encourage people to stop en route between Lyon and Geneva. He wasn't a great salesman, his children claim, but word gets around and today nearly a quarter of their 25,000-bottle production is exported without them ever going out to sell. Now in his mid-seventies, Philippe continues to help in the vineyards, which are located mostly in Mérignat. The vineyards are steep and he originally planted them with relatively wide spacing to make them easy to plough using a small tracked vehicle rather than the popular, but relatively unstable, tractor that straddles the vines. Philippe became unwell in the early 1980s and the family believed it was due to a chemical fungicide – this was the trigger to convert the vineyards to organics in 1984. Philippe doesn't make a big deal about making organic wine; he simply says it protects the soil. Those wide-spaced vines are easier to weed today with an *intercep* rather than by hand with a hoe and they have never specifically planted grass. 'It just grows, so why plant it?,' says Vincent, 'It's not a golf course…'

Cécile and Vincent Balivet in Mérignat.

The estate is now run by Philippe's children, Cécile and her younger brother Vincent, and it's obvious they both love the job. Cécile had been a care-worker and done some gardening courses, but her father encouraged her to come to work with him and she learned on the job. Vincent originally toyed with studying music – like his father he plays in a local band; he is also married to a music teacher and orchestra leader. Before committing to working in wine he also considered archaeology, or even becoming a coroner… but wine studies seemed easier and the courses at Beaune inspired him to continue.

The small cellar is Vincent's domain and you can tell from a glimpse at his detailed notebook that he is fastidious – he even does his own analysis, a rare thing today. Since the big vintage of 2011 he has held some wine back and blended vintages for their main cuvée, which is 100% Gamay with about 55g/l of residual sugar – it's a lovely Cerdon, with very good length. A second cuvée, named Récolte Cécile, is from a varying blend of Gamay and Poulsard – it's technically sweeter, but doesn't seem it. Since 2014, Vincent has also, rather reluctantly, made a small amount of a cuvée named La Dernière with no added sulphur, made from Gamay planted in the

1970s in their highest vineyard at 457m. 'People seem to like it,' says Vincent.

This is a close-knit family. Cécile's partner does the computer work for the estate and their children occasionally work with them in the vineyards. For Vincent, his involvement in music is equally important, to maintain a balanced outlook. Cécile and Vincent describe their father as a visionary, and former Bugey syndicate technician and historian Claude Paul would not disagree. He told me that by establishing the CUMA Philippe brought local vignerons together and helped to popularize Cerdon wine. Undoubtedly this thoughtful family's early commitment to organics is also important to Mérignat and the Cerdon appellation. Every sip of their wines seems to tell a story.

Domaine Philippe Balivet
12 Rue de la Balmette, 01450 Mérignat
Tel: 04 74 39 98 26
Email: gaec-balivet@orange.fr
Contact: Cécile or Vincent Balivet
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 7ha (including 10% Poulsard)
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Raphaël Bartucci

Meet Raphaël Bartucci: born of Italian immigrants, he was brought up in the Moselle region in eastern France. He collects fossils from the vineyards and displays them museum-style in the cosy tasting room below his house. Cerdon was the first wine he actually enjoyed drinking, but now he revels in good organic wines from everywhere; other vignerons in Cerdon think he is an extra-terrestrial, or so he

claims. Often it takes an outsider to shake up a sleepy region, and with a twinkle in his eye Raphaël is pretty sure he did just that.

After training as an electrician, Raphaël decided he wanted to live in the countryside away from the Moselle. He had discovered Bugey while travelling through on holidays, and loved the wildness and beauty of the Cerdon area. He did a harvest with Philippe Balivet, who helped him find an old house for sale in 1981 – it included cellars of course, with barrels and a press. While continuing to work full-time as an electrician until 1991, Raphaël began buying small plots of vineyards and making wine for himself. In 1983 he started commercializing his wine, with 1,500 bottles from just 0.15ha of vines. The next vintage, 1984, was so poor (the last year he chaptalized, incidentally) he could make only 800 bottles, despite owning double the vineyard area. Locals regularly offered him plots of vines to buy or rent, which no one else wanted as they were too hard to work – each year he took on another 0.1 to 0.15ha. Today Raphaël owns all his vineyards and until recently he still worked ten hours a week for the village council.

In his tiny tasting room, Raphaël Bartucci displays his collection of fossils, found in his vineyards.

In 1985 he visited the legendary Jura vigneron Pierre Overnoy and later met Marcel Lapierre of Beaujolais. It was just the time when

Pierre and Marcel were adopting the methods inspired by Jules Chauvet. Pierre stressed to Raphaël the importance of farming his land without chemicals to protect the natural yeasts. Raphaël was easily convinced to farm organically – this is '*agriculture simple*', he tells me. He ploughs the soil and sprays with copper and sulphur, along with horsetail and black soap as extra anti-fungicides. Certified organic since 1997, he seems quietly pleased that at last he's accepted in the region and that others around him are finally adopting environmental measures and turning to organics.

He planted Poulsard in 1986 and 1990 on the soils with more marl and crinoid fossils, and in 2015 he planted a little more, using mass selections from the older vines. The proportion of Poulsard in his Cerdon varies from 15 to 20% and he says it brings an elegance and extra complexity to the Gamay. He also has a little Chardonnay, planted in 1989, and it used to be part of his Cerdon blend. But it was outlawed by the 2009 AOC rules and now he makes about 200 bottles of white wine mainly for himself and his 25–30 harvesters. Raphaël likes to pick his Gamay and Poulsard as late as possible. He aims for a potential alcohol of 11%, uses whole bunch pressing and does not macerate the grapes at all. Part of the local CUMA, he starts bottling in early November when the alcohol reaches 6% and then allows two to three months for the ongoing fermentation and time on the lees, with the first batch of wine available in early January. Everything is transferred and sold by the end of March.

Technically Raphaël Bartucci has now retired, and his estate exists under the official name of Eliane Zivkovic, who just happens to be his wife, a full-time teacher. They have one employee, Laetitia, but nothing has really changed over the years and Raphaël works as hard as ever in his close-spaced vineyards, finding more fossils, preserving his terroir to protect the yeast population and 'making sure his Cerdon won't poison anyone'.

If you are lucky enough to track this wine down, you may well find it to be the most moreish Cerdon you'll ever taste. For a rosé that is pressed directly, it is surprisingly deep-coloured. A touch closed to begin with, it slowly reveals tangy apples and pears from the Poulsard and that strawberry red fruit from the Gamay. It doesn't

hide its sweetness, but has fine acidity and great length, with a hint of grapefruit. The one problem is that the annual production of 13,000–15,000 bottles of Raphaël Bartucci's Cerdon disappears much too quickly into the cars of faithful customers who make the pilgrimage each year to buy from the cellar door, and to long-term trade customers in France, the US, Canada, Japan and beyond. Long may he continue to make them.

Raphaël Bartucci
Chemin du Paradis, 01450 Mérignat
Tel: 04 74 39 95 94
Email: raphael.bartucci@libertysurf.fr
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 2.1ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Patrick Bottex

California-based wine merchant Kermit Lynch has imported Cerdon from Patrick Bottex for over a quarter of a century. Always ahead of the game, Kermit discovered Cerdon by chance, not long after Patrick and his wife Catherine had established the estate. Now 40% of Patrick's small production is exported to the US, Canada, Japan and Taiwan; the rest is sold direct to consumers in France, mainly from the cellar door.

The Bottex family live and farm most of their vineyards in a hamlet that you would never discover without a reason to do so. La Cueille, located on a hillside upriver from the town of Poncin, has an impressive fortified castle with the renovated St-Antoine chapel next to it. Above it is a newly planted vineyard, named Clos du Château, which should one day be the pride and joy of Patrick, Catherine and their son Carl. In 2015 they were able to buy the land and started

clearing the 60% slope and have initially planted 0.5ha of vines – the last harvest from vines in the Clos was sometime around the Second World War. The hillsides in La Cueille once had about 100ha of vineyards. Today pine forests prevail, with a few patches of steep vineyards here and there, most of which belong to the Bottex family, including one single plot of 3.5ha.

Patrick's maternal grandfather, Marius Callerin, had been a mixed farmer with some vines in La Cueille, but Patrick was brought up in the city of Lyon. Patrick wanted to be a farmer and studied agronomy, but with the family holdings being very small it was hard to make a start. At the end of the 1980s a large parcel of land in La Cueille was reclassified as part of the Cerdon appellation (then VDQS) so, seizing the opportunity, in 1991 Patrick and Catherine took on some of the land to plant, as well as two nearby plots of old vines (0.7ha in total).

Patrick works his vineyards in a sustainable way, believing in the importance of working the soil, grassing down to avoid erosion and restricting the herbicide to below the vine rows. Although the Ain river is just below the vineyards, humidity presents little problem; along with sulphur, the least toxic systemic chemical sprays are used. Spending time with Patrick, it becomes obvious that for him the essential work is in the vineyard, right up to harvest, which is all manual. Their vines are mainly Gamay, with a little Pinot Noir for red wine, mainly for home consumption, and a few vines of Poulsard; as the Poulsard vines die, Patrick does not replant them as he finds the variety too difficult.

You can tell from the purply pink colour of the wine that Patrick uses some maceration time before pressing the Gamay. He also keeps the bottles upright for the second part of fermentation in the traditional way. He belongs to the Mérignat-based CUMA and chooses to do regular transfer operations, enabling him to supply Kermit Lynch's US distributors directly in small lots. Patrick is candid and notes that it is never an exact science how much sugar you end up with, but he aims for 50–60g/l in the final wine. The wonderfully old-fashioned Bottex label seems a throwback to a time long before this ancestral method was perfected – but it serves the family well.

Patrick Bottex
La Cueille, 01450 Poncin
Tel: 04 74 37 24 55/06 81 83 41 57
Email: patrick.bottex@wanadoo.fr
Web: cerdon-bottex.pagesperso-orange.fr
Contact: Catherine or Patrick Bottex
Map ref: C3
Vineyards: 6.5ha
Visits: Tasting room, welcomed by appointment

La Combe aux Rêves

Grégoire Perron loves Poulsard and his early reputation was established by his pink sparkling wine, made in the ancestral method. He does not make Cerdon, instead labelling all his wines Vin de France, preferring the freedom from rules, paperwork and costs associated with the AOC label. La Combe aux Rêves (which means 'the valley of dreams') Noct'en Bulles, a pink sparkling wine blend, is today made as a Pétillant Naturel, without the process of removing the yeasts. Part of the blend is from some of the oldest Poulsard vines in the area. Grégoire, who worked for a while at Domaine Pavelot in Burgundy, describes the Gravelles slope on the Croix de la

Dent hill as the ‘Corton of Bugey’. It reflects his respect for the terroir here as well as the visual evidence: like Corton, these vineyards seem to wear a forested headdress over a wide skirt of vineyards. It was this ancient plot of vines that encouraged him to establish his winery nearby.

Brought up near Lyon, Grégoire wanted to work outdoors and after trying forestry discovered the world of wine. He studied in Bordeaux and Mâcon and trained with Jean-François Ganevat in the Jura, followed by over a decade of experience with large wineries in France, the US and New Zealand. He had always wanted to work organically and with Ganevat and Domaine Pavelot he experienced it first-hand. In 2009 Grégoire and his partner Judicaëlle (Judy for short), who originally worked in computer graphics, settled in the quiet village of Journans, in a rambling old house with wine cellars below and a big courtyard, ideal for their two children, a Boxer dog called Houblon (French for ‘hops’, as in beer), vans and vineyard kit.

Now that Judy is working with Grégoire, they want to build up to 3.5ha of vineyards. Their vineyards are farmed organically, allowing natural vegetation to grow, which they control with a flock of rare-breed sheep. The sheep spend about a month in each plot between November and March, when they can do no harm to the vines, and then, in spring and summer, the grass is mown or ploughed back into the earth. Grégoire uses various plant applications – inspired by biodynamic methods – and algae to help prevent the copper and sulphur sprays being washed off the vines by rain.

Grégoire Perron in what he calls his 'forest' of old Poulsard vines.

The old-vine plots are mainly red, so Grégoire has cleared an abandoned plot in Journans to plant with mass selections of Savagnin, Altesse and a small amount of Chardonnay. Like most Journans vineyards the soil is clay-limestone; the Gravelles slope has older clay-rich marl or, in some parts, heavy red clay. On this red clay lies one of his older vineyards of co-planted Gamay, Pinot, Mondeuse and 'many other varieties' between 40 and 90 years old. The CAAPG has taken an interest and found that Grégoire had some almost extinct Gueuche Noire, from which cuttings have been collected. From here he makes his cuvée called Terre des Rangoux, co-fermenting all the varieties.

The old Poulsard vine forest (as Grégoire calls this erratic-growing 100–120-year-old vine plot) is on a part of Gravelles with grey marl, facing southeast. He has some Gamay here too and plans to plant Mondeuse, which was traditionally the most-planted variety on Gravelles. Grégoire uses some of the old-vine fruit for a red named L'Eveil du Loup ('awakening of the wolf'), made from whole grape maceration in a big wooden vat, foot trodden, with a long vinification and ageing in *demi-muid* barrels.

All Grégoire's wines are resolutely natural, with no added sulphur since 2013, but made with much thought. His whites are partly from bought-in grapes – in 2016 he helped out Luc Bauer, buying some of his Altesse and Chardonnay grapes to make a very Savoyard-style steely wine – but his own grapes are used for the fuller-bodied oak-fermented Terremère from about 70% Chardonnay with Altesse and Pinot Noir. Grégoire believes that wines with no added SO_2 suffer a longer period of bottle shock (when wines taste unbalanced and/or inexpressive following bottling) and require at least six months resting before opening and then two to three years in bottle to be great. Even Noct'en Bulles and his other Pétillant Naturel sparkling wines take their time both to be vinified and to be ready to drink.

Grégoire makes his varied range in fibreglass tanks or old barrels (and most recently the *demi-muids* from Côte-Rôtie), but he would like to try out stoneware (rather than clay) ceramic containers too. Cuvées and ideas change each year here and Grégoire has a growing natural wine fan-base worldwide.

La Combe aux Rêves
227 Rue de l'Eglise, 01250 Journans
Tel: 06 16 51 54 90
Email: combeauxreves@orange.fr
Contact: Grégoire Perron
Map ref: A4
Vineyards: 2.5ha (+ some purchased fruit)
Certification: Natur et Progrès
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Domaine La Dentelle

Meeting with Marcel Perinet, it's obvious right away that he is not an everyday vigneron. Despite knowing how to court the press, Marcel is modest and you have to hunt to find out his background. Forty years

ago, he was crowned with one of the Best Sommelier awards in France – I say one, for that year there were three and his was for Maître d'Hôtel Sommellerie, wine service for a hotel restaurant. For 40 years Marcel was the right-hand man for Georges Blanc, a renowned chef and entrepreneur of the Lyon area, and he still lives in Vonnas, home to Georges Blanc's top restaurant and gastronomic resort.

Making a Poulsard-dominated Cerdon is a late career for Marcel Perinet.

Marcel runs Domaine La Dentelle in Cerdon as a joint venture with his son Hubert, who inherited the property. Hubert lives in Paris and works in IT, but comes down to Cerdon for harvest and other key points in the winemaking calendar – but this is very much Marcel's baby. The estate was named for the slope where the main vineyards lie – on the Croix de la Dent hill in the hamlet of Gravelles. Given the classic marl soils, ideal for Poulsard, this was the grape that Marcel decided to plant in 2010 and 2011 on the hillside, which ranges from 450–500m altitude. He has also taken over 1.5ha of old vineyards and purchases grapes from older growers in Gravelles. He hopes to end up with about 8ha, mainly Poulsard.

Noting that herbicide use caused the worst soil erosion, every other row is grassed down each year, with the alternate row ploughed using a small tracked vehicle, and then swapped over the next year. In 2017 Marcel started the official process of conversion to obtain organic certification. Harvest is by hand and he chooses the

time specifically based on the grapes' acidity levels. He aims for a final alcohol level of 8% and thinks that with the lower natural acidity resulting from climate change, he needs lower sugar levels.

Marcel has invested heavily in creating a tank room and buying bottling and transfer equipment so that the estate can be self-sufficient. He has a 20-hectolitre pressurized tank and with cooling equipment he can maintain this at 0°C. The line can handle the transfer of 3,000 bottles per day, which allows production to be spread through the year.

Domaine La Dentelle makes just one Cerdon cuvée, bottled in clear glass to show off the colour. In 2014, the first vintage, Marcel made about 7,000 bottles, which increased to 40,000 bottles in 2016, despite limiting yields. His Poulsard-dominant Cerdon reveals several differences from the Gamay-based wines, being paler and having a tendency to that animal, slightly reductive nose, along with a faint Alpine strawberry character; on the palate the 50g/l of residual sugar is in balance with the acidity, alcohol and gentle fizz, with delicate redcurrant flavours that lead to a much longer finish than many Cerdons. This is an easy-going drink, evidently made with love and joy. I hope that this new vigneron, the retiree Marcel, has many more vintages ahead of him and that his son Hubert continues with his legacy.

Domaine La Dentelle
65 Chemin du Péroux, 01160 St-Martin-du-Mont
Tel: 06 08 84 38 22
Email: marcelperinet@gmail.com
Web: domaineladentelle.com
Contact: Marcel Perinet
Map ref: A4
Vineyards: 5.5ha (mainly Poulsard + occasional purchases)
Certification: Qualisud
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Cellier Lingot-Martin

Mr Lingot and Mr Martin no longer work at Lingot-Martin, Cerdon's biggest wine company, but as so many who love the land, in their retirement you'll still find them working in the vineyards. The Lingot, Martin and Bolliet families linked together in 1970 to make and market the wine from their 16ha of vines. Today there are four partners: brothers Jean-Luc and Frédéric Guillon, who joined the company in 2006, bringing 11ha of vines with them, Gilles Bolliet and Alexandre Vallet. They may co-operate on everything, but this is not a co-operative: it's a partnership of families, with six further employees. With control of more than 20% of AOC Cerdon's vineyards it's gratifying to report that they seem to do a very decent job.

Lingot-Martin was the first Cerdon I ever came across, at one of the Vignerons Indépendents wine fairs in France. It was a light and refreshing change from all the Jura and Savoie wines I was assiduously tasting. And this was the first Cerdon cellar I visited, one cold winter's day in 2009, in a bid to learn about the mysterious ancestral method first hand. On a more recent visit, they were preparing for their twice-annual open tasting weekend. The cellar is on the side of the main Lyon–Geneva road outside Poncin, next to the Monts et Terroirs cheese shop, with plenty of space for food stalls and parking. It was March, so the previous vintage was ready to show and hopefully sell to the world, or at least to the locals and visitors from the nearby cities of Bourg-en-Bresse and Lyon. About 55% of Lingot-Martin's 35,000–40,000 bottles are sold direct to the consumer from the cellar door and from wine fairs around France, an important amount given the increased profit margin. A further 30% goes to supermarkets around the Rhône-Alpes region (including the ski areas) and just under 10% is exported, a figure Jean-Luc Guillon, who since 2018 has been president of the Bugey syndicate, would like to increase. The rest goes to other trade buyers in France.

The partners of Lingot-Martin; Jean-Luc Guillon is second from left.

As far as I know, this is the only producer that offers four different Cerdon cuvées, all distinctly different and of a very good standard. In tasting order, first up is the Sec (rather than the usual *demi-sec*), with just 22g/l of residual sugar and 9% alcohol (more than usual because the fermentation is allowed to continue longer) – its lower sugar level makes this Gamay fizz versatile with food, and it is growing in popularity. The Classic represents 60% of production and is a simple red fruit semi-sweet Gamay fizz, of very consistent, decent quality. Sélectionnée had 70% Poulsard in the blend until the 2016 vintage, when they used 90% Poulsard. This level means it is considerably paler (only the Gamay is macerated), it has a finer bubble and is a more vinous, structured wine, but it needs drinking even earlier than the others. Finally the darker pink-red Cuvée Réservée is a more intense Gamay that has been through a longer maceration and is bottled later. With its hint of tannin I like this too – it's hard to choose.

This serious and efficiently run estate is an asset to the appellation. Mechanization in the vineyards (50% machine harvested) and in the winery is essential here, they explain. They try to work their vineyards in a sustainable manner, but declare that converting to organics is too difficult. Fermentation is with cultured yeasts at the start, but then they let the indigenous ones take over as they work

better with the very low temperatures. All is bottled by the end of November.

There's a good team here, which helps, because the main driver of the company, Jean-Luc Guillon, is often busy with the syndicate. As vice-president he had spearheaded the region's fight against Clairette de Die rosé. As president, he is continuing the fight, but I hope that one day when the legal case is over Jean-Luc will put the same energy into raising quality standards even further and bringing the message to the world about the potential quality of this appellation and of Lingot-Martin as an excellent representative.

Cellier Lingot-Martin
ZA Sous la Côte Ménestruel, 01450 Poncin
Tel: 04 74 39 97 77
Email: lingot-martin.isa@orange.fr
Web: lingot-martin.fr
Contact: Jean-Luc Guillon
Map ref: B2
Vineyards: 40ha (including 4.5ha Poulsard) and some purchased
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine Renardat-Fâche

With sales in around 12 countries, this is the most internationally recognized Cerdon label and the wines are a wonderful ambassador for the region. In a determined and motivated way, the current generation of wine-growers here, Elie and Christelle Renardat-Fâche, have built on what Elie's father Alain had established and he, in his day, built on what his father Léon had created. Several generations prior to Léon were mixed farmers with vines in Cerdon. Léon had fruit and nut orchards and a few cows, but mainly he farmed his Gamay vines to make some sparkling and some rather hard (says Alain) still red. Sparkling Gamay was what he wanted to perfect and he was one

of the region's pioneers, taking time to visit Champagne, Die, Gaillac and elsewhere to see what he could learn. In 1974, when Alain officially joined the estate after wine studies in Beaune, Léon and Alain installed temperature-controlled tanks – the first in the region. At the time the family had just 2.5ha of vineyards. 'We are almost bottling grapes here,' says Alain Renardat-Fâche and he makes it sound easy, but much effort goes into making their Cerdon.

Elie and his father Alain Renardat-Fâche during harvest.

Elie also studied in Beaune and joined his father in 1996, by which time the estate had 8ha. Alongside Elie, Christelle helps in most aspects of the domaine, especially for tastings and sales, and is a great educator for the region. Alain's wife Mireille is also still involved. The Poulsard grape is a passion for Elie and Christelle, for they believe it gives a finer and creamier edge to the wine, as well as better structure. From 2008 they started official organic conversion, with full certification in 2012; however, they note that their treatments changed little. The biggest change was buying better

equipment to be able to plough and mechanically weed their steepest slopes. Elie is testing certain aspects of biodynamic farming, mainly using plant sprays and experimenting with biodynamic preparations. He is not yet convinced to go all the way with biodynamics and says that farming organically remains very difficult, given the amount of rain they receive, and they find it hard to keep within the limits for copper usage. In addition to their own production, about 15–20% extra is purchased from small local vineyards. Since 2015 they've started using their own picking team to harvest the purchased fruit so that they can control selection at the vine, usually picking earlier than at their own vineyards. They are meticulous in keeping everything separate.

Renardat-Fâche's Cerdon with the pale grey label is the négociant one and these days is 100% Gamay from both purchased fruit and also fruit from their young vineyards or those in conversion to organics. It's the first wine to be bottled and the first to be transferred. The black label adorns the delicious organic estate wine: with 30% Poulsard, it has 50–60g/l of residual sugar and 8–8.5% alcohol and shows excellent balance. As well as different labels, the wines have different coloured capsules for better traceability.

In most vintages, the last picking bins of the day are destemmed and then macerated for a few hours to obtain the colour, while the rest are left as whole bunches and directly pressed. For some time Elie has used only indigenous yeasts. Also very important for him is to keep the bottles standing up so that the fermentation restarts slowly, which gives a finer bubble.

The family have always made a little Gamay still red wine for their personal consumption; from 2016, they have made a few thousand bottles to sell, using destemmed grapes, fermented at very low temperature with one pump-over daily, then pressed after three weeks. I have not had the chance to taste it, but Elie says it is a low-alcohol fruity Gamay with the structure of a Mondeuse – interesting! It might raise some eyebrows locally, in this ultra-traditional area, but the family have a history of that. Without doubt, they are wonderful world ambassadors for Cerdon and for Bugey.

Domaine Renardat-Fâche
115 Rue de la Balmette, 01450 Mérignat
Tel: 04 74 39 97 19
Email: contact@renardat-fache.com
Web: renardat-fache.com
Contact: Christelle Renardat-Fâche
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 12.5ha (including 3ha Poulsard) + some purchased fruit
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Rondeau-Guinet

Bernard Rondeau comes from the Loire Valley, the son of a farmer in Anjou who kept dairy cows. Bernard decided on a career in wine and studied in Bordeaux before returning home for his practical experience with Anjou vigneron Olivier Cousin and then working with the Daviau family at Domaine Bablut. Growing up in Anjou Rosé country, he was obviously drawn to all wines pink. Marjorie Guinet hails from a farming family of the Cerdon area, in the hidden hamlet of Cornelle, part of the small village of Boyeux-St-Jerôme. Until the late 1990s the Guinet family lived from apple orchards and a few parcels of Gamay vineyards, from which they made a sparkling (carbonated) Cerdon. Marjorie wanted to continue the family tradition and went to Mâcon for wine studies. Along the way she met Bernard and enticed him to move east; the pair took on the family estate, converting it entirely to wine production in 1998.

They have six vineyard parcels, mostly in Boyeux and among the highest in the region, at between 450 and 500m. Bernard describes the terroir as being stonier than Mérignat, but similar in that it has more clay than Cerdon. He says that working the soil is not practical due to the uneven nature of the land, but he has grassed down all the vineyards and works with a small tracked vehicle, using herbicide

below the rows. He believes that machine harvesting damages the grass, so harvests manually.

Bernard Rondeau.

When the couple started, they had to invest in new equipment for everything; Bernard likes a squeaky-clean cellar and finds that natural yeasts take too long to get fermentation started, so he starts with a cultured yeast and then lets the natural ones take over. After bottling he leaves the bottles standing upright for longer than the statutory two months if possible. He does at least 12 transfer operations each year on the premises, with the wine remaining in pressure tanks overnight. He encourages his French wine shop clients to take small quantities often and even Charles Neal, his California importer, ships three orders per year.

Bernard makes a Bugey Brut, using a Jura service to undertake the traditional method, and three still wines, but his main product is the Bugey Cerdon, with about 10% Poulsard. The singularity of this wine is that, along with Lingot-Martin's Sec cuvée, it is one of the driest in the area with about 35g/l of residual sugar at most, reducing through the year with each batch. It has a pretty pale colour and a vibrant strawberry nose, and is a style suited more as an aperitif rather than after a meal. This is a quietly meticulous winery.

Rondeau-Guinet
7 Rue des Vignerons, Cornelle, 01640 Boyeux-St-Jérôme

Tel: 04 74 37 12 34
Email: bernard.rondeau01@orange.fr
Web: bugey-cerdon-rondeau.fr
Contact: Bernard Rondeau
Map ref: C1
Vineyards: 9ha
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Vucher & Fils

The Vucher family is entrenched in Cerdon history. In the tank room, Eric Vucher explained to me that this was once a carpenter's workshop, where in the Second World War his grandfather, Jean-Baptiste Vucher, hid from the Germans when they came to arrest resistance supporters. There are many grim wartime stories of Cerdon and its surroundings – there is a resistance memorial just outside the village. Eric's father Georges Vucher, who officially founded the estate, is also something of a local hero. In the early 1970s a violent storm provoked a huge earth slippage from the steep vineyard slope above the village, and caused major damage to some of the houses. To prevent a recurrence Georges developed the system of channels to drain the water that is still in place today. Jean-Baptiste Vucher had been a mixed farmer and Georges began the wine estate in 1974 while working for a local wine négociant, which is no longer in business. When Eric joined his father 20 years later, they had 3.5ha and took on another hectare right away. Now, from nearly triple the area, Eric makes just over 100,000 bottles, including a tiny amount of carbonated wine from Gamay de Bouze and some traditional method Bugey Brut from Chardonnay. As well as the estate Bugey Cerdon, he also makes a further 30,000–50,000 bottles from purchased juice, which is sold separately.

The vineyard holdings include an old parcel of Gobelet-trained vines, located on the steep southeast-facing slope above the village – it ripens two days ahead of all their other vineyards and has to be hand-harvested, unlike the rest. Eric explained that this old vineyard

is weed-killed 100% chemically, whereas the other vineyards are grassed-down and mechanizable, with herbicide used only below the vine rows.

The tasting room is in an early 18th-century village house, purchased by Georges, who still works in the vineyards part time. It's an atmospheric place to taste their estate Cerdon cuvée. From almost 100% Gamay, it's different every year, and Eric tells me he blends it on the basis of the smell. Much is sold from the tasting room and at wine shows, but they have good markets beyond too. And Eric is beginning to think big now that he's found an importer in Texas.

Eric Vucher with his Gobelet-trained vines on the limestone scree of Cerdon's La Grande Côte.

Vucher & Fils
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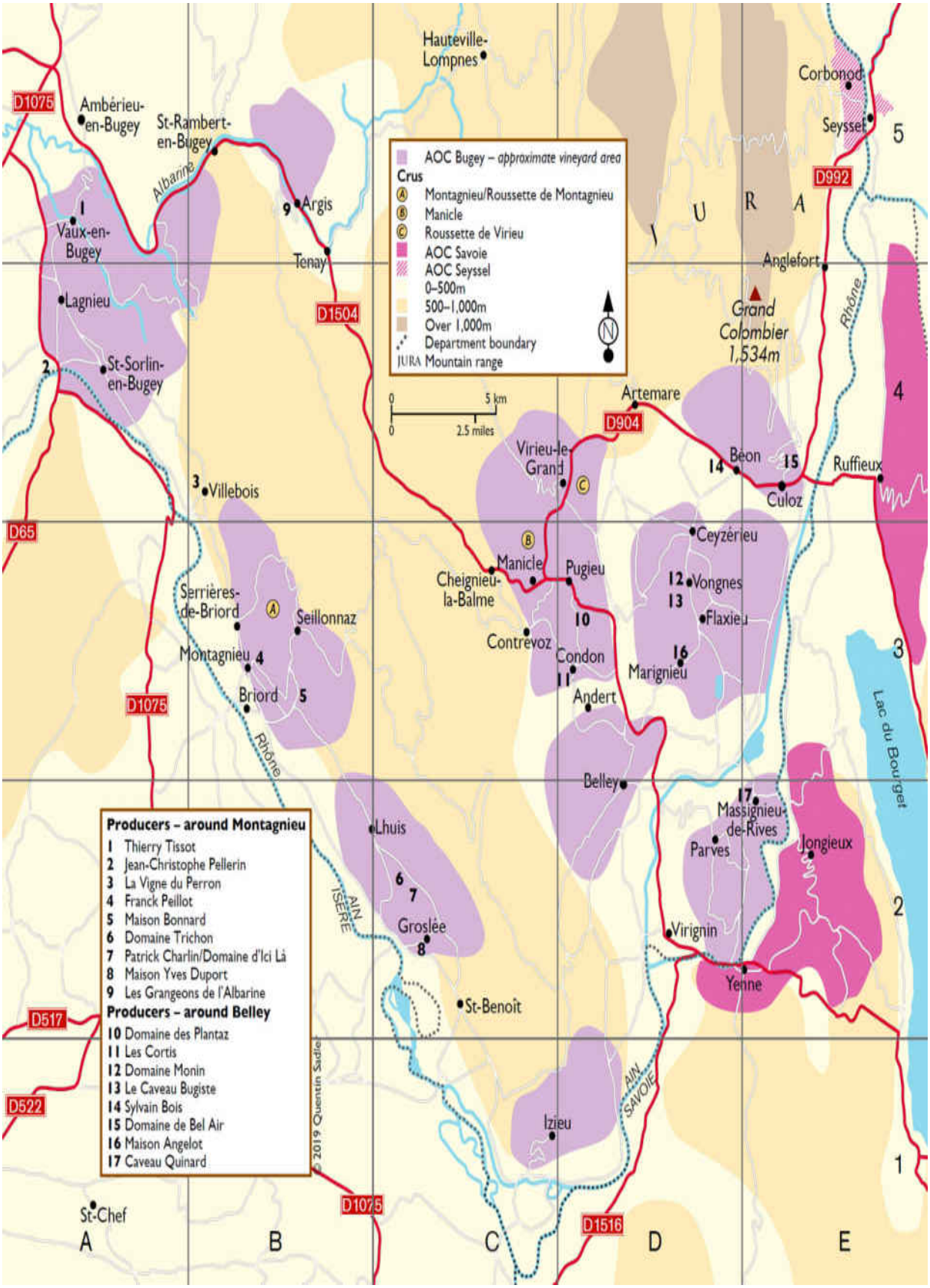
Email: contact@cave-vucher.fr
Web: cave-vin-cerdon-vucher.fr
Contact: Eric Vucher

Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 11ha (+ some purchased grapes)
Visits: Tasting room, visits welcomed, preferably by appointment


AOC Bugey – approximate vineyard area
Crus
A Montagnieu/Roussette de Montagnieu
B Manicle
C Roussette de Virieu
AOC Savoie
AOC Seyssel
0–500m
500–1,000m
Over 1,000m
Department boundary
JURA Mountain range
N
0 5 km
0 2.5 miles
Producers – around Montagnieu
1 Thierry Tissot
2 Jean-Christophe Pellerin
3 La Vigne du Perron
4 Franck Peillot
5 Maison Bonnard
6 Domaine Trichon
7 Patrick Charlin/Domaine d'Ici Là
8 Maison Yves Duport
9 Les Grangeons de l'Albarine
Producers – around Belley
10 Domaine des Plantaz
11 Les Cortis
12 Domaine Monin
13 Le Caveau Bugiste
14 Sylvain Bois
15 Domaine de Bel Air
16 Maison Angelot
17 Caveau Quinard
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Seyssel
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Tenay
Lagnieu
St-Sorlin-en-Bugey
Villebois
Serrières-de-Briord
Seillonnaz
Montagnieu
Briord
Rhône
Lhuis
Groslée
St-Benoît
Izieu
St-Chef
Anglefort
Grand Colombier 1,534m
Artemare
Virieu-le-Grand
Béon
Ruffieux
Culoz
Ceyzérieu
Manicle
Cheignieu-la-Balme
Pugieu
Vongnes
Flaxieu
Contrevoz
Condon
Marignieu
Andert
Belley
Massignieu-de-Rives
Parves
Jongieux
Virignin
Yenne
Lac du Bourget
AIN
ISÈRE
SAVOIE
D1075
D1504
D65
D904
D992
D517
D522
D1516
A
B
C
D
E
1
2
3
4
5

SOUTHERN BUGEY

South of the town of Ambérieu-en-Bugey, the scattered vineyards of southern Bugey lie within a huge loop made by the Rhône river. Here there are ever-present low mountains, often in the form of long ridges (those Jura fingers, mentioned in the Bugey introduction), and it is one of these that divides the vineyards into two further parts. The quieter western part includes the spectacular vineyard slope of Montagnieu. Fitting in neither part, a tributary of the Ain, the pretty Albarine river, winds from east to west through some dramatic gorges. Between St-Rambert-en-Bugey and Tenay there were once many vineyards, but today almost all that remain are those farmed by Les Grangeons de l'Albarine at Argis.

The eastern part is dominated by the Grand Colombier mountain in the north, which has views across Savoie to Mont Blanc and the Alps. Belley, located here, is the unofficial capital of the wine area and a modest town with a population of less than 9,000. It was the birthplace of the lawyer, politician and gastronome Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, whose most famous work, *The Physiology of Taste*, was published in 1825. He is known to have taken a great interest in the wines of Bugey and even owned vineyards. The Rhône separates this southeastern part of Bugey's vineyards from the Chautagne and Jongieux vineyards of Savoie; just to the north is the town of Seyssel, which straddles the Rhône river, with one part in Ain and the other in Haute-Savoie. Seyssel's vineyards are treated as part of Savoie.

The main wines to expect

Most producers in southern Bugey make a significant amount of sparkling wine, often 50% or more of their output. The main sparkling wine is Bugey Brut, usually Chardonnay-based; those with vineyards in Montagnieu also make Bugey Montagnieu Brut. Many also make a white and/or rosé Vin de

France sparkling wine in the style of a Méthode Ancestrale: medium sweet and low alcohol. In still whites, everyone makes at least one Chardonnay; from Altesse some produce Roussette du Bugey (including Roussette du Bugey Montagnieu) and there are a few other varietal whites. Rosé and reds are mainly varietal wines from Pinot Noir, Gamay and sometimes Mondeuse.

Around Montagnieu

In the southwestern part of Bugey, the vineyards stop and start in a line southeast from Vaux-en-Bugey to beyond Groslée-St-Benoît (two villages linked together administratively), above the Rhône river. The most spectacular and contiguous vineyard area is that of Montagnieu, the only cru in this area, which is restricted to the villages of Montagnieu, Briord and Seillonnaz. Unfortunately, from many vantage points the view across to the Rhône river and the department of Isère on the other side is spoilt by the all-dominating Bugey nuclear power plant. But take time to explore the villages here and you will find charming stone churches, communal wash houses (*lavoirs*) and old vigneron houses, where they made their wines too. In the vineyards are many distinctive *grangeons*.

Starting in the north, Vaux-en-Bugey, Lagnieu and St-Sorlin-en-Bugey were all once widely planted with vines and have some fine historical vineyard sites, with several being rehabilitated, such as Mataret above Vaux, which has been replanted by Thierry Tissot, and others by Jean-Christophe Pellerin. If you visit in summer, pause for a walk around St-Sorlin, which is known in Bugey as the village of the roses, with climbing roses clinging to most of the buildings along its steep little streets.

The largest cru in southern Bugey, Montagnieu has around 32ha of vineyards of which about 24ha are designated for sparkling wine, predominantly from Chardonnay. It can be very good indeed and I believe it is the finest traditional method wine area in the Alps.

Montagnieu's vineyards were effectively rescued from extinction after the Second World War, and it was sparkling wine that saved them. Maison Guigard, of Groslée, was known for traditional method sparkling wines made from bought-in base wines, but from the 1950s Pierre Guigard encouraged local growers to plant more Chardonnay and purchased much of their harvest. Today, Guigard's production has declined greatly and is sold locally. Guigard shares a CUMA with Yves Duport, Maison Bonnard and Franck Peillot, for disgorging sparkling wines.

Montagnieu's steep south/southeast-facing slope extends up to above 400m. While predominantly on clay-limestone scree, it has parts that are of very heavy clay; some more friable gravelly clay or marl; other parts rich in fossils; and sections of glacial till – in all a classic combination of Jurassic and Prealpine soils. Mondeuse and most particularly Altesse have been grown on this slope since at least the 19th century and although areas planted today are small, these grapes can produce excellent results. Franck Peillot claims that the celebrated Beaujolais négociant and taster Jules Chauvet rated the potential of Altesse from Montagnieu on a par with Château-Chalon or Château Grillet. This area is not without its viticultural problems, though – apart from being fiendish to work, it seems unfairly prone to both severe spring frost (especially on the lower slopes) and hailstorms. The vineyards of Bénonces and Villebois are effectively an extension to the north, but are not in the designated cru area.

South of Montagnieu, with mixed limestone soils with some sand and silty clay, Lhuis's vineyards vary from steep slopes to flatter frost-prone land, closer to the river. Groslée-St-Benoît has several impressive steep vineyard sites.

Maison Bonnard

There is much respect for the Bonnard family in Bugey, and rightly so, even though they are hardly known outside. Their very drinkable Mondeuse was offered to us over lunch with Raphaël Bartucci in Cerdon; Jean-Christophe Pellerin, who works in biodynamics, told me he was giving the Bonnards a hand; and Roland Bonnard is active in

the Bugey syndicate – the whole family is friendly and open, what's not to like?

South of Montagnieu, these vineyards in Lhuis overlook the canalized part of the Rhône.

Based in Crept, at the foot of the Montagnieu vineyard slope, when brothers Roland and Frédéric established the estate in 1988 they just had a tractor and 1.5ha of vines on the plain. Gaby Bonnard, their late father, was a mixed farmer, who loved to party, according to grandson Romain, who is bringing youthful life to this estate. Whenever Gaby had any money to spare, he bought land, mostly close to the winery in Crept.

They started moving towards organic farming in their vineyards from 1998 – the previous year Frédéric had been plagued with headaches. Now the whole estate is weeded with a hoe or an *intercep*, depending on the slope, and organic certification is on the way. They are also adopting biodynamic practices, from using the plant preparations to making their own concoctions from plants picked in the local hillsides and to working with the lunar cycles.

Everything is hand harvested. Above Briord, the Montagnieu slope is steep, limestone scree, well drained and retains the heat, so it's ideal for both Mondeuse and Pinot Noir. They grow Altesse towards the village of Montagnieu, where there is more marl. Chardonnay can lose acidity too quickly on the well-exposed Montagnieu, with ever-increasing warmth and frequent drought, so in future years they plan to plant more traditional varieties such as Jacquère, Verdesse or Persan. Their 4.5ha of Chardonnay in Lhuis will be gradually reduced, as it is a frost-prone site.

Sparkling wines account for around 40% of production, with a Vin de France ancestral method rosé but the majority being the Montagnieu Brut. Made from Chardonnay, usually with a touch of Altesse and sometimes Pinot Noir or Mondeuse, the Montagnieu is hand riddled and remains about three years *sur lattes*. It's very good, as is the range of still red and white wines, fermented with indigenous yeast and vinified simply, with some old oak use. There are two Chardonnays, notably the oak-fermented Les Bonnes, and a Roussette de Montagnieu, but it is their reds that impress particularly. These include a juicy, whole bunch carbonic Gamay (the CO_2 is recycled), a satisfying Pinot Noir (usually half destemmed) and an excellent classic sour-cherry, structured Mondeuse, made from low yields, mainly destemmed and spending some months in old oak. Another plan is to hold back some Mondeuse and Altesse bottles for later release.

Jean-Christophe Bonnard, a son of André, brother to Roland and Frédéric, has joined the team after his wine studies and works with Roland on soil and canopy management in the vineyards. Frédéric handles the vine treatments, as well as the sales and admin work. His son Romain studied wine at Belleville, then wine business at Dijon, and he works on all sides. Before settling back in Bugey, Romain worked at Domaine Barraud in Pouilly Fuissé and at the biodynamic Domaine d'Aupilhac in the Languedoc, owned by his godfather.

This is a close-knit family, with big projects for the future. Romain's sister Anne-Sophie joined them in 2018, back from travelling the world on a quest to discover the key to wine tourism

(she is La Wine Trotteuse on social media). She is masterminding the development for 2020 of lodgings and meals in old vineyard *grangeons*, plus a wine bar to increase sales at the domaine. Currently they sell much in Lyon and Paris, and exports are minuscule. The future for Maison Bonnard is a fine one, I predict.

Roland, Romain and Frédéric Bonnard, with some of their steep Montagnieu vineyards behind.

Maison Bonnard
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Contact: Romain Bonnard
Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 16ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles
Visits: Tasting room

Patrick Charlin

The most thoughtful Bugey vigneron, Patrick Charlin retired after the 2017 vintage having made wine for four decades; rather sadly, his

children had no interest in taking over the estate. Having already reduced his holdings to 4.5ha, mostly in Montagnieu, the remaining vineyards have been taken on partly by the new estate Domaine d'Ici Là, which is also renting his cellars, and partly by Yves Duport.

Patrick's father Pierre was a mixed farmer, and, after studying at Beaune, from 1977 Patrick started to acquire land and vines. He has been a rare champion of Altesse – specifically, Montagnieu Altesse – and from the 1990s he started focusing on the grape's quality potential. His vineyards were grassed down for many years and more than a decade ago he began gradually converting to organic farming, although he never sought certification. He always preferred hand harvesting.

Patrick Charlin farmed his Montagnieu vineyards for 40 years.

Patrick worked for a while in Champagne and has made fine sparkling wines. Although he grew Chardonnay and Pinot for Bugey Brut, he found Montagnieu Brut easier to sell and for many years concentrated on this, making a fine one, usually from one-third each of Chardonnay, Altesse and Mondeuse, sometimes blending vintages, and with a low 4g/l *dosage*. Like his Chardonnay-dominated Bugey Brut it could age well, and this is the essence of Patrick's wines – he made them to age, releasing them later than most producers.

Overall his winemaking was always considered – whole bunch white grapes and, as in Champagne, he discarded the first and last

juice from the press. He used the same yeast for whites as for his sparkling base wine, started fermentation at a low 12°C and avoided malolactic or racking. For his Mondeuse he picked very late and in more recent vintages used 30% whole bunches, for a little semi-carbonic maceration, to help liberate the spicy, peppery flavours.

Patrick's Altesse needs some ageing to show its best and he releases it at nearly three years old; waiting allows truffle flavours to evolve, as well as weight on the palate. Ten years old is nothing for this wine from a good vintage – acidity is normally a given, although Patrick is worried for the future with a warming climate, noticing he had too much alcohol in his Altesse in later years. His rustic and intense Mondeuse benefits from time too, but he releases it a little earlier. Patrick carefully ekes out his stocks and has even sold some to Becky Wasserman in the US. I urge you to snap up what you can. For now, they are great value.

Patrick Charlin (retired)
Le Richenard, 01680 Groslée
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Map ref: C2
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment, while stocks last

Maison Yves Duport

Yves Duport is a good talker, and as a child he was a voracious reader – a fan of Jacques Cousteau and Paul-Emile Victor, explorers and scientists. He had originally put his faith in both history and science. As an adult, while remaining a history fan, Yves finds the more he learns, the more he distrusts science. He's read Rudolf Steiner but bemoans the fact that he never explained the 'why' of anything. Nevertheless, Yves increasingly practises biodynamics in his vineyards, which have been organic since 2009.

The Duport family was originally from Vaux-en-Bugey, then, having married a local girl, Yves' grandfather settled in Groslée to farm (including vines) in the 1930s. Yves' father Jean and his uncle Jacques worked together from 1970 and Yves joined them in 1992. He had studied commerce in Paris and wine in Mâcon and worked in sales both for a Mâconnais wine co-operative and for Savoie négociant, Jean Cavaillé. After a family split, from 1996, Yves worked with his brother and father to create a négociant business, buying grapes mainly from Montagnieu for sparkling wine and fully equipping a modern cellar to make it. His brother moved on, a partner came and went, and finally, in 2007, Yves started again on his own with his wife Céline. Daughter Lucie, originally in banking, is retraining in wine to join them.

Yves Duport's wide range of wines pleases many markets.

Yves has built up his domaine to 15ha, including 2.7ha of Patrick Charlin's Montagnieu Chardonnay and Altesse taken over in 2018, but he has to obtain organic certification for this. He also has vineyards in Groslée, notably on the hillside below the Château du Groslée, which had not been replanted since phylloxera. Yves has planted Pinot Noir on the rockier, iron-rich, red soil (naming the wine Terre Rouge) and Mondeuse on the deep, brown soil higher up (Terre Brune). He plants mass selections when possible, ploughs the soils, uses the two main biodynamic preparations 'when he can' and works with various plant

infusions. He uses machine harvesting for some of his Chardonnay Les Côtes, whereas reds are always hand harvested.

For whites, Yves ages in tank, encourages malolactic fermentation and uses extended lees contact; he ages the reds in second-hand barrels, purchased from Domaine Tollot-Beaut in Burgundy. Yves makes a yeast starter culture from his natural yeasts early on and uses this throughout – for his top sparkling wine he makes his own *liqueur de tirage* (the yeast and sugar mixture) for the second fermentation. His sulphur levels are kept extremely low.

The Montagnieu Brut – a blend of Chardonnay (part purchased) with Altesse, Mondeuse and Jacquère shows off the cru well with elegance, clean lines and length. The Bugey Brut Origine'L Reserve, from his own Chardonnay, Pinot and Aligoté, is a softer, rounder sparkling wine – much more in line with all the rest of Yves' organic wines. These wines taste like no others from this part of Bugey – they are riper, rounder and more forward, yes, more natural too. I get the sense that Yves takes risks, but he has found a customer base in Paris and on export markets (about 15% including to Japan and the UK) who understand his wines. Yves does Altesse and Mondeuse well and they have a well-deserved following: the Altesse de Montagnieu En Chinvre from a very steep part of Montagnieu on white marl, with plenty of ammonite fossils, has focus and class; the Mondeuse Terre Brune has weight to cope with the oak maturation. Expect the unexpected with Yves in his wines or when meeting him. Every region needs an Yves.

Maison Yves Duport
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Email: contact@yvesduport.fr
Web: yvesduport.fr
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 15ha + some Chardonnay purchases
Certification: Ecocert (for part)

Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Les Grangeons de l'Albarine

His wines are listed by Noma restaurant in Copenhagen, but in his short time as a vigneron, life has delivered joy and pain in equal measures to Luc Bauer. Having worked as a full-time vigneron for just over a year, in May 2016, along with problems with his vineyard equipment Luc was fighting rampant mildew in his biodynamically run vineyards due to the rainy spring. In July the sun returned, he and his partner Clémence moved into their newly restored house above the winery… and two days later he was rushed to hospital having suffered a serious stroke. He battled through, getting close to the void before he got better. He was just 34 years old. The local organic vignerons rallied round to look after his vineyards and Luc sold them his 2016 crop. He wasn't officially allowed back to work until March 2017, but meantime in January there was joy, with a baby daughter, Mélina. He was just celebrating being able to bottle his wonderful 2015s and return to the vineyards when, like many other growers, he was hit by the debilitating frosts of April 2017. He did have some crop in 2017, and fortunately vintage 2018 is what he describes as his real renaissance, with a potential volume of more than 12,000 bottles.

In his isolated Argis vineyards, Luc Bauer uses this kite as a bird-scarer.

Luc studied agronomy and initially worked in the intensive grain industry – he quickly became disenchanted and developed an interest in agrobiology. Clémence is from Alsace and through her family Luc discovered a love for wine. He took a wine course at Mâcon Davayé in 2008 and worked for various domaines in France and Canada, most notably discovering biodynamics while working with Bret Brothers in the Mâconnais. In 2010 he started work in Beaujolais as an organic vineyard consultant while also looking to establish his own vineyards. Instead of Beaujolais, in 2011 it was in Bugey that he found what he was looking for. On the almost abandoned southwest-facing steep vineyard slope above the village of Argis and the Albarine Valley below the Roche de Narse, he took on two young vineyard parcels, Le Paradis and Le Château, totalling 0.8ha. They had been planted by a wealthy but rather clueless Parisian wine lover, who had effectively given up, so Luc had to bring the vineyards back to life, converting immediately to organics, while keeping on his day job. The name he gave to his winery is a tribute to the *grangeons* (vigneron huts) that once covered this slope of the Albarine Valley – Luc's informative website/blog shows a detailed interest in his adopted home and environment. His winery is in a hamlet on the slope opposite the vineyard.

With new plantings in 2015 and 2016, today Luc has 1.4ha above Argis with Altesse, Mondeuse and Chardonnay. Benefiting from sun all day, the vineyards are on a classic limestone scree soil, with some parts of white marl, ideal for Altesse. They are steep and he works with a *chenillette*, ploughing the soil and using biodynamic preparations. Near Manicle in Rossillon, Luc rents another plot with old Gamay, Chardonnay and Aligoté and in Ceyzérieu he has a plot of Mondeuse (for his wine Miss Monde) and Chasselas, from which he now makes grape juice but in 2016, after his stroke, he was able to pick it himself and made a *vin de paille*. He also farms a plot in St-Sorlin with Altesse, Gamay and Aligoté and today has a full-time employee who manages this.

From Luc's first vintage in 2011 he quickly developed a customer following for his natural way of making the wines – all whole bunch, no chaptalization, natural yeasts, long ageing on lees in used oak

barriques and *demi-muids* plus very low sulphur levels, added only just before bottling. From 2017 he has been working also with stoneware jars and says that in 2018 he can really test whether the oak or jars are best. He has exported to the US, Japan and Scandinavia in addition to naturally-orientated bars and shops across France.

There is wonderful minerality in the whites from Argis and a riper character in those from the Rossillon vineyards, which have alluvial soils with round glacial pebbles. Luc is passionate about Bugey, but after trying to work within the AOC regime, he has given up and his wines are labelled Vin de France. The potential of the Altiesse en Paradis (Altiesse, with an 'i') is huge. And Luc's two Mondeuse wines are entirely different – Le Château from Argis is more structured and Miss Monde from a warmer plot in Ceyzérieu is more joyous; both usually weigh in at 10–11% alcohol. A range of other wines is made, varying from year to year.

Luc suffered a lot of knockbacks in a short time, but he bounced back with determination, enthusiasm and great talent too. Providing the stars align better for him, with the support of his family, his colleagues and customers from around the world, his future could be very bright indeed.

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Web: lesgrangeonsdelalbarine.blogspot.fr
Contact: Luc Bauer
Map ref: B5
Vineyards: 2.7ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: By appointment only

Domaine d’Ici Là

The arrival of this ambitious young couple in 2018 means a few more hectares are added to the growing area of Bugey’s organic vineyards. These include just over a hectare of some of the most meticulously farmed vineyards on the fabulous slope of Montagnieu, belonging to Patrick Charlin. Florie Brunet and her partner Adrien Bariol had been looking for the right vineyard area to set down their own roots for some time and, in their words, when they met Patrick, they just happened to be in the right place at the right time. He was able to lease them 1.3ha and his winery buildings, alongside, importantly, the promise of his sage advice and support.

Although neither Florie (from Alsace) nor Adrien (from Isère) grew up in winegrowing families, independently they both were drawn to wine – Florie’s father was a gastronome and wine lover – and later they were both attracted to an organic approach. They met in the Coteaux Lyonnais at the organic Domaine du Bouc et la Treille, where Florie had worked for three years since leaving wine college and Adrien had come for seasonal work after his studies in the northern Rhône.

Apart from several parcels of Patrick Charlin’s Altesse and Mondeuse vines, and some other small parcels with Gamay and Chardonnay in Montagnieu, they have leased a steep vineyard in Groslée with Altesse and Mondeuse, and some easier, flatter land, planted with Chardonnay, in Lhuis, ideal for sparkling wine. Unfortunately, while working hard to convert all the vineyards to organics, on the night of 29/30 May 2018, their Montagnieu vines were almost completely destroyed by a hailstorm. Thanks to their other vineyards, for their first vintage they were able to harvest some of each of their four varieties. Half the Chardonnay is destined for Bugey Brut (in future years they will also make Montagnieu Brut), the rest for two still whites, one made with long skin contact; a tiny cuvée of carbonic maceration Gamay is being released early with no added sulphur; and later there will be small amounts of Altesse and Mondeuse.

New kids on the block: Florie Brunet and Adrien Bariol.

They have made a sensible start, observing their vineyards, focusing on managing the soil, experimenting with herbal sprays. For year one the wines were made in tank, using cultured yeasts for white, indigenous for reds. They hope never to have to chaptalize and always to use low sulphur levels. For 2019 they plan to buy some second-hand barrels and perhaps some earthenware jars. Ambitious indeed, but with some steadying help from Patrick, I hope they will be rising stars.

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Contacts: Florie Brunet or Adrien Bariol
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 5ha
Certification: Qualisud
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Franck Peillot

In 1998 Alain Renardat-Fâche from Cerdon brought the late Joe Dressner, his US importer, to visit Franck Peillot. Joe fell for Franck's Mondeuse and Altesse and immediately shipped 300 bottles of each – these may well have been the first wines from these grapes available in the US. In a story that Franck enjoys relating, the following year Joe returned, and gently suggested Franck might try working as his father, Jean, once did, using indigenous yeasts. Franck says Joe simply nudged him, didn't insist. Franck is not an organic vigneron: everything he does, from planting to bottling, is considered carefully, yet he is not a big risk-taker. For whites he now always uses indigenous yeast, for reds he uses a cultured yeast to make a *pied de cuve*, the fermenting starter juice to get the rest going naturally, allowing him to avoid using SO_2 until after malolactic.

High up in his Montagnieu vineyard, Franck Peillot is a champion for training vines sur échalas.

Franck's great-great-grandfather, Etienne Babolat, lived in nearby Isère and worked for a vine-grower; his son, Jean-Claude Sambet, bought 0.3ha of vines in Montagnieu. These vines were taken on by Jean-Claude's son-in-law, Franck's grandfather, Louis Peillot (1906–

1975), who was a mixed farmer. Franck's father, Jean, continued and in 1968 sold his cows to focus on his 1.5ha of vines, including Altesse and a little Mondeuse. With Altesse he would make a sparkling wine, effectively using the ancestral method but without disgorging the yeast – Franck explained that as the climate isn't as cold as Cerdon, the fermentation in bottle would go on for longer, giving a drier wine.

Franck studied wine at Mâcon and initially had a difficult time settling between military service, working with his father and for the Duport family. Eventually in 1988 he joined his father full time. Together they planted Chardonnay for sparkling wines. His father insisted they should always make their Roussette du Bugey exclusively with Altesse, even though for the VDQS (pre-AOC), Roussette could also contain Chardonnay. To emphasize their use of Altesse, the Peillots not only wrote it on the label (unheard of, then) but also added their distinctive 'Royal' Fleur de Lys (Altesse means 'Highness').

Today Franck's vineyards are in several plots in and around Montagnieu, and in nearby Lhuis, where he took over an uncle's vines. He still has a proportion of very old vines planted by Louis; other plantings date from the late 1970s, and some clones were planted in the 1990s and 2000s. His steeper Montagnieu vineyards of Altesse and Mondeuse are planted at a density of 9–10,000 vines per hectare with low-trained Gobelet *sur échalas* – Franck is a big fan of this training. Franck used to hoe and bank up all his steep vineyards to avoid weed-killer, but says the work is just too much and today he uses herbicide reluctantly, which he can avoid by using an *intercep* on his Guyot-trained, flatter vineyards. For treatments he uses systemic chemicals at the start of the season and then moves onto sulphur and copper. Harvesting is manual.

Franck's largest production is his delicious Montagnieu Brut, made from a base of about 40% Altesse, 30% Mondeuse and 30% Chardonnay, with a plan to reduce the latter. Each vintage he does a single blend and usually two bottlings, keeping the wine *sur lattes* for 12–36 months and disgorging regularly. The Mondeuse content is relatively high; he started using it in 2008 when the Mondeuse vines were young, and found it adds a fruity, vinous character. Franck doesn't want his sparkling wine to taste like Champagne, he wants it to taste like Montagnieu. And it does – just off-dry at 6g/l *dosage*, with a lovely leesy character on the nose, very delicate mousse and a crispness to offset the sweet fruit. There is also a 100% Chardonnay Bugey Brut named Réserve de Jean – it's creamy and minerally, but personally I love what Altesse and Mondeuse give to the Montagnieu.

For still wines there's a simple, eminently drinkable Chardonnay with freshness and creamy lees character, and a deliciously light, juicy Pinot Noir, from vines of the Pinot Droit (Champagne) clone. The stars are two Altesse wines and his Mondeuse. In 2011 at a tasting of old Bugey vintages from 2009 back to 1994, the absolute standouts were three vintages of Franck's Mondeuse in magnum; his Altesse offerings were also in magnum and very impressive.

Matured only in tank, the main Altesse cuvée is bottled partly in spring and partly in summer and needs a few months to show its potential. Franck usually filters to prevent malolactic though in some tanks it just happens. Residual sugar levels vary – 2016, for example,

had as much as 7g/l, but balanced by the fresh acidity and leesy character the sweetness isn't noticeable. Made only in exceptional years, in limited quantity, Altesse QV à Louis is a blend of the main wine with a late-harvest selection, though rarely with botrytis. When pronounced in French, QV is 'cuvée' and this is dedicated to his grandfather Louis, with the same label design he used in 1935. Franck started making it in 1994 when Altesse was believed to be the Furmint grape and he wanted to try making a Tokaj-style wine. With a rich texture, almost a sweet-sour character, QV becomes more honeyed and spicier with time. The last vintage released was 2013.

Franck is the largest producer of Montagnieu Rouge, a mere 6,000 bottles on average. He destems partially and crushes by foot before a maceration of about ten days. He ages the red in tank, bottling within the year, allowing it to mature in bottle for a couple of years before release. This Mondeuse has plenty of tannic grip, giving a rustic edge, and it's a while before the floral and fruit character emerges.

Franck's adult children show no interest in working on the estate and he has a very young family with Morgane, his second wife. Théo Bonnard (of the Bonnard family above) and his partner work for him and Franck hopes they may take over one day. Living right in the heart of the village of Montagnieu, Franck is one of the proudest ambassadors for its vineyard and for its emblematic Altesse and Mondeuse grape varieties.

Franck Peillot

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Map ref: B3

Vineyards: 8ha (3ha each of Altesse and Mondeuse; 1ha each of Chardonnay and Pinot)

Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Jean-Christophe Pellerin

In the winery, you mustn't get stressed: this is the maxim of Jean-Christophe Pellerin, Bugey's only Demeter-certified biodynamic winemaker. Jean-Christophe's great-great-grandfather had 14ha of vineyards in St-Sorlin, with a large wine cellar of cement tanks and two stills for making spirits. By the time of Jean-Christophe's grandfather only 5ha remained, all hybrid vines. Jean-Christophe remembers working with him in the vines as a child – sadly his father had died when he was only two. His studies in electrical engineering did not inspire him and after a period teaching kayaking, in 1986 Jean-Christophe started work for Lingot-Martin in Cerdon and later for Domaine Trichon. In 1999 he rented a hectare of vines in St-Sorlin, planted another, and gradually took on more. Like everyone else at the time, he had mainly Gamay and Chardonnay, but more recently he has diversified – and not only with grape varieties.

By the mid-2000s Jean-Christophe was working his vineyards sustainably and in 2007 he booked himself onto a course for vignerons about plant preparations. He was immediately inspired. In late 2008 he studied biodynamics with Pierre Masson and subsequently became Ecocert and later Demeter certified, making his own biodynamic preparations. In the winery he uses natural yeasts, very low sulphur levels and doesn't chaptalize. He doesn't even add sugar for the second fermentation of his traditional method sparkling wines. Jean-Christophe thinks that to work in the cellar successfully like this one must be fully committed and to believe it will work.

Since 2011 Jean-Christophe has felt that he has no option other than to work outside the constraints of the Bugey AOC, something that still makes him sad. Some of his vineyard parcels are outside the AOC limits, some of his grape varieties are not within the AOC rules, and he doesn't like having to commit to declaring the style of wine to be made from each parcel in March, another AOC requirement. He is also opposed to the fact that so many vineyard and winery processes are permitted within the AOC regime, believing AOC no longer respects the terroir.

Jean-Christophe's vines are in numerous small parcels, with many different soil types in Lagnieu and St-Sorlin. He has just over 1ha each of Chardonnay and Gamay, 0.9ha Pinot Noir, 0.4ha Mondeuse and small quantities of Altesse, Sauvignon Blanc, Aligoté, Viognier and Roussanne. In 2018 he planted more Mondeuse and some Persan and Merlot, and in 2019 the plan was to plant more whites, with mass selection Altesse along with some unusual varieties – Mondeuse Blanche, Savagnin and Petite Ste-Marie. He grows Chardonnay as it's important to him to keep the prices down and its regular yield helps; however, he'd rather plant rarer varieties. Recent plantings have been on sites with as much as 60% slope and to work them he now has a special *chenillette*, bought in Italy where vineyard machinery is cheaper.

There are few other vineyards around, so there is rarely a problem with chemical spray drift, but each vineyard gives a different challenge: in one there were problems with wild boars and not liking electric fences Jean-Christophe sprayed a dynamized plant product to deter them. In another he discovered an electricity line running below ground creating electromagnetic waves, which interfered with the growth of the Gamay. He used a geobiologist to create a barrier with copper (it is simply a matter of trust, he explained to me) and all was well. Contrary to many vignerons, he's not worried about copper treatments as when his vineyard was tested, the copper levels were below the norm.

For now, the vineyard takes priority. In the winery he has fibre and stainless-steel tanks and likes to ferment very cold, below 14°C. He uses five-year-old (or older) barrels for red maturation and one day would like to use horizontal cement eggs and large amphorae. Jean-Christophe doesn't bother analysing sugar levels (or much else for that matter), but picks on the taste of the pips; he uses a bottler in Beaujolais, because 'he doesn't argue', and for sparkling wine uses a Jura service for the traditional method and Monge Granon in the Diois for his ancestral method rosé.

Jean-Christophe Pellerin, flanked by his two sons, Lucien and Baptiste.

You could describe Jean-Christophe as a natural winemaker and indeed his main Gamay cuvée was inspired by Jacques Néauport. However, he is keen to avoid problems, so uses small amounts of SO_2. There is joyful life in Jean-Christophe's wines, with a delicious Brut Nature sparkling wine from Aligoté and Chardonnay; a wonderful ancestral method Gamay; excellent stony Chardonnay, delightful dry Viognier, a juicy Gamay, a creamy Pinot and a downright delicious Mondeuse (named Mandouse as he's not allowed to name the variety on a Vin de France label) at just 10.5% alcohol.

This is an estate with a future as Jean-Christophe's two sons, Lucien and Baptiste, both in their twenties, have joined him and will be official partners in 2020, possibly with a change of name to the estate. With the current prices these could be the best-value biodynamic wines in the French Alps. My natural wine-loving friends, please don't all rush here at once.

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Map ref: A4
Vineyards: 6.3ha
Certification: Ecocert and Demeter
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

La Vigne du Perron

François Grinand is a creative, but like many artists, he has taken a while to find out exactly what he wants to craft to satisfy himself both financially and creatively. The story of how his wines arrived on the tables of Paris and New York's more naturally-inclined restaurants and wine bars, then disappeared, and now have reappeared, is one of the more unusual.

After studying music at the Lyon Conservatoire, François Grinand taught piano, but by his late twenties he was looking for a change. Brought up in the Bresse, to the north of Bugey, he had always enjoying working with his father on their tiny family vineyard in Villebois. He decided to study wine at Mâcon Davayé, alongside practical training with Jean Peillot, father of Franck. A fellow student, who was training with Marcel Lapierre in Beaujolais, invited him to visit this pioneer. François realized that Lapierre's revival of traditional winemaking methods, including making some wines without added sulphur, were more or less how his family had always made wine and was what he wanted to do, rather than follow the techniques taught at college.

Renting vines between Villebois and Groslée to supplement the family's holdings, François set up his estate with the aim of making wines with no added sulphur. Today, he regrets his lack of experience. His first two vintages were disastrous, partly due to the weather, partly to his methods, so in desperation to make some saleable wine, in 1996 he asked for help from consultant Olivier Turlais and used cultured yeasts and added SO_2. But this did not make François happy. A year later, with advice from consultant Jacques Néauport and from Pierre Overnoy of the Jura, he returned

to his original idea. From 1998 he also converted to organics, with some advice from Raphaël Bartucci in Cerdon. His wines often didn't pass the Bugey VDQS (as it was then) tasting tests and from 2000 he dropped the Bugey name, labelling his wines Vin de Table. A wine merchant friend found him customers, including a big buyer from the Netherlands, and at last he was enjoying himself, travelling to promote his wines and finding receptive clients. But all was not well. There were difficult vintages, he worked with low yields, he often had spoilt wines and his prices were low. His debts built up and unfortunately he went bust after the 2007 vintage.

François took a job in a factory, kept on teaching the piano, and in 2008 worked just his family vineyards and sold the crop. But in 2009 he was visited by a young Belgian lawyer, who was a fan of his wines. He proposed that he and a friend would create a partnership with François to set up a new company – by morning the domaine was (re)born with the label 'La Vigne du Perron'. With less than one hectare to begin with, there is now 2.5ha, all in Villebois, comprising 0.6ha of equal parts Chardonnay and Altesse, and the rest split between Gamay, Mondeuse and Pinot Noir, with slightly more of the last. They also established a négociant business to buy in organic grapes – Jacquère and sometimes Bergeron from Chignin, occasionally Chasselas from Ain, and Chardonnay from the Mâconnais.

François is the only commercial vigneron in Villebois and his meticulously farmed vineyards are mainly on limestone scree, with some loess or silt, sited between 300m and 400m, many recently cleared of scrub and replanted. The main section is called 'Sur le Perron' and is reachable only on foot or with a *chenillette*. François has consistently worked organically without certification ('too complicated') and follows the moon phases, along with some biodynamic techniques such as spraying silica and plant preparations, keeping copper input below 3kg per hectare annually. He weeds with a hoe, uses a pulley and *treuil* for ploughing, and the *chenillette* for treatments.

A rambling old building in the centre of Villebois has served as the permanent cellar since 2013, stocked with an old press, a couple of

fibreglass tanks and old barrels of various sizes. For whites, François works the juice oxidatively in the press to avoid oxidation later and usually vinifies in oak. He uses semi-carbonic maceration for Gamay and Pinot Noir but prefers to destem Mondeuse. From Villebois there are four cuvées, which as Vin de France may not name their varieties (a local Bugey law): Sérène Blanche, a local synonym for Altesse; Ermitures, which means abandoned vineyards, for Gamay; Etapes, meaning a small plot, for Pinot Noir; and the wine I have enjoyed most, Persanne, for Mondeuse. Persanne is a local synonym for Mondeuse, somewhat confusing as it has nothing to do with the grape Persan.

François Grinand's vineyards in the village of Villebois are in the sector named Perron.

François has my utmost respect for keeping alive the heritage of his village's vineyard slope. His wines are made resolutely for natural wine aficionados and mainly too funky and volatile for me, but that will not deter everyone, quite the contrary. They are hard to unearth, for they are distributed in so many directions, but rarely within Bugey. It's a funny old world out there.

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Vineyards: 2.5ha + some purchased grapes
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Thierry Tissot

Tissot is a common name in Switzerland and in eastern France; there's no family relationship with the famous Tissot vignerons of the Jura, but in Thierry Tissot you can find that same dedication. And it's shared by his wife, Céline, originally from Lorraine; like Thierry, she has an oenology degree, along with a real love for plants. Their small estate is in conversion to organics after a period of regularly reducing chemical inputs. Among their vineyard parcels is the superb Mataret site, historically valued and once planted with 80ha of vines; now there are just the 3ha Thierry planted with Mondeuse and Altesse from 2001.

Thierry and Céline went far from home for their studies and work experience: Thierry studied in Bordeaux, then Dijon, and worked in St-Emilion, Buxy, Asti in Piemonte, and at Domaine Eugène Carrel of Jongieux in Savoie to learn about Mondeuse and Altesse; Céline did her degree in Montpellier, then worked in Fronton, then in Bergerac as a technical advisor for sustainable vineyard management. Now with children, the couple are firmly rooted in the pretty village of Vaux-en-Bugey, where Thierry can trace his family's vineyards back to the 19th century. His great-great-grandfather, a mixed farmer, had some vines, a still for making *marc* and a vine nursery, just after phylloxera. Grandfather Louis and Thierry's father Jean-Pierre were

also mixed farmers and from the 1960s started bottling some wines from their 2ha of vineyards.

In 1998 the family purchased 4ha of land at Mataret, made up of 35 plots owned by 50 different people; it all had to be cleared of brushwood and trees. Thierry began planting vineyards when he joined the estate in 2001. The steep slope goes up to about 360m, basking in the sun all day. The soil is a classic clay-limestone, with well-drained grey/blue marl on top in some areas, ideal for Altesse, and scree in others, better for Mondeuse. To limit yield they use Cordon de Royat training and work very hard on de-budding and canopy management. Some areas are grassed down, but most of the vineyards have been ploughed for over ten years; they now use a small tracked vehicle for weeding. They spray against disease little but often and Céline has been learning more about plant preparations from near-neighbour Jean-Christophe Pellerin. Biodynamics does not interest them yet, although they bottle only during a waning moon. Harvest is manual.

The winemaking is simply done but somewhat technical, using neutral cultured yeasts and shunning oak. CMC bottles their wines and handles the traditional method sparkling wines. The Bugey Brut is delicious, from 40% each of Altesse and Chardonnay and 20% Aligoté/Jacquère, spending three years *sur lattes* and with just 4g/l *dosage;* an Extra Dry rosé fizz at 12g/l *dosage* from Gamay and Mondeuse is sheer fun. A very old family vineyard includes a plot of partly pre-phylloxera Jacquère mixed with some interesting oddities and from this they make an intriguing, intense, dry and light Jacquère IGP Coteaux de l'Ain. Another IGP wine is an off-dry Altesse, from slightly late-harvest grapes. But Thierry Tissot's pride is the Mataret Altesse, which he says is like a shy person: it takes time to express itself and they release it five years after the vintage. It is stony, rich and elegant, expressing its fabulous vineyard slope; the Mataret Mondeuse combines red fruit and tannin well.

Céline and Thierry Tissot.

Export, especially to the US, now accounts for 20%; for now, 50% is sold in Rhône-Alpes, but demand is increasing elsewhere in France. Céline and Thierry are preserving a piece of Bugey's heritage with Mataret and by working with local grape varieties. With a little nudging on the winemaking side, their future should be bright.

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Map ref: A5
Vineyards: 5.3ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Domaine Trichon

Stéphane Trichon and his wife Claire run their 13ha-estate organically by absolute conviction. Both lost their grandfathers at a relatively

young age and became aware of the risks of chemical pesticides in the vineyards. Claire was born into a wine-growing estate, Domaine La Ligière in Vacqueyras in the Rhône Valley, and Stéphane is the third generation with vineyards here in Lhuis. In the 1950s Stéphane's grandfather, then a mixed farmer, pulled up his hybrid vines to replant with *Vitis vinifera*. In 1966 he was joined by son Jean and with 7ha they devoted themselves solely to the vines. Stéphane joined in 2001 and when Claire arrived a few years later they determined to move towards organic farming, starting official conversion from 2008.

The vineyards include one parcel of 4.5ha in Lhuis and the rest scattered through Lhuis and Groslée-St-Benoît. They grow mainly Chardonnay and Gamay, with a little Pinot and Mondeuse, and would like to plant Altesse, but for now are having to regularly replace vines lost to esca. Their oldest vines are a small plot of 40-year-old Molette, which are used with a little Aligoté to spice up the Chardonnay-dominated Bugey Brut.

The vineyards are obviously the couple's passion. Claire notes that in the old days everyone rotovated the soil and Jean used to plough every other row, swapping every ten years. Now, despite their soil being clay-rich and stony, this is just what they do, adding green fertilizer around harvest time, and by March ploughing it in. Although they do not work with biodynamic preparations, they follow the moon cycles for vineyard work and use various plant concoctions to limit the copper and sulphur sprays. They are close to the Rhône, which brings frequent mists, good for avoiding drought, but not so great for fungal disease. The couple are keen to listen to nature whatever weather it throws at them and are one of the rare estates here to be insured against frost damage. Harvesting is by machine for most of their whites, giving better quality, they believe; reds are picked by hand.

Stéphane took advantage of the low-interest loans offered to young farmers when he arrived to build a modern, gravity-fed stainless steel vinification cellar, inspired by his winemaking stint at Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe in the Rhône Valley. He ferments with indigenous yeasts and still uses the old concrete tanks for malolactic

fermentation for reds; the only oak barrel they own was bought in 2016, when they forgot to harvest one vineyard and had to find a small container. The range is straightforward, with a Chardonnay, released after two years, a rosé, and three reds, which I found characterful, especially the soft and fruity Mondeuse. Sparkling is an important part of production: their biggest seller is a Bugey Brut that spends three years *sur lattes*; there are also two semi-sweet, non-AOC sparklers, 'made for pleasure'. The Cuisse Rose sparkler from 80% Gamay and 20% Pinot is a big hit and perhaps the only carbonated rosé I might admit to enjoying… two carbonations keep the bubbles fine.

Stéphane and Claire Trichon in their Lhuis vineyard.

The Trichons keep prices low and sell most wines at their tasting room, plus at a few wine shows in Belgium and Luxembourg. They are beginning to export a little to the Netherlands and Russia too. This estate is a real family affair and in the tasting room you can see a joyful mural depicting various family members with their employees and friends. I hope that the current generation, whose attention to detail is admirable, will move the estate forward in quality. They opened a newly renovated self-catering cottage in 2019.

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Vineyards: 13ha (50% Chardonnay)
Certification: Veritas
Visits: Tasting room

Around Belley

There used to be vineyards on the hills all around Belley, but very few remain. In the town, apart from the great Saturday market, there is not much to see in the centre. But nearby is the canalized part of the Rhône river and several attractive lakes, including the Lac du Lit du Roi, good for water sports.

Islands of vineyards are scattered on gentle hillsides from just north of Culoz to just south of Belley. The small town of Culoz was home of the Serpollet brothers, pioneers in making steam-driven cars in the late 19th century. Close to the canalized Rhône, it lies below the imposing Grand Colombier mountain, a southern tail of the Jura range; this has become a regular climb on the Tour de France cycle race, which gives good publicity to Bugey. On Grand Colombier's south-facing slope a few vineyards remain, whereas once it would have been fully planted.

The densest vineyard areas cluster on the rolling hills around a series of delightful villages including Marignieu, Flaxieu, Vongnes and Ceyzérieu. The latter is the largest; a good small restaurant and wine bar opened here in 2017. In Vongnes, Caveau Bugiste looks after a wine museum. This area is also becoming known for the production of black truffles; prevalent in the 19th century, truffle oaks are once

again being planted. A few vineyards lie east of Belley on the gentle hills between the canalized part of the Rhône and the river itself, between Parves and Massignieu-de-Rives, with views across to the Jongieux vineyards of Savoie. Parves are the highest vineyards in the area at 450m. All these vineyards have mixed sedimentary soils, including the ubiquitous limestone, glacial deposits, silt and sandstone.

There are three notable, historically recorded vineyard slopes, all of them farmed principally by Caveau Bugiste: Machuraz, which was once abandoned; Virieu-le-Grand, a Roussette du Bugey cru with just over one hectare; and the cru Manicle with ten hectares in production. Between Cheignieu-la-Balme and Pugieu, Manicle lies below a dramatic cliff, with the vines mainly on limestone scree with some glacial deposits. As required by the cru it must be planted with Chardonnay or Pinot Noir and has four owners: Caveau Bugiste with a 6-ha plot; Domaine Monin with 2ha; about 2ha were planted on barren land in 2017/2018 in association with the owners of the ruined Château des Eclaz; and another 2ha, which were owned until 2018 by a small, historic family estate, André Miraillet. The fourth-generation vigneron farmed ultra-traditionally and his wines sold out immediately on release. Very few restaurants stocked them, but I was able to taste the young 2016 releases at the nearby Auberge de Contrevoz. The white was simple, mineral and delicious; the red was a very pale, ethereal Pinot. André Miraillet had no successors interested in taking over and as we were going to press in 2019 the 2ha planted plus 1ha of barren land within the Manicle cru were sold to a young vigneron from outside the region.

The magnificent Manicle vineyards lie below a dramatic limestone cliff, which provides protection.

Maison Angelot

There's a kind of symmetry to this family wine estate, which has done much for Bugey. Today it is run by brothers Philippe and Eric Angelot, who took over from their father Maxime and his brother, Gilbert. Maxime was president of the Bugey wine syndicate from 1988 to 1996 as well as mayor of their village, Marignieu. Then from 2008 to 2018 Eric took on the Bugey wine syndicate presidency, at a time when the region finally achieved the much worked-for AOC designation. He has yet to be the village mayor, but he is a proud citizen indeed.

Maxime, who died in 2017 aged 84, started commercializing his wine in bottle from the early 1970s and later in the decade sold his cows to focus on winemaking. He must have been a hard act to follow for Philippe and his younger brother Eric, who joined the family winery in the 1980s. But they seized the challenge to bring their estate into the modern age, shifting the sales little by little towards exports, now at 8%, mainly to the US and Belgium. The welcome at their tasting room means that 50% is sold directly from there, the rest is sold at various wine shows in France and Belgium, and to wholesalers.

This is the largest single family-owned estate in Bugey (nearby Caveau Bugiste and Lingot-Martin in Cerdon are both larger, but owned by several families), producing 180–200,000 bottles per year, about one-quarter being their Bugey Brut, a blend of Jacquère, Aligoté, Molette and Chardonnay with around 9g/l *dosage*. This, Eric Angelot explained to me, is made to their clients' taste, but he still manages to sell 15,000 bottles of an Extra Brut Chardonnay with 4g/l *dosage*, made more to his taste and mine too – this shows how good Chardonnay sparkling wine can be here.

Eric is firm in his opinions on how vineyards must be managed, and the wines made. The vineyards have permanent grass cover and herbicide is applied twice a year under the vines. An *intercep* is not something Eric is considering as he says what is currently on the market doesn't suit their training systems and he worries about the environmental impact of the extra fuel use. He blames organic growers for the revival of black rot in the region – he believes using copper and sulphur treatments only is insufficient. Yet it's obvious that Eric loves his Bugey terroir, wanting his photograph taken by the 500-year-old chestnut tree in one of their older vineyard plots (the light was wrong, so no picture…).

BUGEY

Eric Angelot.

Locally, Maison Angelot's Cuvée Maxime Chardonnay is listed by all the best restaurants – Maxime Angelot did much to further the cause of growing Chardonnay in these parts. From the estate's oldest Chardonnay vines, picked late and made only in tank, it can be a little overblown in warmer years. For my taste, the dry, vinous rosé from two-thirds Gamay with Mondeuse, and sometimes Pinot Noir, and the range of reds, are more enjoyable. This is endorsed by Angelot's US importer, Charles Neal, who ships only the reds. Some thermovinification is used for the two Gamays, an easy-going basic version and the more expensive Reflet du Terroir, which includes a little Mondeuse. I wonder whether the thermovinification flattens them a touch; nevertheless I enjoyed the latter. But Eric describes Mondeuse as his 'raison d'être' and it can be very drinkable. Yields are well-controlled; he destems 100% and macerates without pump-over or punch-down at the start in order to protect the fruit character. New for the 2017 vintage was the Mondeuse Cuvée Marignieu, aged in *demi-muids*, which I have not yet tasted.

Philippe is in charge of sales at the wine fairs, while Eric manages the vineyards and winemaking. Their father was a larger-than-life presence, but Eric's energy is sure to push the estate and the wines forward. His aim is to increase exports. And waiting in the wings is William, Philippe's son, currently studying wine at Beaune.

Maison Angelot
121 Rue du Lavoir, 01300 Marignieu
Tel: 04 79 42 18 84
Email: contact@maison-angelot.com
Web: maison-angelot.fr
Contact: Eric Angelot
Map ref: D3
Vineyards: 30ha
Visits: Tasting room open seven days a week

Domaine de Bel Air

It is a reflection of the somewhat perilous commercial state of the Bugey wine region that one of the most spectacularly sited vineyards in this sector has gone through three owners – or strictly speaking tenants – in the past decade. The latest to take over, from January 2017, are two vignerons from Seyssel, Régis Mollex and Pierre Alain Vionnet (see their profiles), who share working the vineyards and making the wines, and have created a joint company to sell wines from their two Seyssel estates along with those from Bel Air. They have ambitions to elevate the status of Bel Air's wines to equal those from Manicle.

In the 14th century the monks of Arvières cultivated a vineyard on this slope on the foothills of the mighty Grand Colombier. The founders of the estate in its current form – comprising the house, winery and vineyard – were the Férier family, who purchased it in 1920. In the 1970s Madame Michèle Férier formed a liaison with Antoine Riboud, the founder of the Danone food group (owners of Evian mineral water), and the two families developed the wine estate together for some years. Later the wine part of the estate was leased out and at one point the Belmores, an English couple, ran it alongside a Savoie estate in Chautagne. Following a few years of neglect, in 2013 Sacha Mantel, a vigneron from Savoie, took it on, but after a mere four vintages, he moved on too.

Bel Air translates as 'good air', describing the regular breeze over the vineyard, which forms a cirque – a steep-sided hollow at the end of the Grand Colombier. This is an extremely stony vineyard on clay-limestone – in fact more stones were added after an impressive landslide in March 2017, when a couple of seriously hefty rocks carved a passage through the vineyard, narrowly missing the house. Well-exposed, facing south-southwest, there is sufficient clay in the subsoil to avoid problems with drought; nevertheless, this site is usually the first to be harvested in southern Bugey.

Bel Air's vineyards are effectively on one plot, above and below the buildings. Chardonnay accounts for 70%; there is 20% Mondeuse and 10% Pinot Noir, and the plan is to increase the Pinot Noir

plantings. Pierre Alain and Régis had to work hard in 2017 and 2018 to tidy up the vineyards and are gradually reducing the amount of chemicals used. They are seeking HVE certification (for sustainability) in 2019 and hope one day to become organic. The cellars are cool, well-equipped and relatively modern and the wines are made here with advice from Oeno Conseil. Unusually for Bugey, oak ageing has been a feature of Bel Air's wines for some time. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir have always showed the promise of the terroir but in the recent warmer vintages Mondeuse is revealing potential too. A project to watch.

The Bel Air vineyards lie on limestone scree, below the Grand Colombier.

Domaine de Bel Air
Rue Albert Férier, 01350 Culoz
Tel: 06 84 33 14 17 (Pierre Alain Vionnet); 06 81 14 38 71 (Régis Mollex)
Email: sasmollexvionnet@gmail.com

Map ref: E4

Vineyards: 7ha

Visits: Tasting room open on Saturday all day, and Wednesday–Friday afternoons

Sylvain Bois

The French wine guides and competitions love the wines from Sylvain Bois, whose vineyards lie in two neat plots a couple of kilometres apart below Grand Colombier. After a couple of years working in civil engineering, Sylvain decided he preferred to work for himself, outdoors, rather than in a big company office. Supported by his father, after training at Mâcon Davayé, in 2001 he took over a plot of vineyards from his grandfather and bought others, starting his estate with 2ha. He now has 40% red grapes and only 15% of his production is sparkling wine – bucking the local trend – preferring to focus on varietal whites and reds. He built a new cellar in 2011, with a practical set-up of stainless-steel tanks – everything is geared to making it easy to work almost entirely on his own, with help from local wine service CMC for analysis, light filtration and bottling.

Some of Sylvain's vineyards are very steep and this is one of the reasons he continues to use herbicide below the vine rows, with a strip of grass in between. Although he uses some temporary help, he prefers to do the more intricate work himself. He has calculated that the tractor work to mechanically weed his vineyards would require 175 hours of extra labour between April and July, something he is simply not prepared to pay for. Instead, he has calculated how to use just 10% of the recommended dose of chemical herbicide and uses his systemic fungicides similarly – another reason he shuns organics is that he doesn't like the use of copper. Two-thirds is machine-harvested and a regular group of pickers harvest the Mondeuse, the steepest vineyard of Altesse and a 60-year-old Chardonnay plot.

Sylvain Bois below his main vineyard plot.

The wines are made according to the textbook, very clean and balanced, lacking perhaps some character. From 2016, I appreciated Sylvain's Chardonnay (and it is whites that he generally submits to the competitions); from 2017 it was the Mondeuse that stood out for me as an old-style, structured version of this grape, which is too often unloved in Bugey – Sylvain doesn't possess a destemmer, but the grapes are crushed in the truck and then the tanks do the rest. For all wines he uses a neutral Champagne yeast to make a *pied de cuve*, a starter culture to encourage spontaneous fermentation in the tanks. Sylvain aims for maximum permitted yield, which allows him to keep his prices extremely reasonable, but gives him a decent return, as he sells over half his production directly to consumers from his tasting room. Currently he exports about 13% to the Netherlands and Germany.

Sylvain Bois
11 Route de Bourgogne, 01350 Béon
Tel: 04 79 87 23 26/06 88 49 03 95
Email: cavesylvainbois@yahoo.fr

Map ref: D4
Vineyards: 5ha
Visits: Tasting room

Le Caveau Bugiste

In 2017, Caveau Bugiste, whose partners today are Yannick Chaudet and Clément Metge, celebrated its 50th birthday – in many ways, 50 years is a long time in the Bugey wine region. In 1967 Bugey was a vinous backwater with very few wines sold in bottle. Yannick's father Jean Chaudet (who still works with them) and his grandfather André were among the six founder vignerons who pooled their 4.5ha of vineyards to create Caveau Bugiste, run as a partnership rather than a co-operative. For several years they all continued with dairy and crop farming. Today the vineyards of the partners (and some of the retired partners, including Serge Malik, who retired in 2018 after a quarter century) represent a sizeable amount in this small and fragmented wine area. They produce about 400,000 bottles, or one-quarter of southern Bugey's wine production, making them by some margin the most important Bugey wine company. Caveau Bugiste offers a fine and diverse range of wines, listed in most of the good restaurants of the area. Effectively, they have led the area from the front for five decades.

The vineyards are generally farmed by the individual associates, while the winemaking equipment, management and sales are shared. Yannick has been the winemaker for 20 years, having studied at Beaune and then done an oenology degree at Montpellier, with several training posts in France and one in the Swan Valley, Australia (surely the most diametrically opposed climate to Bugey).

Tasting the new Caveau Bugiste Chardonnay juice are Yannick and his father, Jean Chaudet, with (on right) Clément Metge.

Yannick aims for very ripe grapes and as little cellar intervention as possible. Oak is used for certain of the top vineyard-designate cuvées, buying some new each year and conducting regular tests on different oak origins. For the red wines, part is vinified whole bunch and part destemmed; he favours micro-oxygenation and is dabbling with thermovinification for Gamay; the Manicle Pinot Noir is foot-trodden. Rare for a winery of this size, indigenous yeasts have always been used, with long fermentations and malolactic fermentation the norm. Traditional method sparkling wines represent a quarter of Caveau Bugiste's production and are aged *sur lattes* and riddled in their cellars, with CMC handling bottling and disgorgement. Surprisingly, Caveau Bugiste doesn't have bottling facilities and a Beaujolais-based company brings a mobile line about five times a year.

Caveau Bugiste has holdings on three of the region's finest vineyard slopes: 6ha on Manicle, purchased in 2000; 1.2ha on Virieu, a monopoly on this Roussette du Bugey cru; and just under 2ha on

Machuraz, a wonderful, historic vineyard slope near Artemare, planted about 30 years ago, purchased by Caveau Bugiste in 2012 and farmed organically, without certification. All these are hand-harvested; machine harvesting is used in some of the other sites. Caveau Bugiste was one of the earlier producers in the region to grass down the vineyards and limit weed-killer to below the rows. They are experimenting with an *intercep* but it will be some years before herbicides are eliminated. Vines in most of the vineyards are at least 30 years old. Most vineyards, including a 10ha plot in Ceyzérieu, are within 3km of the winery. Manicle is 18km away and so equipment and two employees are based in the old winery building on the site.

The quality of the wines is generally good, with an interesting IGP Coteaux de l'Ain range including a Mondeuse Blanche (0.5ha planted in the 1990s), a Molette and an especially delicious Aligoté from 70-year-old vines; some Gamaret is coming on stream soon. There are two very pretty Altesse wines: Roussette du Bugey Tradition and the unique Roussette de Virieu, from the low-yielding, well-exposed and stony site. Yannick believes this needs five years to develop, and the vintage on sale always has two years' bottle age. An old-vine Bugey Chardonnay is good, but the Machuraz Chardonnay sings. The first vintage was 2012 and Yannick ages it only in tank, with plenty of lees contact. Reds are generally less successful, but from Machuraz comes a classic Mondeuse, with plenty of freshness. The sparkling range is decent and evolving, with a Brut Zero added recently.

I personally loved the Machuraz pair, but the jewel in the crown, where most attention is lavished, is the range from Manicle: Cuvée des Eboulis and Cuvée de l'Amandier Chardonnay, and Cuvée des Rocailles and Cuvée de la Truffière Pinot Noir; in each case the second cuvée is from a selected parcel. Oak maturation is used with all these wines and they reflect this fine vineyard site well. The Eboulis and Rocailles are particularly delicious and good value too, whereas I find the parcel selections a little over-oaky for the nature of the fruit in this region.

In many ways Caveau Bugiste is run like a family business, with several members of the partners' families working on the sales side,

and partners take turns pouring wine at the fairs. Seeing the busy stand at the annual Bugey wine festival, Le Printemps du Bugey, it is obvious that Caveau Bugiste is a highly respected and loved member of the community. Some of this is also due to the way they have valued the heritage of Vongnes, helping it become a local tourist attraction by restoring a *grangeon* for an excellent winemaking museum and next to it creating a museum of the craft of stonemasonry; old village houses have been converted into cellars and a busy, cute tasting room. Half of the production is sold in the tasting room, and almost all the rest is sold in the wider Rhône-Alpes region. It would be good to see more of the top wines on sale further afield – there is much quality potential here.

Le Caveau Bugiste
326 Rue de la Vigne du Bois, 01350 Vongnes
Tel: 04 79 87 92 32
Email: contact@caveau-bugiste.fr
Web: caveau-bugiste.fr
Map ref: D3
Vineyards: 40ha + about 20ha purchased grapes
Visits: Tasting room

Les Cortis

You are much more likely to know the wines from Les Cortis if you are a fan of authentic wine living in New York, Canada, Scandinavia or Japan than one living in the French Alps. When Jérémy and Isabelle Decoster founded the domaine in 2016 they knew little about Bugey but imagined that their planned production of 25,000 bottles a year would sell locally. But word-of-mouth quickly led importers to snap up their first vintage. Then in 2017, like so many others, they were hit by frost, allowing them to make just 10,000 bottles.

The couple from northern France have quickly settled in the quiet village of Condon, 4km from Belley, close to schools for their children. Although he was brought up in Paris, Jérémy's family were resolutely beer drinkers from Lille, but, wanting to work outdoors, he found a job in the vineyards in Bordeaux and loved it. A move to Chablis led him to work for the small organic estate, Domaine de Moor, and it was here that he studied wine formally and found inspiration. Some years on, now with Isabelle, they looked for somewhere to call their own, with strict personal criteria. They wanted somewhere sufficiently isolated to convert easily to organics, with widely spaced vine rows to work without cutting the grass, instead using their preferred method of rolling it over. The vineyards from a Bugey grower who wanted to retire fitted the bill – all are close to the village and already grassed down, minimal chemicals had been used simply to keep the cost down. Half the plantings are Chardonnay and there is 1ha Altesse, 1.5ha Gamay, a small plot of Mondeuse and another mixed plot.

The couple set to work with organic conversion, working the soil mainly manually, limiting vine vigour, adding only manure, and using plant concoctions when needed – up till now only in the dry year of 2018. It is inevitably work in progress, but Jérémy is firm in his convictions of how to work the vineyards best and loves being out there, as does Isabelle, who avoids work in the cellar if she can help it.

Before coming to Bugey, the only local wines Jérémy had experienced were from Adrien Berlioz in Savoie. With no experience

of making red wines either, Jérémy knew only that he wanted to use as little intervention as possible, yet he was also determined to avoid the faults of excessive volatility or reduction. Jérémy seems to have the right feel to make wines adapting to the vintage; he questions everything and is adamant that first and foremost he makes wine, rather than natural wine. He has been helped with winemaking by Oeno Conseil and some tips from Savoie's Jacques Maillet.

Many of the wines are blends, usually sold under a Vin de France label, but the cuvées are likely to change for these first few years. Certainly, Jérémy seems to have a deft touch with whites, with in 2017 a delicious Altesse cuvée called Teraxe, and Xylofaune, a blend of Altesse with Chardonnay and some Aligoté donated by his former employers in Chablis, all aged in oak. A light juicy Gamay with 20% Mondeuse, named Uzée, was spot on too. Les Cortis seems set to become an excellent addition to the line-up of organic Bugey vignerons.

Les Cortis
41 Rue de l'Eglise, Condon, 01300 Andert-et-Condon
Tel: 06 11 73 35 34
Email: decoster.coiffier@gmail.com
Web: lescortis.com
Contact: Jérémy or Isabelle Decoster
Map ref: D3
Vineyards: 6ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Les Vins de Lavie

Geese for the weeding, crazy labels and a desire to bring back oxen to the vineyards were just some of the ideas Guillaume Lavie brought to Bugey when he arrived in 2015 to join his then-partner Aline, who

worked for another vineyard. Guillaume had originally been a landscape gardener, but some contract work with organic winemakers in Burgundy, including Arnaud Ente in Meursault, revealed the magic of wine to him. He went on to study wine in Beaujolais, where he also worked with Domaine Patrice Arnaud.

For three vintages Guillaume and Aline rented 1.3ha of vineyards on the same plot as Caveau Quinard in Parves, one of the highest vineyards in this part of Bugey, which was owned and farmed organically since 2010 by Domaine de Soleyane – an estate that no longer trades. Guillaume started conversion to biodynamic methods and he dislikes tractors or any vineyard machines, which compact the soil, so all was worked either with a horse or manually. Sheep, geese and chickens were used in different years for weeding, and everything possible was done to limit copper and instead use plant concoctions and essential oils to fight disease. Mostly it was planted to Altesse and Mondeuse.

Guillaume Lavie in the Bugey vineyard he farmed biodynamically for three vintages.

Up to the 2017 vintage four wines were made in a rented warehouse in Belley, in which Guillaume installed an old Vaslin press and a few old tanks – he created a barrel room by adding a home humidifier and getting hold of some second-hand barrels. Guillaume

likes to handle wine as little as possible and he looked for great finesse in his Altesse and silkiness in the Mondeuse, both AOC Bugey. He certainly achieved that, with each vintage getting better and more capable of ageing. Two Vins de France have been made in a more funky, natural way: a juicy carbonic maceration Pinot named Ro(u)gé, which sold out immediately on release, and a fascinating red blend called Hé Robert from a tiny mixed vineyard parcel which includes Gamay, Mondeuse, Merlot and the hybrid Seibel. This is a man clear in his ideas but who follows life's callings, so after separating from his partner, his next move makes much sense.

For the 2018 vintage Guillaume decided to move to Savoie and set up as a négociant, named Des Vins d'Envie, with vigneron Maxime Dancoine, who also works for Oeno Conseil. The owners of Domaine de Soleyane took back their vineyards but sold them the grapes, so this means under the Les Vins de Lavie label in 2018 there will only be the Vin de France wines. For the future, Guillaume plans to establish his own small organic estate in Savoie ('even if it's conventional, I can make it come alive in three years'), focused on local varieties.

Les Vins de Lavie
1145 Rue des Mettanies, 38530 Pontcharra
Tel: 06 23 12 82 82
Email: lesvinsdelavie@gmail.com
Map ref: B1
Visits: Strictly by appointment

Domaine Monin

By Bugey standards this estate had an illustrious past and was rescued from the brink of extinction by an outsider to the region and to the wine business, Charles Varin-Bernier, who bought it in spring 2015. He has been gradually trying to retrieve the estate's reputation and move forward.

Founded by Marius Monin, the heyday was under his son Eugène Monin, who in 1965 was one of the first in the region to move from mixed farming into solely winemaking. A year later he became the president of the Bugey growers' syndicate and remained as president until 1988, at the same time building up his own estate in Vongnes to become one of the most respected in the region. His sons Hubert and Philippe succeeded him and built the estate up to 25ha, including 2ha on Manicle, planted half and half with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. But things didn't go so well for them and they began off-loading vineyard parcels, while trying to sell the estate.

Charles, who has worked for 25 years in the international food business, had been looking for a wine estate for some time. He had branched out into being a cheese merchant in Paris and has two shops, one where he ages the cheese. He had often stopped in Bugey while visiting relatives and one day learned about the opportunity to buy Domaine Monin. He bought the 8.5ha of planted vineyard that remained, effectively the best parcels, including Manicle, along with the estate buildings, stock and name.

Charles Varin-Bernier in one of Domaine Monin's vineyards, above the Lac du Lit du Roi.

Charles divides his time between Paris and Vongnes but has an experienced right-hand man based in Vongnes; he uses the winemaking consultancy services of Oeno Conseil. The Manicle wines and Mondeuse are aged in *demi-muids* with 20% replaced each year, but in general the cellars lack investment right now. The vineyards needed a lot of work, in particular to make them more

environmentally friendly – they were far from it before – and Charles says it will take till 2020 before herbicide use is stopped, but spray treatments are now organic.

Most of the vineyards are grassed down and are split between those near the winery in Vongnes/Ceyzérieu, the prestigious 2ha in Manicle (with some 13th-century dividing walls still in place) and some above the Lac du Lit du Roi with a view across the Rhône to Jongieux. Charles has planted 3ha of virgin land, with a first vintage from part of it in 2018. These new plantings are on fairly rocky steep slopes and alongside Pinot, Gamay and Chardonnay, Charles has planted Roussanne, Mourvèdre and Syrah, which he will make as Vin de France wines and add interest to the range, he believes.

Charles has renovated an old house in Vongnes for a tasting room, although today it accounts for only about 20% of sales. Much is sold to restaurants locally and in Savoie, and Charles is now developing sales in Paris and beyond, hoping to attract export interest.

With reduced yields and improved viticulture the range is slowly improving. Once again, the terroir will out, with both Manicle Blanc and Manicle Rouge showing better than most of the other wines, though still lacking a little soul; whereas the 2017 vintage of Mondeuse Les Perailles showed well, with a juicy, soft structure, reminiscent of Jongieux Mondeuse. I sincerely hope that Charles will succeed in developing the historic Domaine Monin into a fine modern wine estate.

Domaine Monin
255 Chemin des Vignes, 01350 Vongnes
Tel: 04 79 87 92 33
Email: info@domaine-monin.fr
Web: domaine-monin.fr
Contact: Charles Varin-Bernier
Map ref: D3
Vineyards: 11.5ha

Visits: Tasting room

Domaine des Plantaz

Fabrice Gros is one of the few Bugey vignerons with a focus on Altesse, representing more than 20% of his estate. He makes two cuvées, one of them oak-aged and released about five years after harvest. He is also one of the few vignerons to hold back stocks of older wines. I first tasted a mini-vertical of his Altesse in 2011 at a rare tasting of older Bugey wines – the consistency of their expression stood out and those that were 4–6 years old tasted best. Fabrice's father grew mainly Chardonnay, and with 6.5ha this is the domaine's most important variety, some vintages partly sold to a négociant. But from early on Fabrice wanted to grow local varieties; he planted the first Altesse vineyards in 1990/91 with his father Bruno, with whom he learned on the job, while doing basic wine studies at Beaune, before becoming a partner in 1995. Bruno was the first in the family to focus solely on winemaking, from 1973, but Albert, Fabrice's grandfather, already made wine, selling it in barrel to customers in Annecy and to Mollex in Seyssel.

Most of Fabrice's vineyards are located on a section of the plateau called Sur Plantaz at around 300m above the hamlet of Chavillieu. All the vineyards are close to his cellar, so he is able to work almost on his own, with just two seasonal workers. The vineyards are essentially formed of a glacial till, with a lot of clay, along with some granitic rocks; below is limestone, as everywhere. This soil helps retain acidity in the grapes, even in early harvests. Fabrice notes that until the mid-1990s, his father would always harvest between 1 and 5 October; more recently harvest has usually taken place between 3 and 20 September.

Fabrice Gros uses a wooden pole to stir the lees of his best Altesse wines.

The clay-dominant soil means the grass grows quickly – the vineyards were grassed down from 2011 and in 2012 Fabrice stopped using weed-killer. He uses organic sheep and bird fertilizer, stopped anti-botrytis sprays and insecticides long ago and likes to wait eight years before replanting any plot. From 2018 Fabrice gave up systemic anti-fungal sprays and may seek organic certification. The vineyards are not steep and so white grapes can be machine harvested, another aspect that keeps the prices more than reasonable, which is important to Fabrice.

Climate change has brought drier seasons and in recent years only 2011 gave Fabrice the 55hl/ha he could do with economically, but this genial vigneron laughs this off, saying he usually averages 40hl/ha. The cellar is small but efficiently equipped. Mostly indigenous yeast is used, although he will resort to cultured yeast if necessary. There are temperature-controlled stainless steel tanks along with fibreglass tanks, and Fabrice likes to work with the lees for his whites. Sur Plantaz Altesse is fermented in barrel with malolactic and *bâtonnage* (lees stirring). Today, Fabrice does almost everything himself with no outside consultant or analyses. He is even equipped for bottling most of the stock, though CMC does a little, as he uses them for bottling and disgorging of his Bugey Brut – a blend of old Jacquère vines planted by his grandfather, with Chardonnay and some Altesse.

Fabrice's Chardonnay is a delight and his two Altesse wines are serious and distinctly different. The unoaked Altesse can develop

Riesling-like petrol notes with a few years of age, and the spicy Sur Plantaz oaked version can marry truffle notes with honey. These are balanced and lovely textured wines. Reds are all destemmed; Fabrice notes that the Mondeuse stems are rarely sufficiently ripe. Some *saigné* rosé is made to concentrate the Gamay, and both Gamay and Pinot have up to 48 hours of cold maceration. Today he is aiming for softer, fruitier reds than before – the Pinot is from young vines and Fabrice thinks it will gain in expression as the vines age. The first vintage of Mondeuse was 2001 and today he uses some oak ageing – it needs time; 10-year-old Mondeuse from the best vintages can be spot on. Currently Fabrice has just under 2ha of reds (only 0.4ha each of Pinot and Mondeuse), and he would like more, but believes he needs rocky and better drained plots.

Years ago Fabrice exported to the US. Today he works with a distributor in Paris and with wine shops in Lyon, Isère and Ain, plus a few local restaurants. He has lots of plans, but meantime he seems happy and that's reflected in his wines.

Domaine des Plantaz
46 Chemin de la Source, Chavillieu, 01510 Pugieu
Tel: 04 79 81 47 48
Email: earlgrosfabrice@gmail.com
Contact: Fabrice Gros
Map ref: D3
Vineyards: 11.5ha
Visits: Tasting room

Caveau Quinard

It is fortunate for readers and indeed for this author that before the French Revolution the Quinard family changed their name from Quenard – the name of at least six wine estates in Chignin, Savoie. The family, who had always been farmers, came originally from the

Combe de Savoie and migrated over the Montagne du Chat and across the Rhône river to settle in Bugey, by then part of the Kingdom of France. The current generation running Caveau Quinard is Julien Quinard, who has also been the mayor of Massignieu-de-Rives since 2014. The village lies above the Lac du Lit du Roi, just a few kilometres from Jongieux in Savoie.

The family have owned vines for four generations – Julien's father Maurice, who changed exclusively to viticulture in the mid-1960s, remembers his grandparents' vines, which were of course, as he remarks, farmed organically. Julien started to work with his father from 2001, after studying viticulture in Belleville, Beaujolais. He took charge of the estate from 2007 – Maurice still lends a hand. The vineyards were converted to organic viticulture, becoming fully certified with the 2012 vintage. Every other row in the vineyards is grassed down and this is swapped every three years, with the soil in the alternate row worked.

Vineyard holdings include a fossil-rich vineyard high up in Parves; and not far from the winery is their most prized vineyard, Coteaux de Son Nant, a very productive slope once part of the Rhône glacier, with a vein of sandstone along with round pebbles of glacial origin. More than half is planted with Chardonnay, some to make a more intense old-vine Coteaux de Son Nant Chardonnay, and some for the estate's Bugey Brut, which accounts for half its production. The Brut includes some Molette and spends three years *sur lattes*, giving a delicate, zippy wine, with really good persistence. Altesse is grown in Parves and the 2015 I tried had lovely acidity, balanced by a touch of residual sugar – I can see potential for this wine especially. The wines have been made with indigenous yeast for over a decade, and there is no oak ageing. The few reds made are less successful, and their US importer ships only the whites. Exports are growing and account for 10%, with sales also to Japan and the Netherlands; half is sold at the tasting room and these are among the more visible wines in the local supermarkets.

Massignieu-de-Rives vigneron and mayor, Julien Quinard.

After studying wine in Beaune, Sébastien Quinard, Julien's much younger half-brother, has been working on the estate for a couple of years and officially became a partner in early 2019, helping Julien juggle his administrative commitments outside the winery. Aline Ziemniak, originally a partner in Les Vins de Lavie, also works with them; with a team so dedicated to the local environment, I feel sure that this estate could up their game in the quality of their wines.

Caveau Quinard
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Tel: 04 79 42 10 18
Email: caveauquinard@orange.fr
Web: caveauquinard.fr
Contact: Julien Quinard
Map ref: D3
Vineyards: 12.5ha
Certification: Veritas
Visits: Tasting room

COTEAUX DE L'AIN

The IGP Coteaux de l'Ain covers many areas within the Ain department, including the Bugey vineyards. Bugey vignerons make wines under this designation when they use grape varieties not included in the AOC rules. The most planted area outside the Bugey AOC is the Pays de Gex, which is allowed to add its own designation to form IGP Coteaux de l'Ain Pays de Gex. This area lies close to the Rhône river just to the west of Geneva and the Swiss border. The vineyards often straddle the border and there is an agreement between the two countries on use of the grapes, since the most concentrated area of vineyards in the Geneva canton of Switzerland is also in this area. In the past the French-owned vineyards supplied grapes to the Swiss co-operative wine cellar in Satigny (now La Cave de Genève), but today a few producers here make their own wines. There is one lone, noble, full-time vigneron, profiled here.

Domaine de Mucelle

With a gentle smile, Frédéric Péricard likes to describe his vineyards as the Premières Côtes du Rhône, because they are the first vineyards near the Rhône river after it crosses the Swiss border. In the village of Challex, the vineyards, though not particularly steep, are deceptively high, at around 500m, and lie on glacial deposits with mainly clay-sandy soil.

Domaine de Mucelle's organic vineyards are in sight of Lac Léman and the city of Geneva.

The vineyards came from Frédéric's wife's family, who also farmed 40ha of corn and wheat (converted to organic growing methods in 2000). After the Satigny co-operative went into liquidation, in 1993 the family started vinifying some of their grapes and Frédéric joined forces with his father-in-law, Jean-Claude Dallemagne. Frédéric took over the farm and the wine estate in 2005 and converted the vineyards to organic growing, with full certification since 2012. Chasselas and Pinot Noir, the most typical local varieties, still dominate but there is some Pinot Gris and a little Altesse, the latter used for sparkling wine. For reds he grows Gamay and Gamaret; Mondeuse does not ripen successfully here.

Frédéric manages the estate on his own with seasonal workers – his wife works in Geneva. He studied at the University of Wine at

Suze-la-Rousse and practises organics out of conviction, limiting the use of copper by working with essential oils and Bach flowers. He harvests late and has a simple, very clean cellar with an old chain press and metal tanks, fitted with an inert gas system to protect the wine. Since being certified organic, whenever possible he has used indigenous yeasts and adds SO_2 sparingly, or not at all.

Frédéric makes a sulphur-free Chasselas alongside the regular one. For this, he picks the grapes a little earlier, ensuring he has only super-healthy bunches, and uses CO_2 from the red wine fermentation vats to sterilize the press and the vats. The wine has a well-deserved following, though, for me, the regular Chasselas shows better length, minerality and brightness of fruit. The main Jura sparkling wine service makes his sparkling wine from a Chasselas and Altesse base with three years resting on lees. It currently represents 10% of his 40,000-bottle production and each year he has more demand. From Pinot Gris he makes a late-harvest, oak-matured sweet wine, with fresh acidity that keeps it delicate.

Frédéric Péricard was one of the earliest converts to organics in the Ain department and has developed a loyal customer following.

Just as in Geneva's vineyards, Gamaret has become important here to give colour, alcohol and fruit. Frédéric makes his pure Gamaret aged in oak, uses part oak for Cuvée Galexis, a blend of half Gamaret with Pinot and Gamay, and tank only for varietal Pinot Noir and for the Gamay, which is sometimes made with zero sulphur addition. The tank-aged reds are full of attractive mountain acidity and fruit, and the Galexis shows well after a year in bottle.

Like their maker, these wines are a mixture of honesty and fun. They find ready markets with private sales locally on both sides of the border, as well as further afield in the Rhône-Alpes region and Paris, mainly to organic wine shops. Recently Frédéric has developed some export sales in Japan and the US.

Domaine de Mucelle
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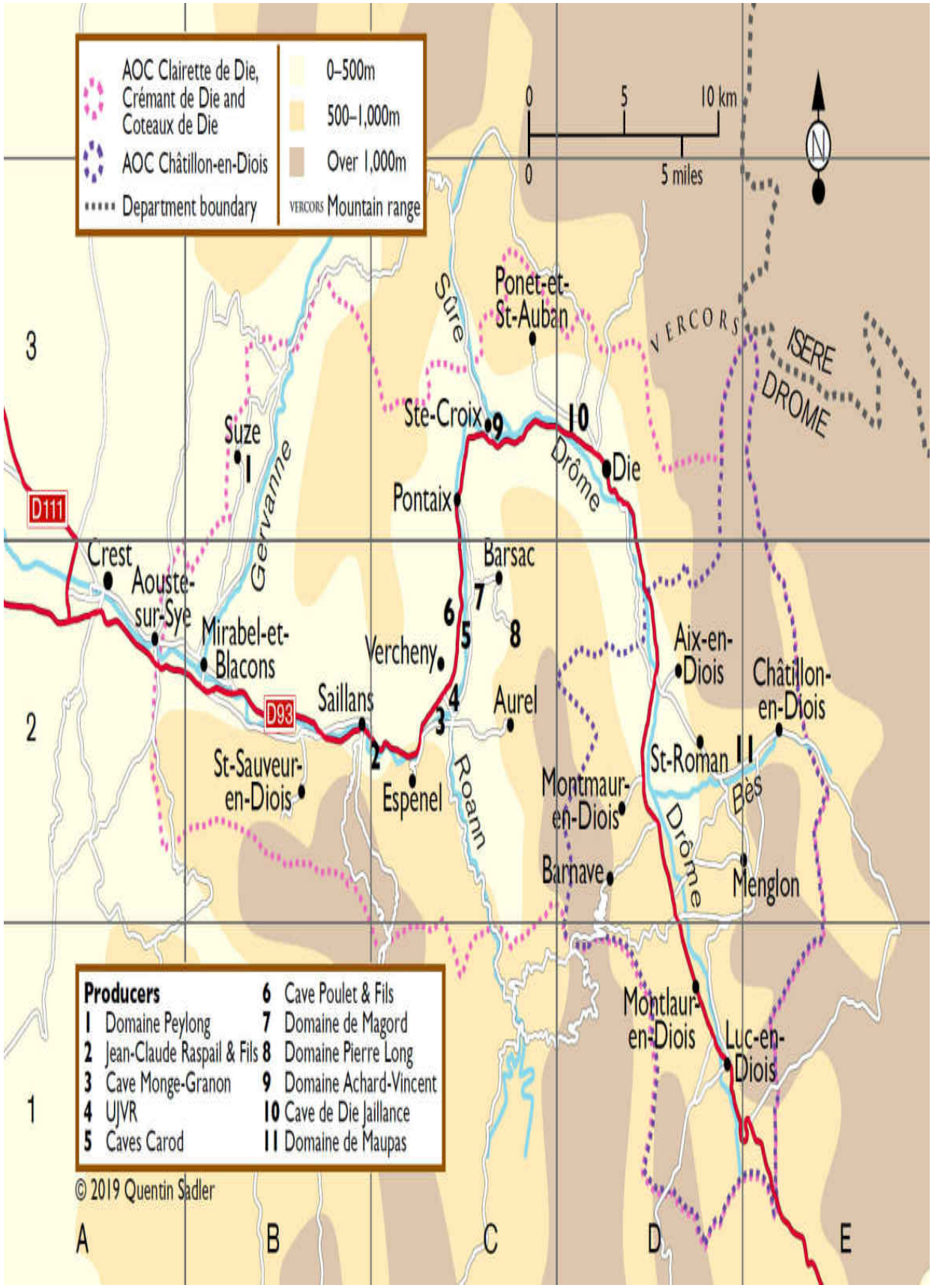
Email: info@domainedemucelle.fr
Web: domainedemucelle.fr
Contact: Frédéric Péricard
Vineyards: 8.5ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment


AOC Clairette de Die, Crémant de Die and Coteaux de Die
AOC Châtillon-en-Diois
Department boundary
0–500m
500–1,000m
Over 1,000m
VERCORS Mountain range
0 5 10 km
0 5 miles
N
Producers
1 Domaine Peylong
2 Jean-Claude Raspail & Fils
3 Cave Monge-Granon
4 UJVR
5 Caves Carod
6 Cave Poulet & Fils
7 Domaine de Magord
8 Domaine Pierre Long
9 Domaine Achard-Vincent
10 Cave de Die Jaillance
11 Domaine de Maupas
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Ste-Croix
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Pontaix
Die
Crest
Aouste-sur-Sye
Mirabel-et-Blacons
Barsac
Vercheny
Saillans
Aurel
Aix-en-Diois
Châtillon-en-Diois
St-Roman
St-Sauveur-en-Diois
Espenel
Montmaur-en-Diois
Barnave
Menglon
Montlaur-en-Diois
Luc-en-Diois
Sure
Gervanne
Drôme
Roann
Bès
VERCORS
ISERE
DROME
D111
D93
A
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3

THE DIOIS

With flavours of Provence creeping in, it's another world from Savoie and Bugey here, and yet it's also another world from the Rhône Valley with which Clairette de Die and the other Diois appellations are usually linked. The Diois – named for its small capital town, Die – is a low mountain region, lying on the southern edge of the Vercors mountains and national park. Indeed, the Col de Rousset, a mountain pass in the Vercors at 1254m, 19km north of Die, is considered as one of the important dividers between the northern and southern French Alps, and there is a distinct difference in the vegetation on either side. The Drôme river, a tributary of the Rhône, rises in the east where the Drôme department meets Hautes-Alpes. It flows through the Haut-Diois (upper Diois) and the vineyards run along its course from Luc-en-Diois almost to Crest, about 55km downstream. The vineyards lie above the river, on a series of plateaux, nestled up in the nooks and crannies of the surrounding hillsides and along the smaller river valleys.

The Diois has always been an agricultural valley, known for sheep farming as well as for vines, fruit and nut trees, and lavender. These all thrive in the very warm summer temperatures, with cool night-time mountain breezes. Like most of the wine regions in this book, the Diois was once an Alpine crossroads and there are some delightful medieval villages strung along the valley, once places for travellers to rest and today attracting summer tourists. Many of the larger wineries have tasting rooms by the side of the main road and indeed sell most of their wines there, but if you head up some of the side valleys you will be repaid by glorious views and a feeling of peace.

Most visitors drive into the valley from Valence in the west. Crest is a good starting point for exploration and a pleasant market town. Heading east, in the historic village of Saillans, with vestiges from the pre-Roman era, vineyards become more dominant and slowly climb in altitude. From Saillans the most distinctive southerly view is of the

Trois Becs, three closely linked mountain peaks (between 1545m and 1589m) within the Saoû mountain range and forest, the start of northern Provence. The heart of the area is around Vercheny, which has vineyards on both sides of the river and is where several key producers are based. To the south of a big bend in the river are the other important vineyard villages of Barsac and Aurel.

The town of Die lies at 367m, west of the mountain plateau called the Glandasse. With a population of around 4,500, Die is laid-back, with an artistic or even vaguely hippy feel to it, possibly because it struggles to survive economically. Many residents and businesses in the Diois put protection of the environment high on their agenda. To continue the exploration of the valley there is a choice of heading up to the plateau and village of Châtillon-en-Diois or towards Luc-en-Diois. In both directions you will be spoilt for choice in terms of views. Tourist offices offer a brochure with eight easy vineyard walks in the Clairette de Die area.

Looking south across the vineyards of Vercheny to the distinctive Les Trois Becs mountain.

The Diois AOC figures

Area under vine (2017): 1,650 hectares (80–85% Muscat à Petits Grains)

Volume produced (average 2012–2016): 97,417 hectolitres (approximately 13 million bottles)

(% of production)

Clairette de Die (all styles including *brut* and rosé)	96%
Crémant de Die	2.25%
Châtillon-en-Diois (51% white; 34% red; 15% rosé)	1.7%
Coteaux de Die	0.05%

A few vineyards lie down by the Drôme river on alluvial sandstone soils, better for growing Clairette than for Muscat, but the vast majority are on the hillsides at varying expositions on broadly clay-limestone soils with areas of white marl. Classically Alpine, on the Vercors side the vineyards have a predominance of limestone scree, but on the other side at Barsac and especially at Aurel, there are outcrops of heavy blue or black marl. Although prized by some for giving a finer Muscat, it is particularly hard to work. Altitude – varying from below 250m up to nearly 700m, with the majority of vineyards at 350–500m – makes a big difference to ripening. At the higher elevations in midsummer, the diurnal temperature difference may be more than 20°C.

Châtillon-en-Diois

High up along a side valley southeast of Die, the medieval village of Châtillon-en-Diois lies in a strategic position on the route from Grenoble and the Trièves to the Drôme Valley. It is an enchanting village with many fountains: one of its assets was the ready

availability of water from numerous natural springs. Below the imposing Glandasse cliffs lies the broad plateau where most of the vineyards are, dotted with numerous vineyard cabins and sharing space with walnut and fruit trees.

Due to the higher altitude, Muscat grapes ripen three weeks later here than in Saillans. In 1993 there were 72ha of vineyards designated for the still Châtillon-en-Diois AOC wines (rather than grapes grown for Clairette de Die) from several nearby villages. Today that figure is around 35ha – it is somewhat hard to quantify due to the plantings of Gamay, some of which have been used for Clairette de Die rosé. Alongside Cave de Die Jaillance, which is responsible for over half the production (much of it organic) in Châtillon-en-Diois, making all three colours, there are three independent vignerons: Domaine de Maupas (profiled here) and two smaller ones in St-Roman.

Wine production and producers

Apart from Jaillance, there is one other co-operative-style winery, UVJR, and one important négociant, Caves Carod. Caves Carod and the largest individual vigneron, Monge Granon, offer production services to smaller producers. These four producers dominate volumes, mainly due to the complicated equipment needed for ancestral method sparkling wines. Along with seven smaller vignerons, the four are profiled in this chapter. Due to the very small amount of Crémant de Die, many in the Diois, including Jaillance, share a CUMA for disgorgement. There is a score of smaller vignerons making Clairette de Die: decent ones I have tasted include Luc Faure and Domaine Maillefaud.

Côté Cairn is worth a mention: it is an alliance of two long-term organic farms, now both run biodynamically, one near Die owned by Cyrille Copier and the other in Barnave owned by Sylvie Hembise and Vincent Lefort. Until 2016, the growers were part of the Cave de Die Jaillance. Monge Granon does all the vinification for Côté Cairn for Clairette de Die and Crémant de Die, which Côté Cairn sells locally

and to organic shops around France. Monge Granon also sells part of the production under its Origine label.

The main wines to expect

Most producers make more than one Clairette de Die Méthode Ancestrale (sometimes labelled Méthode Dioise Ancestrale): usually at least one blend, often named Tradition, and at least one cuvée from 100% Muscat. Clairette de Die rosé is offered while stocks last. A few producers make Clairette de Die Brut from 100% Clairette and increasing numbers offer a Crémant de Die blend. While quantity remains small, more producers are diversifying into IGP Drôme still wines, often single varietal Chardonnay or Syrah. AOC Coteaux de Die (100% Clairette) is available only from a couple of producers. Production of Châtillon-en-Diois wines is growing slowly – note that Châtillon producers may also make Clairette de Die and Crémant de Die.

The war of the rosés

When the Bugey region (specifically the cru Cerdon) learned in 2015 that the fellow AOC Méthode Ancestrale region Clairette de Die had applied for a change in statutes to allow it to make a rosé version, including the Gamay grape, Bugey attempted to block approval. But with a revised limit of maximum 10% Gamay, in November 2016 rosé Clairette de Die AOC was authorized from the 2016 vintage. However, Bugey took its complaint to the Conseil d'Etat, France's highest court. To the stupefaction of the Diois, in January 2018 the Conseil d'Etat revoked the amendment that allowed Clairette de Die rosé to be made.

Bugey Cerdon produces only around two million bottles in an average year, compared with Clairette de Die's 12 million bottles, and the latter had estimated making about 10% rosé in the short term. To be fair to Bugey, whose cru Cerdon is only 180ha and who worried about the selling power of Jaillance, this was rather a David vs Goliath story.

Since the 2018 judgement, Bugey has not ceased to complain that the Diois producers continue to market their unsold stocks. However, Clairette de Die AOC rosé had been made in good faith in vintages 2016 and 2017; indeed growers planted more Gamay and the red variant of Muscat. French wine law can be an ass, and because producers must state in March before harvest which category of wine a vineyard's crop is to be used for, the 2017 rosé cannot simply be sold as still wine. And there is another knotty issue: in 1957, presumably at the request of the Clairette de Die vignerons of the time, a law was passed forbidding any non-AOC sparkling wines to be made within the AOC limits. This means that the rosé may not be labelled simply as IGP or Vin de France. In late 2018, the Clairette de Die syndicate attempted to get this law overturned but failed. At the time of writing the Diois were continuing to market remaining stocks as Clairette de Die rosé using the poster shown to advertise locally – the word *osée* means 'dared'. In December 2018 Jaillance and the appellation together launched third party proceedings against the ruling and they fully intend to go to the European Court of Justice should this fail – rosé Clairette may yet re-emerge.

Domaine Achard-Vincent

If the Achard-Vincent family were based in almost any other wine region, my feeling is that they would be huge international stars – not that this family would ever seek the adulation which many biodynamic vignerons receive these days. The first time I met them, in 2008, was at a harvest festival in Vercheny, which was memorable partly for being a complete wash-out. Talking about organics, Jean-Pierre Achard confided to me *'ça vient de nos tripes'*, meaning 'it's a gut feeling'. Jean-Pierre and his wife Claudie were wearing sandals and dressed in their official Clairette de Die fraternity robes in a ceremony to pick grapes and bless the harvest – and then came the downpour…

Their son, Thomas, was brought up in a dedicated organic environment. From Ste-Croix, his grandfather, Raymond Vincent, Claudie's father, was one of the French pioneers who shunned chemical herbicides and pesticides and adopted the Lemaire-Bouchet

method in 1968. Grandfather always said that it wasn't him who changed, but everyone else. Jean-Pierre, who was the son of a mixed farmer in Saillans, wanted to do even better than his father-in-law; he was an early member of Nature et Progrès from 1982 and totally committed to organics. Thomas studied agriculture, followed by wine courses at Suze-la-Rousse University of Wine. Apart from a spell working in London to improve his English and taste other wines, he never wanted to work anywhere but at home, and in his turn wanted to do better than his father. He was intrigued by biodynamics, took some courses with Pierre Masson and didn't look back, encouraged by Jean-Pierre, who was keen to learn about it too, and the estate became certified by Demeter in 2005. The Achards belong to a group in the southern part of Rhône-Alpes who exchange ideas about biodynamics and they have also hosted a study group from Jaillance.

The family farm two main vineyard plots. From the Achard side in Saillans there is a well-drained, sandy area at just 230m altitude planted with 4ha of earlier-ripening Muscat and 2ha of Clairette, which, as a late-ripener, does well here on the warmer site. At Ste-Croix, the Vincent side, where the winery and family are based, the vineyards benefit not only from the isolation and cool breezes provided by the Sûre river but also from the higher altitude at 400m, and are on a compact clay soil, stony in parts. Their small amount of Aligoté is in the lowest, more clay-rich, part and Muscat is deemed finest with most acidity when grown on the cooler, stonier plots.

Managing the soil has long been a priority for both Jean-Pierre and Thomas – the former would sow grass in every other row; Thomas lets the natural vegetation grow, believing it helps drainage and de-compacts the soil, much needed in Ste-Croix. He ploughs alternate rows, swapping each year. Allowing the vine roots to go deep and protecting microbial life are their priorities, along with encouraging a natural biodiversity. Thomas uses biodynamic practices and follows the lunar calendar as much as he can, but confesses that with their extent of vineyards it's impossible to be perfect.

Thomas works with two full-time employees and some part-time, and his father consults. About 10% of the production is exported to the US, Japan and all over Europe. For the rest 50% is sold at the

tasting room, 30% to specialist organic shops and 10% to local restaurants and wine shops.

The estate makes no still wines and does all the processing of its sparkling wines, much of it manually, both for the small amount of Crémant and also for the six cuvées of Clairette de Die. The Crémant de Die – from roughly two-thirds Clairette, one-third Aligoté and a dash of Muscat – always spends at least three years *sur lattes* and is very dry, citrussy and stony, with no *dosage*.

Jean-Pierre and Thomas Achard-Vincent in their biodynamic vineyards in Ste-Croix.

The Clairette de Die Tradition represents 70% of the domaine's production. It is usually a blend of 85% Muscat and 15% Clairette from at least two vintages, with about 60mg/l of residual sugar. Just like in Champagne, it is the main cuvée that makes the reputation of a domaine and this does the job superbly every time you taste it, even though Achard-Vincent offers more intense blends, such as Topaze and Gabrielle de Richaud, both from 100% Muscat. For me, the pièce de résistance is another wine from 100% Muscat, Bio-Sûre, whose name sums up everything about the estate. Bio = organic;

Sûre = not only the name of the river that runs by their oldest Muscat plantations, but also means 'certain'. And yes, I am certain that this is one of the purest expressions of Muscat sparkling wine.

All the wines have low sulphur additions, and there are two cuvées with no added sulphur, touchingly named for Thomas' two children: P'tit Jules is a Crémant (a recent addition to the range) and P'tite Gaby a Clairette de Die from 100% Muscat. I do hope that either little Gaby or little Jules, or maybe both together, continue the tradition of this amazing estate, striving to do differently and ever better to enhance their environment and their wines.

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Contact: Thomas Achard-Vincent
Map ref: C3
Vineyards: 11ha
Certification: Ecocert and Demeter
Visits: Tasting room

Caves Carod

Owned by Grands Chais de France, one of France's largest wine companies and a sparkling specialist, this is a slick operation in terms of winemaking and has a busy tasting room too, including a small wine museum. Although dwarfed by Jaillance, Caves Carod is the second biggest producer in the region and the most important purchaser of grapes from growers who are not part of the co-operative. Grands Chais purchased the company in 2008 from the well-respected Carod family, who had founded it in 1940. The family had built up a reputation not only for its wines but also for its

expertise in using the ancestral method, being very early in offering filtration and transfer services to smaller vignerons locally.

The original Carod vineyards, named Domaine Guigouret, are in Espenel and have been extended to 45ha including 15ha in conversion to organics, with the intention of converting all eventually – some are terraced and hard to mechanize. Other grapes, increasingly organic, are purchased from across the region. From AOC Châtillon-en-Diois is a white wine named Cuvée Amade (after one of the Carods), made from half and half Chardonnay and Aligoté – it spends a year in oak barrel, but personally I don't think the fruit is up to that. A red Cuvée Amade has been made since 2015, but sold under the IGP Drôme designation as it does not contain Gamay, required for the Châtillon appellation. The 2016 was two-thirds Pinot Noir and one-third Syrah and shows the area's potential for fresh red wines; for this wine a year in oak adds a welcome spiciness.

The regularly updated cellars are Caves Carod's forte and have enough capacity not only to make their own wines but also to do contract processing. Since 2016 they have been run by Chloé Weber, an oenologist with prior experience ranging from Grands Chais' own wineries in Alsace and Jura to Schramsberg in California and Saint Clair in New Zealand. As one would expect from Grands Chais (whose Jura outpost, Maison du Vigneron, makes big quantities of a very decent Crémant du Jura, regularly winning plaudits for its good value), the Crémant de Die here is spot on. From 80–85% Clairette with 10–15% Aligoté and 5% Muscat, it spends at least 18 months *sur lattes*.

The range of Clairette de Die, especially the non-organic examples, I have found to be a little hit and miss, some of them lacking length, though the organic versions tend to do better. Two cuvées stood out at my tasting in 2018. The first is the Domaine Guigouret Muscat from vines of 50–60 years old, which showed a vibrant Muscat character. The second was more surprising: a marketing dream that tastes decent too. Named 7° Carod Ice, it is prominently labelled Vegan and Bio (organic) and packaged like a craft beer. From 75% Muscat with 25% Clairette it tastes as it should: light, delicate and fruity, slightly stony and with a citrus twist from

the Clairette. Caves Carod is clever with marketing and this is helping it increase exports, notably to Japan. About 20% is exported to various markets. Around two-thirds goes to French supermarkets and it will be interesting to see if the new 7° Carod Ice can attract the younger French consumers back to drinking Clairette de Die.

Caves Carod
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Web: caves-carod.com
Contact: Chloé Weber
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 45ha + 180ha purchased grapes
Certification: Ecocert (for part)
Visits: Tasting room

Cave de Die Jaillance

The Die wine co-operative controls more than one out of five hectares of the vineyards in the French Alps and it is by far the largest wine producer included in this book. While many might regret the might of Jaillance and indeed might worry that the Cave de Die accounts for nearly three-quarters of the Diois production, there is a big saving grace: the average wine quality is good and the company leads its region in many ways. On my first visit in 2008, it was proud to have ten per cent of its members' vineyards certified organic; a decade later that figure had more than doubled. Apart from a tiny co-operative in Correns in Provence, which is 100% organic, Cave de Die with 23% organic in 2019 is way ahead of any other French wine co-operative. Organic grapes attract a 15% premium payment for members and the vast majority of growers harvest by hand.

Tasting is free at Jaillance's visitor centre, which is open daily.

Founded in 1950 with 266 members, today the co-operative has around 220 members scattered across the Diois. The main production site (there is a second grape pressing area in Espenel) is on the edge of the town of Die and is the town's largest employer, with 80 people. Sales to French supermarket groups have always been important, although exports began as early as the 1960s and now account for 15%. Jaillance was formed in 2001 as a distribution company and a new brand name to replace the 25-year-old 'Clairdie' brand which was causing confusion. At this time, the company diversified by purchasing Brouette in Bordeaux, which specializes in Crémant de Bordeaux, and in 2017 it added Caves SVS et Pé for traditional method sparkling wines from the Loire Valley.

The winery equipment for the ancestral method has been regularly updated and from 2013–16 a major upgrade took place, with the construction of a new building specifically for the *prise de mousse*, the period when fermentation continues in bottle; it has a potential capacity for ten million bottles. Environmental concerns and sustainability – using low impact materials, reducing energy and water consumption, and recycling – have taken precedence.

Wines from the latest vintage remain in pressure tanks at a temperature of 0°C or lower, at 2–3% alcohol, to be used as and when they are needed up until the end of July. The wine is heated up slowly in tank for the fermentation to restart and reaches 5.5%

alcohol (with about 90g/l residual sugar) before being bottled for the *prise de mousse*. Bottles are stored at 10°C for fermentation to continue very slowly to reach 7.5% alcohol and about 60g/l sugar. Rather than the minimum four months *sur lattes*, the norm here is six months, with some special cuvées remaining up to two years. The transfer process takes four to eight days. After refilling, the bottles are warmed to 20°C to allow them to be labelled straight away.

Both Crémant de Die (accounting for just over half the region's output) and Clairette de Die Brut are also made. From a good, ripe year the Clairette Brut can be excellent, usually spending several years *sur lattes*. With several cuvées of Crémant, it is the vintage-dated, organic Icône Crémant de Die that is the standout. From 55% Clairette, 40% Aligoté and 5% Muscat, about half of the Clairette base wine remains in oak for about six months and the blend spends a minimum of three years *sur lattes*. It might be more successful if the *dosage* was brought down a little, bearing in mind the organic fruit should give plenty of flavour.

Not surprisingly there is a large range of Clairette de Die ancestral method cuvées of a high standard, including several designated organic, some from single growers; Les Hauts de Desse is from a 6ha certified biodynamic farm in Ponet-et-St-Auban. A 100% Muscat vegan and organic cuvée Flore is sold in supermarkets alongside the standard cuvée. Cuvée Impériale Tradition has 5–10% Clairette in the blend and offers excellent balance. The vintage-dated Clairette de Die Cuvée Blanche Icône is 100% Muscat selected from the region's best parcels and riper grapes, with higher residual sugar level, up to 70g/l.

Cave de Die offers a basic range of Châtillon-en-Diois, with Aligoté showing best, as well as an organic terroir/grower specific range. The latter is a big step up, with an excellent stony, zippy Domaine de la Gouyarde Aligoté once again confirming this variety as ideal for the terroir here, plus two Gamays from Domaine de la Chapelle and the even better Domaine du Sourbier. These Gamays from the warm recent vintages are full-bodied, with more southern richness than a Savoyard version, and with more zingy acidity than from Beaujolais.

The Cave de Die's visitor centre is a major attraction, including the Muséobulles: there is a small charge for a visit with a multi-lingual

audio guide and a tasting at the end. The visit explores the history of the region and the co-operative as well as providing a succinct explanation of the sparkling vinification methods. The jazzy Bar à Bulles (Bubbles Bar) allows you to taste the range. The current president of the co-operative practises organics, as did the previous president; sustainability is a big theme for this co-operative winery. It's an impressive outfit and with increasing sales, currently around eight million bottles per year, it bucks the downwards sales trend in the region.

Cave de Die Jaillance
355 Avenue de la Clairette, 26150 Die
Tel: 04 75 22 30 00
Email: accueil@jaillance.com
Web: jaillance.com
Map ref: D3
Vineyards: Approximately 1,180ha
Certification: Ecocert and Demeter (for part)
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine Pierre Long

High up above Barsac is the idyllic farm where Pierre Long has worked his vineyards organically for over 30 years and where his son Sébastien joined him in 2015. Pierre's father André farmed sheep, apple orchards, lavender and grain, with a small area of vines. Once Pierre joined him in 1986, they established 6ha of vineyards, clearing the scrubland and planting on the red sandstone and rocky south-facing plateau above at 450m. From here you have a clear westerly view to the Trois Becs and can watch the weather coming. In this remote spot, you would think the wild boar might be a problem to the vines, but Pierre says the wolves have sorted them out…

The Long family were one of the earliest organic estates in Clairette de Die.

Pierre had no wine training, but simply learned as he went along. Sébastien, on the other hand, who is taking over officially in 2019, studied oenology at Montpellier, then worked in New Zealand and with organic estates in France. Having built the vineyards up to 9ha, comprised of 1ha Clairette and the rest Muscat, in 2018 they planted some Syrah to make an IGP Drôme red and are planting Grenache in 2019. Pierre had worked organically from the start, ploughing the soil and weeding by hand, using only Bordeaux mixture for treatments. Organic certification was obtained from the 2013 vintage. Harvest has always been by hand.

Up until now, only two wines have ever been made. The Clairette de Die Brut receives no *dosage* yet the one time I tried it (a 2011 that had five years *sur lattes*) I found the grapefruit character just right and the wine was elegant and long. The Clairette de Die Tradition includes only 3% of Clairette in the blend and is normally given much longer than the minimum required *sur lattes*, providing a delicate and delicious example. Caves Carod filter and transfer the latter; otherwise all the production is done by the Longs themselves. The wines are sold at the tasting room and at wine shows and markets across the Vercors and Chartreuse regions. This is a little gem and it will be interesting to see how the domaine develops under the stewardship of Sébastien.

Domaine Pierre Long

3 Route des Viopis, 26150 Barsac
Tel: 04 75 21 71 09/06 21 96 22 93
Email: cave.long.pierre@gmail.com
Contact: Sébastien Long
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 9ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room, preferably by appointment

Domaine de Magord

Jérôme Vincent's grandfather was a local pioneer in Barsac, selling wines in bottle back in the 1940s. Today Jérôme still farms his grandfather's 70-year-old Muscat vines and is proud to share his wines at the vineyard. Selling about 40% there, he has an increasing number of foreign visitors, encourages groups and is part of France Passion, which welcomes caravans to stay on the vineyard. This makes it doubly important for him to work the vineyard in an environmentally friendly way; although he is not organic, he has gained HVE certification, uses herbicide only once a year on his steepest slopes, just under the vine rows, and uses systemic anti-fungal sprays only early in the season. Jérôme presents his wines at many tasting shows, which has brought him clients from across France.

Jérôme is one of the rare growers to make a still 100% Clairette, AOC Coteaux de Die, producing about 1,500 bottles each year. He never chaptalizes, as it normally reaches at least 11.5% potential alcohol, and he bottles it for early drinking. It is very drinkable, just off-dry with about 6g/l of residual sugar. His Crémant de Die includes 10% Aligoté, which he believes adds both finesse and richness, and there's 10% Muscat too. There is an attractive herbal character, but I'd rather this sparkling wine was drier.

Jérôme Vincent in the vineyards of his Domaine de Magord estate near Barsac.

The two Clairette de Die cuvées are both essentially from Muscat. The main cuvée is a good grapey example of the style, usually 100% Muscat, kept for at least six months *sur lattes*. But it is the limited production Cuvée ThomAnaïs (named for Jérôme's two children) with 5% Clairette that is more interesting and the wine that Jérôme is most proud of. He selects a couple of specific parcels, where he has lavished particular attention, and picks the grapes later than the rest. After bottling, he leaves the wine on its lees at cold temperature for at least a year and then proceeds to riddle and disgorge like a traditional method wine. Although it has around 80mg/l of residual sugar, the extra fruit intensity and finesse make it seem less sweet than the main cuvée and it has much greater length. Jérôme is a wonderful ambassador for good quality Clairette de Die and for sharing the story of his region.

Domaine de Magord
2 Route de Vercheny, Magord, 26150 Barsac
Tel: 04 75 21 71 43

Email: domainedemagord@orange.fr
Web: cavevincent.com
Contact: Jérôme Vincent
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 10ha
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Domaine de Maupas

Jérôme Cayol is the standard-bearer for the tiny appellation of Châtillon-en-Diois; his winery is in large stone farmhouse buildings in the middle of the plateau between St-Roman and the village of Châtillon-en-Diois. Jérôme originally worked as a typesetter in Die but was drawn to the land where his grandparents were mixed farmers, with a hectare of vineyard land. Retraining in agriculture and wine from 1988, he ran a farm with both herbs and vines and then began clearing land to plant 6ha of vineyards, officially establishing his estate and building a winery in 1992. While vineyard land in this appellation was steadily disappearing, Jérôme was effectively trying to halt the decline, initially farming sustainably and then converting to organics in 2003.

Above the winery, the vineyards are in several plots, ranging from 550m to 640m altitude on stony clay-limestone soil with areas of gravel on which the red grapes are planted. Where possible, Jérome has left some of the cherry trees to maintain the biodiversity – together with the vineyard cabins and the towering Glandasse cliff, this makes for a bucolic setting. Most of the vineyards face directly south, with extreme daytime heat in summer, reaching over 40°C sometimes, but at this altitude the nights cool down dramatically to 18°C, helping maintain acidity in the grapes. On the steeper slopes, Jérôme allows grass to grow between the vines to avoid the soil warming up so much; elsewhere he works the soil with a draft horse of the Percheron breed. He's used a horse since he started the estate, one of the very first 'modern' vignerons to do so, 'not as a fashion statement', but because he loves working with a horse. In

summer, visitors to the estate can book a tour of the vineyards on the horse and carriage. Harvest is by hand.

Jérôme Cayol with his dog, Ipop, under the cherry tree in one of his vineyards, at about 600m altitude.

Jérôme's practical training was with Jean Lionnet in Cornas, a well-respected vigneron (now long retired) who made a limited range of wine. Jérôme decided to build a spacious, modern winery so he could make a wide range of wines. He devotes 2.5ha of his land to make Clairette de Die, with everything done in his cellar up to filtration. The rest of his vineyards are planted one-third to Aligoté and Chardonnay and two-thirds to reds, with Gamay dominating and a little Pinot Noir and Syrah. Winemaking is as simple as possible, using indigenous yeast and allowing malolactic fermentation to happen naturally if it wants to for the whites. His Aligoté, named Cuvée du Barbu in homage to the *Gypaète barbu* – the bearded vulture or lammergeier, reintroduced from the late 1980s into the Vercors mountains – shows how this variety works so well from high-altitude vineyards; the two Chardonnay cuvées, one oaked, are less successful. If the wild boars coming down from the mountains allow it, he makes a late-harvest Clairette. A fresh dry rosé made in the *saigné* method is named after daughter Zöe, but the stars are three

reds: juicy Gamay; a Gamay-Pinot (with 30% Pinot); and the excellent Cuvée Loup du Loup, from the oldest vines of Gamay, blended with young Syrah – he uses a little old oak in the latter two cuvées. The reds are usually destemmed to avoid herbaceous flavours that grapes grown at this altitude may give. All apart from the late-harvest wine are AOC Châtillon-en-Diois.

A small amount is exported to Belgium and the Netherlands but most is sold at the tasting room, looked after by Jérôme and his wife Murielle, and in organic grocers and supermarkets in the region. And you can buy online – for the record, this is one of the best websites for an independent vigneron that I've seen. It is only in French but the photos are sumptuous.

Domaine de Maupas
Le Maupas, 26410 Châtillon-en-Diois
Tel: 04 75 21 18 81/06 08 57 85 57
Email: domaine-de-maupas@orange.fr
Web: domainedemaupas.com
Contact: Jérôme Cayol
Map ref: E2
Vineyards: 12ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room open summer, otherwise preferably by appointment

Cave Monge Granon/Verdie

Monge Granon is the largest single vineyard owner in the Diois, and also buys grapes. The Verdie company name is used for the négociant side of the business, buying grapes as well as some wines *sur lattes*, and is also the name of the company that offers filtration and transfer services. It is well respected in the area for its technical know-how and is used by several local growers. For the main Monge Granon cuvées the grapes come from its own vineyards, 90% of

which are in Vercheny close to its winery, based off the main road in an old cement factory. The estate also has small parcels in Aurel and St-Sauveur-en-Diois.

Rémi Monge checks the pressure of his Clairette de Die bottles pre-disgorgement.

The two families Monge and Granon can trace their winemaking heritage back four generations, but it was in 1985 that brothers Franck, Emmanuel and Pierre Monge linked together with François Granon to create the company. With HVE certification, which covers vineyards and the winery, the cellars are efficiently run by François Granon and his son Rémi, who joined following oenology studies. Pierre Monge looks after the vineyards and his brother Emmanuel is in charge of sales. Brother Franck manages the show and is also the mayor of Vercheny. Tourism is important to them and the family also run a nearby campsite and two self-catering apartments in a restored farmhouse, La Bastide des Monge in Vercheny.

Alongside a Clairette Brut are two more successful Crémants de Die, both with 83% Clairette, 15% Aligoté and 2% Muscat. For the better Cuvée de Minuit, the Aligoté is fermented in oak and this wine has lovely, vibrant citrus character from the Clairette, the Aligoté giving it a stony character, vinosity and length too. Among the three main Clairette de Die cuvées, the Tradition with 10–15% Clairette is very well made; the label Pur Muscat is for a 100% Muscat wine; and another 100% Muscat Cuvée de Minuit is from a parcel selection giving riper grapes and an attractive result.

The Origine Clairette de Die Tradition is from biodynamic grapes, grown by the two farms of Côté Cairn. Monge Granon makes it with fewer additives (notably no enzymes) than its own wines and my one tasting revealed a completely delicious example. It is a blend of Muscat with around 15% Clairette. An Origine Crémant de Die has also been released.

Under both the Monge Granon name and the Verdie name, much is sold to supermarkets, but also to the trade generally across France. Exports are growing and currently Monge Granon sells to the US, Canada and Japan, as well as within Europe. This is a serious outfit and the biodynamic wines are extremely good value.

Cave Monge Granon/Verdie
St-Pierre, D93, 26340 Vercheny
Tel: 04 75 21 74 93
Email: contact@clairette-mongegranon.com
Web: clairette-mongegranon.com
Contact: Franck Monge
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 41ha + organic purchases
Certification: Ecocert/Demeter (part)
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine Peylong

For six generations, dating back to the mid-19th century, through the tragedies of phylloxera and two world wars, the Lombard family have kept viticulture alive in the Gervanne valley, with vineyards at between 300m and 400m. Although Fabien Lombard has been president of the Clairette de Die regional association since 2011, this is far from a typical Diois wine estate. Until 2017 the family were the only one in the region to run their own family estate at the same time as being members of Cave de Die Jaillance, which Fabien's

grandfather Albert joined in 1956. They could do this because for their domaine they produce no Clairette de Die Méthode Ancestrale, specializing in the Clairette grape and in still wines.

Domaine Peylong has 1ha of Clairette, planted by Fabien's father Joël in 1973; some is used for Clairette de Die Brut, named L'Etourdie (the scatty one), and the rest for the still white Coteaux de Die, named L'Oublié (the forgotten one). The family have planted a little Aligoté for Crémant de Die in future, but they and their customers appreciate the dry sparkling pure Clairette. The rest of their own production is IGP Drôme white, rosé and red, from a range of Rhône Valley grape varieties plus some Cabernet Sauvignon.

What makes this small French Alpine estate stand out too is the true partnership of equals between Christelle and Fabien. Christelle was brought up in Nantes in the Loire Valley and had no wine connections except that her grandfather was a cooper. Studying food technology, she was mystified why wine wasn't part of her course. She followed up her studies with an oenology degree at Montpellier, but with no real intention to work in wine. At Montpellier she met Fabien; very soon afterwards, his father fell ill, so instead of time for work experience elsewhere, he was obliged to return home and soon Christelle joined him. While Fabien earned a much-needed wage teaching winemaking in local colleges, Christelle got down to work, farming the vineyards. Both always wanted to convert to organics, but practically it took time and even now the area they farm for Jaillance is not 100% organic, with some herbicide used in difficult plots. But they are dedicated to their land, working with the soil, and using local herbs for treatments.

The pair want to make wines to be what the French call '*digeste*', light enough to slip down easily. They've chaptalized only twice in 20 years and use low levels of SO_2. Fabien loves being able to set up a tasting to show off the Clairette grape, comparing the same vintage of the base wine for the Clairette de Die, for which the bottling and later *rémuage* and disgorgement is done by UJVR, with the still Coteaux de Die, which has malolactic and a year in *demi-muids*. Along with the grapefruit character, which for me is so typical of Clairette, both express that zippy mountain acidity emerging from grape and terroir. The Lombards make a more varied range of reds than most here, with different proportions of Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and sometimes other varieties, all destemmed, with long macerations. L'Inespéré – from 20-year-old Syrah vines with a touch of Cabernet Sauvignon – shows dark berry fruit with a freshness of acidity, tamed by the use of second-hand *demi-muids*. And L'Inattendu, 100% Cabernet, marries deeper fruit and tannin again with fresh acidity. For now you will have to visit to taste these lovely wines that combine mountain freshness and Provençal warmth, for 90% is sold at the tasting room and the rest at local organic shops and restaurants.

Domaine Peylong
Les Batailles, 26400 Suze-sur-Crest
Tel: 04 75 76 42 28/06 14 73 17 11
Email: flombard@peylong.com
Web: peylong.com
Contacts: Christelle and Fabien Lombard
Map ref: B3
Vineyards: 17ha (3.7ha estate)
Certification: Veritas (for the estate grapes)
Visits: Tasting room

Cave Poulet & Fils

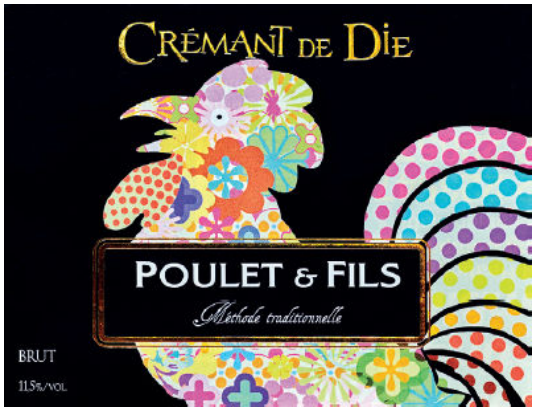
If the secret to good sparkling wine is blending from different areas, then the Poulet family have a head start. Emmanuel's mother's family had land in Montlaur-en-Diois in the Haut-Diois and the Poulet family have around 6ha of vineyards there. These are 200–300m higher in altitude than their main vineyards at Pontaix, which lie on either side of the Drôme. In Montlaur Cave Poulet grows 0.5ha of Aligoté for its Crémant de Die, with the remainder being Muscat, which due to the higher altitude adds freshness to the Clairette de Die blend. In 2016 Emmanuel took on 1ha of Gamay in Châtillon-en-Diois to extend the range of wines.

Emmanuel, who studied commerce in Grenoble, is the fourth generation of the Poulet family to work the vineyards. His grandfather, a mixed farmer, sold a little wine in bottle and the estate really took off when his father, Alain, took over in 1970, starting with just 1.5ha of vines. Some of their best vineyards today – above Pontaix – were replanted by Alain on virtually abandoned vineyard sites, which had been reclaimed by pine forests. By the time he retired in 2004 the family had 16ha. In terms of vineyards and winemaking, Emmanuel learned directly from his father. The vineyards have been worked sustainably for many years – they are a mixture of ploughed and grassed-down, with some herbicide and systemic chemicals use, and were certified HVE in 2012.

The Poulet family make 20–25,000 bottles of Crémant de Die and are responsible for nearly half the region's exports of this appellation. Emmanuel agrees that the delightful chicken illustration on the label helps, but it's a very good example, tangy and stony: Emmanuel explains that the 10% Aligoté gives roundness, the 5% Muscat adds aroma and the Clairette provides liveliness as well as endurance for the three to four years *sur lattes*.

Poulet is known for being one of the last producers to filter in what's called the bottle-to-bottle method for its Clairette de Die. On disgorgement the wine spends just 1–1½ hours in tank before being filtered and filled into a clean bottle. This method was used by everyone when filtration came along, but it is technically difficult, requiring a special filling machine as the wine is so bubbly. Emmanuel is proud to continue with this method, having updated all the

equipment in 2009, and he likes the practical fact that at ambient cellar temperature, rather than very cold, he is able to label the wines right away if required.



Emmanuel uses 25% Clairette in his main cuvée, a consistently decent Clairette de Die Tradition, which to me has a citrus character. A recent cuvée, Divine Tradition, is made with the same varietal proportions, using grapes from the two south-facing sites above Pontaix on white marl, which give lower yields and a slightly sweeter and fruitier expression to the wine. Emmanuel was enthusiastic about producing a rosé version and made one of the better ones I tasted, including 5% Gamay. Roughly one quarter of the total production is exported, mainly to Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, but also across the Atlantic both to Canada and the US. In France, Poulet sells at around 30 wine shows each year, as well as at its welcoming modern tasting room.

Cave Poulet & Fils
785 Avenue de la Clairette, Quartier la Chapelle, 26340 Vercheny
Tel: 04 75 21 72 80/06 88 77 31 36
Email: cave_alain_poulet@yahoo.fr
Contact: Emmanuel Poulet
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 22ha
Visits: Tasting room

Jean-Claude Raspail et Fils

There's always someone who does things differently in the world of wine and here it's Frédéric Raspail, who, shunning the various versions of the transfer method for disgorging, for all his Clairette de Die cuvées still uses riddling or *remuage*, whether by hand or in gyropalettes. This means that the wine stays in the same bottle from the start to the finish, without being filtered. In his view the method gives greater length to the wines, which is certainly evident on the Grande Tradition (100% Muscat), for me the most stylish of the range.

Frédéric's great-grandparents ran the local café and late in life in 1942 bought Domaine de la Mûre, an estate with a building and a small vineyard on the south side of the river. Their son, Flavien, expanded the vineyards to 3ha, alongside lavender fields and walnut groves, and was one of the first to commercialize Clairette de Die locally. It was Frédéric's parents, Jean-Claude and Françoise, who began to make a name for the estate, growing the business and building a tasting room. Jean-Claude did not use chemical sprays, just some herbicide below the vine rows, and when Frédéric joined in 1997 they converted the estate to organics. They also began replanting some of the south-facing slope high above Saillans, named La Roustière, where they have 4ha of Muscat and some Syrah for still wines. There is 1ha by the cellar not far from the river, with a soil covered in large pebbles, and the rest of the vineyards lie on a high plateau south of the river. Today these comprise 6ha, including some 50+-year-old Muscat vines from the original la Mûre vineyards; nearby is a further 4ha on a slope with a mixture of orientations. Jean-Claude planted vineyards in Aurel too, but Frédéric has let those go, not liking the black marl soil; he prefers Saillans with its mainly clay-limestone and white stony soil, with some slate in places. Frédéric works the soil with a *chenillette* and uses plant concoctions alongside Bordeaux mixture to limit the copper usage.

Frédéric studied wine commerce in Orange, and then continued viticulture and oenology studies in Avize in Champagne, followed by two years working with Champagne Bollinger. His father had spent six

months working with Champagne de Castellane. Both have always been adamant about retaining the traditional Champagne method of *remuage* and disgorgement for their Clairette de Die, rather than transfer. The process is not easy as the deposit is very sticky, due to the residual sugar levels of 50–100g/l and the relatively short time the wine has been fermenting in bottle. Whereas it would normally take four weeks to hand-riddle Champagne or Crémant, it takes eight weeks for Clairette de Die; and using a gyropalette it takes 12 days instead of the usual five to seven days. In some years and with some cuvées, a test of a few bottles indicates that the gyropalettes simply won't do the job, so it must be done by hand.

Frédéric Raspail in La Roustière vineyard, between rows of Muscat vines on the left and Syrah on the right.

The IGP Drôme still wines represent a little more than ten per cent of the estate's production. Ligne Blanche (Chardonnay from La Mûre) and Ligne Rouge (Syrah from La Roustière) are among the best I've tasted in the Diois, both made with judicious oak use. There is a rosé too and an occasional, unctuous late-harvest Clairette, named Les Belles Demoiselles. There are three Crémants, all of which have a minimum of three years *sur lattes*. The standard cuvée is very pleasant, with 80% Clairette, 15% Aligoté and 5% Muscat; the other cuvées have 65% Clairette with 30% Aligoté and 5% Muscat, my

favourite being the vintage-dated Cuvée Flavien, containing a high proportion from old vines, the other being a vintage-dated cuvée where the base wines were oak-aged.

Raspail's main Clairette de Die Tradition is a blend including 25% Clairette, but I prefer the two 100% Muscats: Grande Tradition, made from the older La Mûre Muscat vines; and the more exotic and much sweeter Must, a limited cuvée made from the Muscat at La Roustière, harvested last. Sales at the tasting room account for 70%, with 20% in the rest of France, most of it local, and about 10% exported, mainly to Denmark, Sweden and Taiwan, and occasionally to the US. This is a very firmly anchored organic estate.

Jean-Claude Raspail et Fils
780 Route de Die, 26340 Saillans
Tel: 04 75 21 55 99
Email: contact@raspail.com
Web: raspail.com
Contact: Frédéric Raspail
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 15ha
Certification: Ecocert
Visits: Tasting room

Union des Jeunes Viticulteurs Récoltants

The UJVR, as it is known, is an agricultural co-operative: unlike most wine co-operatives, all the partners work full-time and pool everything. The founding of UJVR in 1961 was partly motivated by a sad event that took place in the village of Vercheny during the Second World War. In December 1943 local resistance forces successfully derailed a train carrying German troops – Gestapo reprisals followed and many of the men of the village were arrested and deported to German labour camps, never to return. It was, said

Vincent Viard, Vice President of UVJR today, as if there was a missing generation in the 1950s. Young sons, often without fathers, were left to run the vineyards with little experience, yet this was also the time when there was opportunity and help to buy tractors, for example through the Marshall Plan. Seven young vignerons (the *jeunes* in the company name means 'young' in French) decided their best chance was to group together to farm their 8ha of vineyards, plant more land, and make and market their wines as one entity.

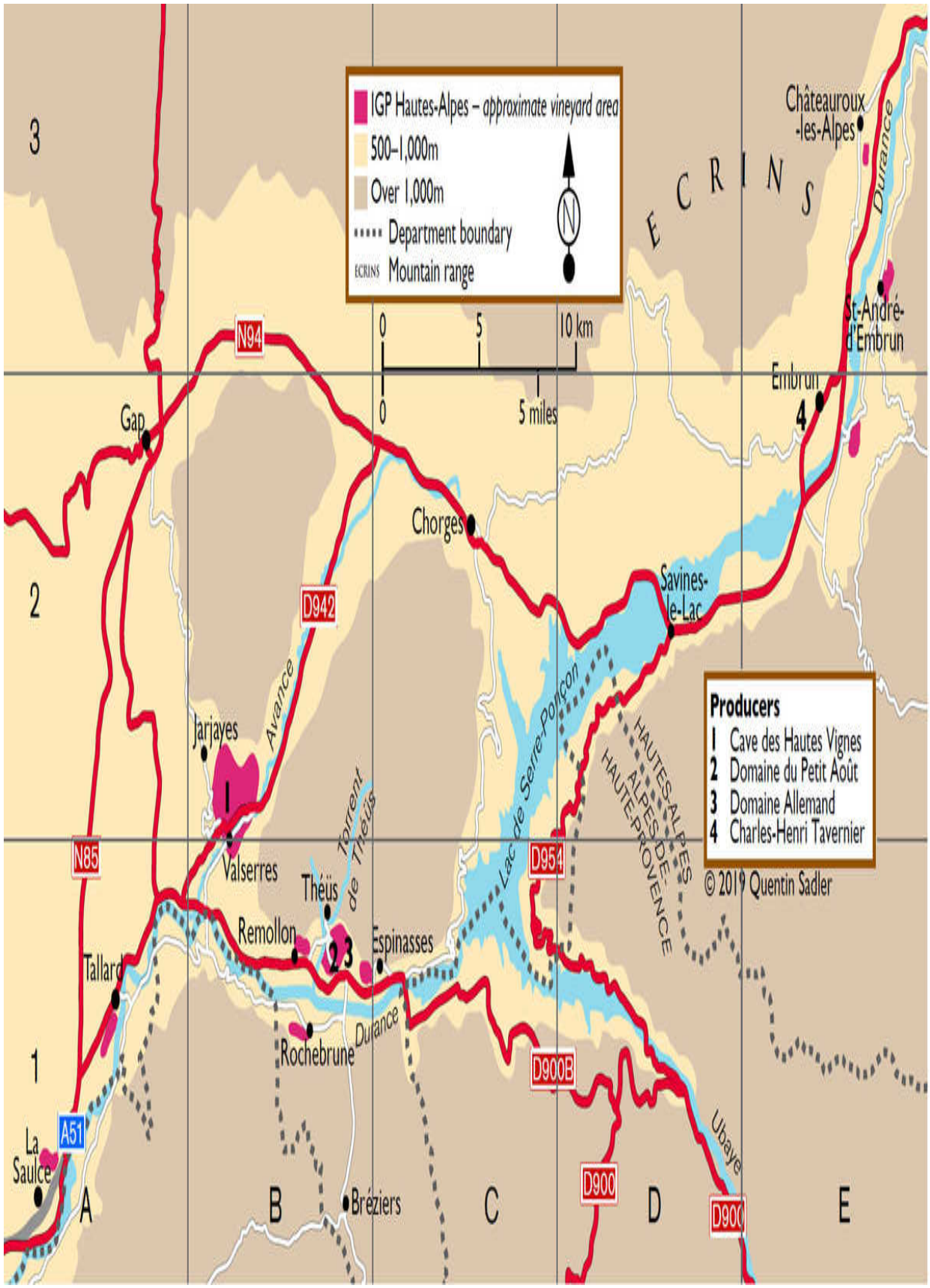
Today there are still seven partner members, no longer all young or even from the same original families, although some are the third generation. UJVR is the third largest winery in the Diois and has négociant status too, producing about half a million bottles, mainly of Clairette and Crémant, with a little still white wine from Aligoté. The vineyards are largely in Vercheny, Aurel, Barsac and St-Sauveur-en-Diois. UVJR is certified HVE and has farmed sustainably for several years, with every other row grassed down and using an *intercep* for weeding where possible. Systemic chemical anti-mildew sprays are used at the start of the season, but stopped at latest by the end of July. This is one of the wineries that pushed for a change to the AOC rules to allow machine harvesting for Clairette de Die grapes. The partners tested machine harvesting and like it not only for economic reasons but also because the time between the harvest and the grapes arriving at the press is shorter, and they find no quality difference between machine- and hand-picked fruit.

The winery is modern and the processing is the same as in most wineries here, looking for very clean juice at the start. The Clairette de Die transfer process may take up to four days. Apart from rosé, the UVJR has four sparkling cuvées, two each for Crémant and Clairette. All bear the name Chambéran, which was the name of the first vineyard. The premium level of each wine style is called Gamme Blanche or 'white label' and is a selection of the best vats, which usually equates to the best terroirs. With 13ha of Clairette, the partners use 15% in their Clairette de Die; the Crémant de Die is a blend of 75% Clairette with 24% Aligoté and 1% Muscat. Having tasted it on several occasions, I can confirm that the UJVR Crémant de Die Gamme Blanche is one of the best, delicate but vinous and

with less of the Clairette bitterness than in some. The range is overall more than competent and about one-third is sold at the tasting room, or at their shop 'Saveurs du Terroir' in the middle of Die, which also sells local produce, or occasionally at wine shows; one-third is exported to various countries, mainly in Europe; and the final one-third is sold to French supermarkets, often specifically made for them, from purchased fruit.

For several years UVJR has been presided by Bernard Pelissier, who at one point was president of the Clairette de Die syndicate, and both he and the company do much good for this region. His daughter runs her own estate, Domaine des Muttes, currently in conversion to organics.

UJVR
3000 Avenue de la Clairette, Route de Die, 26340 Vercheny
Tel: 04 75 21 70 88
Email: contact@ujvr.fr
Web: ujvr.fr
Map ref: C2
Vineyards: 62ha + some purchased grapes
Visits: Tasting room


IGP Hautes-Alpes – approximate vineyard area
500–1,000m
Over 1,000m
Department boundary
ECRINS Mountain range
N
0 5 10 km
0 5 miles
ECRINS
Durance
Châteauroux-les-Alpes
St-André-d'Embrun
Embrun
Gap
Chorges
Savines-le-Lac
N94
D942
N85
D954
D900B
D900
A51
Avance
Torrent de Théüs
Lac de Serre-Ponçon
HAUTES-ALPES
ALPES-DE-HAUTE-PROVENCE
Jarjayes
Valserres
Théüs
Remollon
Espinasses
Tallard
Rochebrune
La Saulce
Bréziers
Ubaye
1
2
3
4
A
B
C
D
E
Producers
1 Cave des Hautes Vignes
2 Domaine du Petit Août
3 Domaine Allemand
4 Charles-Henri Tavernier
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HAUTES-ALPES

I had never heard of wines from the Hautes-Alpes department until I tasted a Mollard wine at a CAAPG meeting. It was such a quintessential Alpine wine that it had me hooked, especially when I was told that Mollard was *the* grape of Hautes-Alpes, grown in vineyards at upwards of 600m altitude. When I learned that in the latter part of the 19th century, pre-phylloxera, there were more than 6,000ha of vineyards in Hautes-Alpes and now there were less than 150ha, this had me even more intrigued.

Everything is 'haute' or high in Hautes-Alpes: the town of Gap at 750m is the highest departmental capital in France, the department has the highest average altitude of land and yes, the highest average altitude for vineyards too. Today's vineyard plantings are in the most prized areas historically, close to the valley of the Durance river. Hautes-Alpes is the only wine region in this book where at least some of the vineyards are on real Alpine foothills, rather than Prealps foothills – the northern part of the vineyards lies in the Ecrins mountain range and national park. There are Provençal influences too, visible in architecture and vegetation – the department immediately to the south is named Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, which also has scattered vineyards, including AOC Pierrevert, but they are at lower altitude.

Most of the vineyards lie south of Gap between the Lac de Serre-Ponçon and Tallard in the mid-section of the Durance river, which rises near Briançon (the second-biggest Hautes-Alpes town). There were once four co-operative wineries in this area, but only Cave des Hautes Vignes remains in operation. The biggest tourist attraction is the beautiful Serre-Ponçon lake, the largest reservoir in France, created by the construction of a huge dam, completed in 1961. The dam allowed the planting of fruit orchards on the flat alluvial lands by the river, which contributed to the decline of the vineyards, and the region remains an important fruit producer.

The greatest density of vineyards is in the valley of the Avance, a small tributary of the Durance, near Valserres, where Cave des Hautes Vignes is based. Closer to the Durance, on its right bank, are interesting vineyards below Mont Colombis, just to the south of the Ecrins mountains between Remollon and Espinasses. Between these villages is La Plaine de Théüs, with vineyards lying on an old alluvial cone from the Torrent de Théüs. The delightful fortified village of Théüs is located up the hill. Close by are the spectacular *demoiselles coiffées* (ladies with hairdos) or *cheminées de fées* (fairy chimneys), eroded rock spires similar to the hoodoos in the US. They are well worth a visit and easy to access from the small side roads.

Overall in this area are varied clay-limestone soils, limestone scree and some marl, with vineyards at altitudes between 600m and 750m. Summers are hot with low rainfall (600–800mm annually); the mistral wind also dries the soils, which can restrict growth, but means disease pressure is low. At this altitude the wide day–night temperature variations allow the acidity to be maintained, despite the heat. Hail is an increasing issue and hit several vineyards in 2013 and 2014; spring frost can be a problem too. To the west, the fortified town of Tallard lies just off the Route Napoléon between Gap and Sisteron in Alpes-de-Haute-Provence; near the riverside here are more fruit orchards and vineyards on alluvial soils.

The northeast of the department around Embrun is the other area where some vineyards survive or have been replanted. The cathedral city of Embrun was once the capital of the maritime Alps and an early Christian diocese. Vineyards in the locality stretched from Embrun to Châteauroux-les-Alpes and further north, all farmed by the church, and some of these have been rescued and replanted at altitudes up to 1,000m. It is a challenge to produce regular commercial yields as spring frost is a frequent problem. Yet across this area there is widespread evidence of medieval presses and troglodytic cellars, and near L'Argentière-la-Bessée (off the map to the northeast) vineyards were located as high as 1,300m.

Remollon once had more vineyards than any other village in Hautes-Alpes with about 200ha at the beginning of the 20th century. Today all that remains is the Domaine de la Clochère with less than 2ha.

Producers and wines

There are currently nearly 140ha of vines grown commercially, mostly under the IGP Hautes-Alpes label. International varieties dominate; there are less than 10ha of the indigenous Mollard, often known in the area as Petit Mont, and less than 1ha of Espanenc. Cave des Hautes Vignes accounts for well over half the production and is profiled in this chapter, alongside three independent vignerons.

Others worthy of mention include the following: Olivier Ricard of Domaine de Tresbaudon in Tallard is the largest independent producer; he has about 20ha which he planted with international varieties from scratch from the late 1990s. He has a good local following, but the wines are less Alpine, from vineyards at lower altitude. Nearby, with organic vineyards at altitudes up to 700m, is organic fruit producer Philippe Bilocq of Domaine St-André, who has 3ha of non-local varieties – he makes his small production in a very natural way, with slightly inconsistent quality. Domaine de la Clochère is the only estate remaining in Remollon; it has 2ha of 45-year-old Mollard vines mixed in with other varieties, grown in a walled

vineyard by the church and owned by the mayor, Bernard Allard Latour. Bernard makes his reds in an old-fashioned way, ageing them in large, very old barrels, which shows the rusticity of Mollard and its companions. Bernard has been an important supporter of the renaissance of the local wines, as well as the rescue programme for Mollard.

Domaine Allemand

Both Louis and Marc Allemand, respectively grandfather and father of Laetitia Allemand, are pioneers and saviours of the wine region and Laetitia may be following in their footsteps. Louis was born into a local farming family, with a few vines made into wine mainly for family use. Having done military service in Champagne he was enamoured with the Champagne lifestyle and determined to become a vigneron on his return in 1954. He gave up mixed farming and aimed to make quality wines to sell in bottle, starting with a traditional method sparkling wine. Four years later Louis established the first Hautes-Alpes wine estate, located off the main road on the plain of Théüs, and planted more vineyards mainly with white grape varieties. In 1964 his wife, Marcelle, created a welcoming tasting room to sell their Hautes-Alpes wines direct to passing trade, locals and tourists alike. At the same time, Louis looked after a governmental experimental vineyard, testing out grape varieties suitable for mountain areas.

Marc joined his father in 1974 and helped to extend the vineyards and range of wines; Domaine Allemand became the first to be accorded the Vin de Pays des Hautes-Alpes designation (the forerunner to IGP) in 1984, the year Marc took over running the estate. In the early 1990s, he launched a passionate rescue campaign for the fast-disappearing Mollard, the emblematic grape variety of the region, conducting experimentation and clonal selection in conjunction with the Institut Français de la Vigne et du Vin. This led to Mollard being officially recognized in the register of grape varieties in 2005, and Domaine Allemand retains a nursery of Mollard clones. As for Laetitia, a TV journalist for 15 years and the only child

of Mireille and Marc, when she heard that her parents might sell the winery – at one point a partnership was considered with Yann de Agostini – she decided to join the family estate. From 2014 she did a Masters in wine business at Dijon University and has since used her journalistic experience to promote not only her family's wines but also those of the whole area, while learning about winemaking from her father.

Laetitia, Marc and Mireille Allemand

The vineyards next to the winery lie on gentle hills on the very stony soils of the old alluvial cone. There are further stony hillside vineyards spread across Théüs, Remollon and Espinasses at between 600m and 750m altitude, plus a few flatter vineyards near Tallard. Just over 4ha of Mollard is the family's pride, with the oldest vineyard including a relatively large area of 70-year-old vines; there are also plantings of Merlot, Cinsault and Cabernet Franc for reds and rosés. For whites, Muscat à Petits Grains accounts for 4ha, with a little Chardonnay and Ugni Blanc. The vineyards are farmed sustainably, grassed down where possible with mainly mechanical weeding and thermal gas to burn off the weeds; herbicide is used only on the

steeper vineyards. Marc does not like the use of copper and shuns Bordeaux mixture, but instead uses chemical contact sprays, then sulphur, avoiding spraying late in the season. Laetitia is interested in biodynamic methods but is biding her time to change things. Harvesting is exclusively by hand.

The winery building is spacious and everything including bottling is done there. Marc and Laetitia look for structured wines that show the classic acidity and minerality of their mountains and aim to limit intervention. For whites they use cultured yeasts and for reds they make a starter culture and then fermentation continues naturally. Temperature is controlled and fining is with bentonite, with light filtration. Marc uses a consultant oenologist from Aix-en-Provence during harvest; otherwise he works with Laetitia and with long-term assistant Laurent, who also helps in the vineyards.

The stars of the range are the wines from Mollard and Muscat varieties. In sparkling wines, the standout is a limited volume 100% Mollard Méthode Traditionelle Brut Rosé, a copper-coloured, stony and zippy bubbly that spends a couple of years on lees. In whites, Le Théüsien is a dry and delicate Muscat with just a touch of spritz. The rosé Goût des Vacances has 20% Mollard from young vines with Cabernet Franc, whereas Mollard is used in roughly equal parts with Merlot for the red M & M Secret Partagé – far from chocolatey, it delivers some deep fruit character. From the 2016 vintage Laetitia has made a red blend named Ma Cuvée. It's a classic winemaker creation of Merlot and Mollard with a touch of Cabernet Franc, co-fermented using punch-down in barrels, then 15 months ageing in two-year-old Burgundy barrels. I prefer Le Théüsien red from 100% old-vine Mollard with just a short time in oak, which to me expresses more of an Alpine freshness and acidulated cherry character. Laetitia has made a small volume of a skin-contact Muscat too, which has potential. It seems Marc and Laetitia are beginning to have 'his and hers' cuvées. All the wines have a slightly hard edge to the finish, which frustrates me as this comes close to being an excellent range.

Producing around 45,000 bottles in a typical year (not 2017, ravaged by frost), almost all the wines are sold locally – some in the amazing vintage tasting room, looked after by Mireille or their genial

long-term employee Véronique. There you can also find a range of fruit spirits, distilled on the premises. There are a few Paris wine shops who take the wines, but so far no significant exports. Marc and Mireille, along with grandfather Louis, who still lives on the estate, are delighted Laetitia is taking over and give her every support. There are no plans to grow this proud and historic estate and I am willing Laetitia to focus on the vineyards and winery to create more finesse in their wines – I feel sure it's possible.

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Vineyards: 12ha
Visits: Tasting room

Cave des Hautes Vignes

It is a little sad that the only remaining Hautes-Alpes wine co-operative isn't the biggest fan of Mollard, the region's emblematic variety – however, two of the 68 members retain plots totalling about 2ha, and three of the wines in the range feature Mollard. The lack of love for Mollard is easily explainable, for this co-operative cellar is resolutely geared to the palates of the locals, with one-third of the production sold from the tasting room and the rest to supermarkets, shops and restaurants almost exclusively within the department. Among the older locals, Mollard does not have a good reputation – the grape gave high yields and long macerations made it very tough, plus the name has a slang meaning that doesn't endear it.

Originally named Cave Coopérative La Valserroise, it was founded in 1950 and was the first of the region's co-operatives to bottle its wines. At that time almost all the grapes were red, mainly Cinsault, giving very light wines, which were often blended with Algerian wine to beef them up – perfectly legal then. As tourism became more important, white wine was needed too; the local Muscat wasn't ideal, so the Cave was the first in the region to plant Chardonnay in the early 1990s, with about 30ha grown today. There is still around 2ha of Muscat, as well as newer 1.5ha plantings of Roussanne. For reds, there is only 3ha of Cinsault left, mainly used for rosé. The largest red plantings are of Merlot, with some Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Mollard. The Bordeaux varieties were planted from the mid-1990s; the Syrah was planted later, but struggles to ripen, so will be grafted over gradually to Merlot.

Despite having taken on some of the growers from the other co-operatives when they closed, the number of members is on a steady downward slide. In order to make a living it is estimated that a co-operative grower needs 20ha of vineyards if that's all he does, hence there is little interest from young people. Back in 2000 there were 170 members; of the 68 remaining only two are full-time growers and between them these two are responsible for about half the vineyards. Domaine de la Grande Hauche in Valserres is owned by Jean Sarret and his family and Domaine des Treilloux in nearby Jarjayes is owned by Bernard Estachy. Both converted to organic viticulture at the turn of the century and the co-operative adapted its cellars so that the organic grapes could be handled separately, and thus the estate names appear on labels. The other members tend to use herbicide, the easier option – when rain does come it's often fierce, and regular erosion in the vineyards makes them hard to work without specialized machinery that small growers don't own.

The only remaining wine co-operative in Hautes-Alpes is the Cave des Hautes Vignes in Valserres.

The best of the organic wines are the Domaine de la Grande Hauche Cuvée Léane, a just off-dry Roussanne, and the weighty but fresh Domaine des Treilloux red, a Merlot-based blend with some Syrah. Among the non-organic wines of interest is a cuvée named Croquant Petit Grain, a fresh, dry, early-drinking Muscat. The wines that feature Mollard are a simple rosé blend and two successful reds, one a blend of Cinsault with Mollard and the other a pure Mollard, which is labelled Rare Cépage.

Trained winemakers were employed and the cellar was modernized in the 1990s and 2000s, leading to an increase in quality. This co-operative holds its head up, and I sense that with some motivation to sell beyond the local area and a little advice, it could do much better.

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Map ref: B2
Contact: Jean Sarret
Vineyards: 75ha

Certification: Ecocert (for part)
Visits: Tasting room

Domaine du Petit Août

Yann de Agostini is the most important recently established vigneron in Hautes-Alpes and a champion of both its best vineyard terroir and its indigenous grape varieties. Yann's grandfather came here from close to Lake Maggiore in Italy as a mason, a trade Yann's father continued. Born near Gap, Yann studied wine and worked in Cognac and Bordeaux, St-Emilion and Cahors, then over in Australia's Yarra Valley with Martin Williams MW and finally at Château Mont-Redon in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. He returned home to join his girlfriend, now wife, Anne, a psychologist in Gap, and between 2002 and 2008 became the winemaker for Cave des Hautes Vignes. Knowing Marc Allemand and having been to high school with his daughter Laetitia, Marc and Yann made a deal in 2009, whereby Yann could establish his own estate with help from the Allemands, making his first vintages of some old-vine Mollard at their winery; in return he worked on their estate. The partnership might have concretized into something bigger, but from the 2012 vintage the two domaines decided they would be best working apart and in 2013 Yann took on more old vineyards and land to plant.

Yann de Agostini in one of his young Mollard vineyards.

As well as being a champion of Mollard for reds and Clairette for whites, Yann was fascinated by an old variety called Espanenc or Plant Droit, which was once much planted in the region and which he had found in the vineyards of one of the co-operative members. He made an experimental cuvée with a few vines in 2015 and was able to take over 0.1ha to make 400 bottles in 2016 and to take cuttings. In 2016 he ran a successful crowdfunding campaign to help with costs for clearing land and planting a new plot of Mollard in 2016 and a further 0.2ha plot of Espanenc in 2017. Locals knew Espanenc as *pousse* or *pie de chèvre*, because the bunches are said to be similar to goat's teats… but Yann's Espanenc cuvée is named Un de Ces Jours (One of These Days). Having tasted it a couple of times, I can see what makes Yann excited – a quintessential rustic mountain red, but with a potentially greater depth of fruit than Mollard, it seems ideal for the area.

More than half of Yann's vineyards are planted with Mollard, including about 2ha of old vines, some now over 80 years old. In all, he farms about 20 parcels located in Remollon, Rochebrune and Espinasses as well as some historic vineyard plots on the impressive road that winds up the gorge to Théüs. Altitudes are between 600m and 700m. Alongside Mollard and Espanenc Yann has 0.3ha of Cabernet Sauvignon. For whites, 1.2ha of Roussanne and 0.8ha of Clairette form the largest plantings, with 0.2ha each of Marsanne and

Muscat. He has some old Muscat à Petits Grains and some newly planted Muscat d'Alexandrie, which ripens later and provides acidity. Yann has always ploughed the soil and he originally used herbicide below the vine rows but has never used systemic chemical treatments; from 2013 he converted the vineyards to organics with full certification in 2017. He believes that the soil is too dry to work well with biodynamics and has not yet tried plant treatments but uses sweet orange essential oil to help combat oidium and reduce the sulphur sprays. Due to the range of grape varieties his harvest extends over four weeks, usually from mid-September; all harvesting is by hand.

Yann's winemaking approach is simple, and he is skilled at it, with his practical winery built into the hillside stocked with a Vaslin press, mainly fibreglass tanks and some oak barrels, using CMC's Provence outpost for bottling and also for disgorging of the sparkling wine. He uses neutral cultured yeasts for some cuvées, but otherwise his winemaking is very hands-off, with low sulphur levels. In a normal year, Yann makes about 24,000 bottles – the figure was 14,000 in 2017 due to the harsh frosts, with fewer cuvées than usual. His wines are named after popular French song and album titles and, apart from the Espanenc, all the red cuvées include Mollard. There are three 100% versions: the juicy Mémoire Neuve has no barrel ageing and is made to drink young; Tout Compte, Tout Compte Fait is from the very old vines and aged in old oak; and the 40-year-old Mollard goes into a cuvée called Mille Façons, inspired by Philippe Grisard of Savoie – hand destemmed and fermented in oak, with a very long maceration – I've never managed to taste this. Finally, Les Amis Imaginaires (the delightfully named 'imaginary friends') is equal parts of Mollard and Cabernet Sauvignon with a little oak ageing – the Cabernet adds tannin and the style is very vintage dependent. He makes a delicious Mollard rosé, called New Rose.

Yann believes that Clairette is a very good variety for the area – he makes an Extra Brut 100% Clairette sparkling named L'Imprudence, with low *dosage* working a treat and better than most Clairette de Die Brut I've tasted; in Sur Le Fil, 40% Clairette (60% in 2017) is blended with Roussanne and about two-thirds is oak

fermented. The result combines herbal aromatic characters with slight peachiness and stony freshness – a delight. Le Poids du Superflu is usually Marsanne, Roussanne and Clairette fermented in four-year-old Meursault barrels, giving a dry, fuller and spicy white. The frivolous and fruity Fête Foraine is co-fermented Muscat (50–60%) with any leftover Roussanne and Clairette plus some stray Chardonnay vines.

Yann exports to the US and the UK, accounting for about 15%, which he hopes to increase to a third of production. About half is currently sold locally and the rest to wine shops around France. Proof of his dedication to innovating with Hautes-Alpes products, Yann is also a partner in Apple des Cimes, whose 'ice ciders' are made in his winery; manager Philippe Rostain is a great unofficial salesman for Yann's wines. Otherwise Yann works entirely on his own, except for seasonal vineyard workers – I hope his trajectory is ever upwards.

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Vineyards: 6.4ha
Certification: Alpes Contrôles
Visits: Preferably by appointment

Charles-Henri Tavernier

Known to all as Charly, this genial vigneron made his last vintage of Hautes-Alpes wines in 2018, but he has certainly left his mark on the region. Originally from a cattle-farming family in Normandy, he studied geography in Paris, spending two years in Hautes-Alpes writing a thesis on the vineyards; it was published in 2000 (see

Bibliography). He became enamoured with Hautes-Alpes and with wine, so moved on to wine studies at Beaune, with work experience in Irancy, and with the biodynamic estate Domaine de la Garrelière in the Loire Valley.

In 2003, Charly set up his small estate, taking over an official departmental experimental vineyard in Châteauroux-les-Alpes and little by little taking on numerous tiny family-run plots that were threatened with disappearance, mainly in St-André d'Embrun. In some he was able to keep the parcels of old vines; others he replanted. He ended up with nearly 4ha between Embrun and Châteauroux at altitudes from 800m to 1,000m. Many of the plots in St-André are divided by old walls, built by the church as steps climbing up from the Durance river in the 13th or 14th century – it's an extraordinary sight. The soils are largely clay-limestone, with limestone scree and one area on an old alluvial cone. In 2013/14 he converted all his vineyards officially to organics and made compost along biodynamic lines. Spring frosts have resulted in very erratic production and even in good vintages Charly never managed to make more than 10,000 bottles.

Charly created a winery in the cellar of the old village home he bought and restored. With a mixture of tanks and barrels, spotlessly clean, Charly developed into a thoughtful, natural winemaker, using only natural yeast and very low or no SO_2. With a huge range of grape varieties, he generally made two cuvées of white and two or three of red, nearly always blends – he promised some surprise single varietal wines for his last vintage. All his wines have marked acidity, which you would expect at this altitude. In whites, vintages I tasted of his Cuvée Mélilot, from the best plots of Chardonnay and Chasan (a crossing of Chardonnay and Listan), were full of life – made in a Burgundy style, the oak giving texture. In reds his unoaked blend of about two-thirds of all sorts of old vines, mainly southern varieties, combined with press wine from young Gamay, Mollard, Pinot and Cabernet Franc, marries warm fruit with bite. The barrique-aged red with one-third of the best of the old vines, plus young vines of Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Cabernet Franc and Mollard, is built to age a

while. Most of the wines have been sold under the IGP label, though some were deemed 'too natural' and sold as Vin de France.

In later vintages Charly exported reasonable quantities to a Belgian client; the rest is sold at markets, wine shows and through local shops. Three vignerons have taken on Charly's vines to supplement their own little plots and he will let them use his cellar to begin with. As for Charly, he is seeking a somewhat easier life and is planting Chasselas to farm table grapes. A massive supporter of the region's wines, without Charly, there would be no commercial winemaking in this northeastern part of Hautes-Alpes.

Charles-Henri Tavernier (retired)
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Certification: Alpes Contrôles
Visits: Preferably by appointment

The walls around these vineyards in St-André d'Embrun above the Durance river were originally built by the church, which farmed vines for the Christian diocese of Embrun.

In the Bugey region, these vineyards on the once deserted vineyard slopes of Argis are being maintained and replanted by organic vigneron Luc Bauer of Les Grangeons de l'Albarine.

THE FUTURE FOR FRENCH ALPINE WINES AND THEIR PRODUCERS

As the second decade of the 21st century draws to a close, the stars are aligning for those who make wines in the foothills of the French Alps, even if shadows also lurk behind those crystalline skies. Wines from these steep hillsides promise so much. Many of these wines are born of unusual grapes and their light and fresh profile is in tune with the changing tastes of many consumers. They offer a sense of place that anyone can relate to who has visited or admired photographs of the gorgeous French Alps. Exports are inching up and the word is spreading that there are new wine regions to discover here.

These once-isolated mountain wine areas have progressed in quality no end, but it has taken time for them to believe in themselves. Recently, vignerons have begun to work together, especially through a burgeoning interest in rare grapes, but also through the French fascination for preserving *la patrimoine* or heritage – specifically, historical vineyard areas. A real cause for optimism is the increase in young vignerons choosing to work in the sometimes tough conditions of the French Alpine terroir, often organically. French Alps wines are poised to claim an important niche in the esoteric wine world.

The challenges for the future

In many key Savoie areas, and in the tiny Isère wine areas too, finding vineyards to lease or buy for newcomers is particularly hard, due to the pressure of housing and, in Savoie, the acquisition power of the major négociants. This is worrying as vignerons require an optimum area of vineyards in order to make a living. Finding people willing to work in steep vineyards is increasingly difficult and production costs go skywards. Striving for lower yields to give better quality means higher sales prices are needed – yet many producers fear losing their traditional customers if they raise prices by more than a small amount each year. Traditional markets are changing – the once popular Clairette de Die is often seen in France as yesterday's choice, and the ski industry is no longer a reliable source of 'white gold'.

While climate change offers many potential benefits for French Alps wine regions, it carries huge risks, with increasingly unpredictable weather, more frequent severe spring frosts and localized hail. As I write, the 2019 vintage has been badly hit in Savoie by a massive hailstorm in June. Many vignerons feel helpless in the face of these challenges and it sometimes seems that the official regional organizations which represent them are stuck in the 20th century.

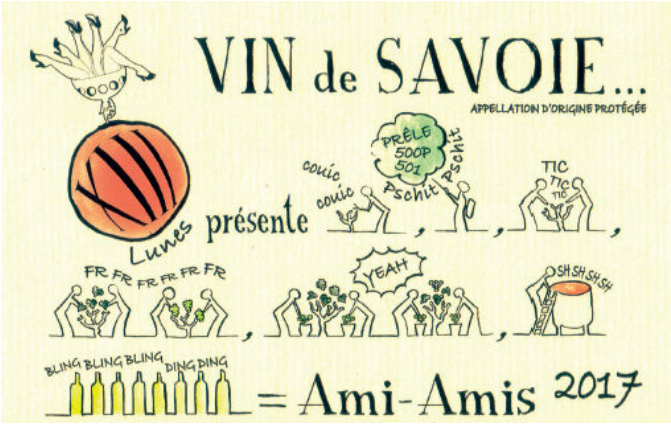
Protecting or promoting?

The vast majority of the wonderful wines of Savoie and Bugey discussed in this book are in the AOC category, which has helped raise the profile of both regions. The AOC designation is defended staunchly and only wines from these categories may bear the name of the region on their labels. But this means that many wines that don't meet AOC requirements are labelled simply Vin de France, without being able to proclaim their proud origins – these include wines from rehabilitated local grape varieties, from revived vineyard slopes, or indeed those made in a natural way. I am not against protecting the concept of terroir but the priorities of those who defend the AOCs so fiercely are increasingly out of tune with consumers' interests. Discussing at length how to instigate a premier or grand cru system, to add to the complexities of the Savoie AOC, for example, or fighting Clairette de Die rosé as Bugey has done, do not improve the overall image of the regions.

Producers who make IGP and Vin de France wines, often working with lower yields and greater respect for the environment, are effectively promoting their regions even without the name on their labels. It is in the quest to preserve history and to create wine areas fit for the future that the isolated vignerons of Isère and Hautes-Alpes, both working under the more flexible IGP designations, show signs of flourishing in the next decade. Restaurateurs and wine shops in France and abroad may care little about AOC – they list these wines because they are high quality and they cite the region on their lists anyway.

The biggest positive in Savoie, Bugey and beyond is the creation of new wine estates, many organically certified, and these estates are more frequently working together to exchange ideas and indeed to promote their wines. The Pétavins group was the first non-official producer group to run trade tastings, mainly in Paris, but the original group has been slow to welcome newcomers. In May 2019 the first edition of a new trade tasting, named Jour Fruit, was held in the Savoie vineyards. Organized by an independent sommelier, it featured more than a dozen vignerons, not all of them young or organic, but all keen to share their top-quality wines. This was a welcome change from the ongoing friction between organic and non-organic factions,

and I truly hope this rancour will disappear with younger generations taking over.



Sylvain Liotard of Domaine des 13 Lunes names his cuvée Ami-Amis to reflect both the grape blend in the wine and the friends who helped produce it.

The price of protecting the environment

Undoubtedly it is extremely hard to manage vineyards in these mountain areas, especially for those who work organically. On the rise are sustainability initiatives, such as the HVE certification, which covers more than just the vineyards. But HVE has little consumer recognition and is unlikely to achieve greater returns for its practitioners unless it becomes a stepping stone towards organic farming. Growing numbers of vignerons have proved that it is possible to work organically and receive a sufficient financial return, selling more to export markets too. But the question of setting the right sales price for the quality of wines offered is something the vignerons of these areas need to work on. I know several excellent vignerons who I believe should increase their prices and use the money to invest; on the other hand I know too many young, organic vignerons who priced their wines over-ambitiously from their very first vintage and will need to take care that they can maintain customer loyalty at those prices.

Marketing the mountains

For these regions to flourish, vignerons need to work closely together. I would love to see more co-operation between the different French Alps wine regions. Vins des Coteaux Alpins ('wines from Alpine slopes') is a perfect name for a group of three IGP areas, but aside from a rarely updated website, it has been little publicized. My Utopian view would be a marketing group covering all the French Alps AOC, IGP and Vin de France producers and such a banner would also be ideal for creating focused wine tourism opportunities, especially those aimed at foreigners. Producers need to remember that today it is not the plaudits from journalists or competition medals that necessarily sell wines, but consumers discovering the wines for themselves and spreading the word, for example via social media. The people who put their hands in their wallets to pay more for the costs of hand-weeding a steep mountain vineyard are those who will share their enthusiasm for these exciting and unusual wines.

The future is in the hands of the inheritors of these lands and grapes, whether they are the successors to the hard-working vignerons of centuries gone by, or the newcomers who have decided to adopt these mountain vineyards as their own.

ENJOYING THE LOCAL FOOD AND WINES

Abondance cows graze in the meadows above the Col des Aravis, with a view to Mont Blanc. This is the heart of Reblochon country.

FRENCH ALPINE CHEESES

All around the world, cheese is the product most readily associated with Alpine lands. While many holidaymakers in the French Alps experience Alpine cheese only in the form of fondue, raclette or tartiflette, connoisseurs relish it in its pure state on a cheese board. It is no understatement to say that if it were not for the success of Alpine cheeses outside their regions, allied with the rise of tourism in the Alps, many mountain communities in the French Alps would simply have disappeared, their population leaving for an easier life in the cities.

Tommes ageing in the cellars of Monts et Terroirs in Montmélian. The smaller, higher ones in the foreground are Tommettes; others are versions of Tomme de Savoie.

For anyone who has visited the Alps in summer the sound of cowbells is an inextricable part of the experience. In the northern Alps, cows have always been seen grazing on the pastures, whereas further south towards Provence, where it is drier, there are fewer cows and more sheep and goats. However, in the past two decades the herds of sheep and goats in the north have increased, thanks to a wider appreciation of goat's and sheep's milk cheeses.

Almost all French Alpine cow cheeses are made with milk from one or more of three breeds of cow — Abondance, Tarine (Tarentaise) and Montbéliarde, stocky breeds that can cope with grazing on very steep pastureland. Their horns are usually kept on, which can be daunting when you go hiking and come across a herd of large cows, but they are almost always harmless (unless they are protecting a young calf), so if you ignore them, they will ignore you.

Alpine cheeses taste different depending on whether the cheese was made from summer or winter milk, because in summer the animals feed exclusively on grass and Alpine meadow flowers. Indeed, the rhythm of life in Alpine territories is demonstrated most clearly by the twice-yearly transhumance, the moving of the animals between their winter and summer abodes. In Alpine winters, roughly from November to April, the animals remain inside, eat hay or cattle feed and are milked at the farm, at altitudes normally of 1,200m or lower. Taking the cows up to the higher pastures (the *alpages*) for the summer, up to 2,500m in places, is a joyful event and often family and friends join in – this is when the distinctive bells are put round the animals' necks and stay there through the summer months. The animals are milked either at a *chalet d'alpage*, a simple chalet up the mountain where one or two family members decamp and make the cheese, or by a mobile milking line. All cheeses that require long ageing have to be taken down the valley. However, cheeses aged at reasonably high altitude, where the air is drier, can benefit from long, slow ageing conditions. Some *affineurs* (cheese-agers) have created ageing cellars in tunnels carved into the limestone cliffs.

The parade at the annual Retour des Alpages festival in Annecy.

Village festivals mark transhumance, even if just symbolically, and cows at the festivals wear larger-than-normal leather collars and bells. Every June a large transhumance festival for sheep takes place in Die, when fit hikers can accompany the sheep being taken up to the high pastures. Bringing the animals down for winter is also an occasion – Annecy, for example, has a festival parade in October, Le Retour des Alpages.

When you buy cheese, note that cheeses made at an individual farm or by cheese farmer co-operatives are known as *fermier*. Farm-made Abondance, Reblochon, Tome des Bauges and Tomme de Savoie have a green oval casein seal placed in the rind. If they are made in a creamery or factory then the seal is red. AOP or IGP regulations state that certain cheeses must be made with raw (unpasteurized) or thermalized (between raw and pasteurized) milk.

Also note that the word *tomme* or *toma* in Savoyard dialect means simply a 'round cheese'. This can be confusing for those who know the cheese Tomme de Savoie, as the word may be casually used in conversation to denote a whole round cheese of any sort, e.g. a *tomme de* Reblochon.

Appellation d'Origine Protégée (AOP) is the French version of the European Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) system for protecting the authenticity of agricultural products, especially food and drink. AOP officially replaces Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée

(AOC); where relevant I have mentioned the date the product was first granted protected status. A lower tier of the system, Indication Géographique Protégée (IGP), has slightly more flexible rules.

Cow cheeses

In 2018 Beaufort and Reblochon, arguably the most famous cheeses of the French Alps, celebrated respectively 50 and 60 years in the AOC (now AOP) system. Quite different one from another, they demonstrate the variety of mountain cow cheese styles, the best known of which are described below. This section begins with hard cheeses, listed alphabetically, then soft cheeses (which begin with Reblochon), then blue cheeses.

Abondance AOP

Although Abondance was granted AOC only in 1990, the cheese dates back to medieval times. Monks made this cheese at the Abbaye d'Abondance and its name was established in 1378 when it was served at the papal election in Avignon. The cheese, and the valley – and a breed of cow – take their name from a village in Haute-Savoie, which is just a few kilometres south of Lac Léman. Beyond the Abondance valley, the semi-hard raw milk cheese can also be made in the nearby regions of the Aravis and Mont Blanc.

Beaufort ageing. The cheese has a concave wall, which is stamped with a green casein seal for traceability.

The cheese is left to mature on spruce boards for a minimum of 100 days, during which it is regularly turned. The cheese wheels are typically around 40cm in diameter and weigh around 10kg, with an amber rind which should not be eaten. Abondance has less powerful flavours than Beaufort or Comté but it is a particularly good choice in winter when the cheese is 6–8 months old. It is ivory to pale primrose in colour, supple yet velvety and slightly grainy on the tongue.

Beaufort AOP

Produced in the Savoie valleys of Beaufortain, Val d'Arly, Maurienne and Tarentaise, this firm cheese – granted AOC in 1968 – is sometimes known as the 'Prince des Gruyères', because it is made in what is referred to as the Gruyère method. Beaufort is made from raw milk, mainly from Tarine cows, though Abondance milk is allowed too.

There are three versions. The first, simply called Beaufort, is made from November to May when the cows are usually stabled and eat hay (no silage is allowed in their winter feed), producing an ivory-coloured cheese. Beaufort d'été or summer Beaufort is pale yellow and made from June to October when the cows are grazing on Alpine pastures at higher altitudes. Chalet d'alpage Beaufort is the smallest production, made from June to October, from the milk of a single herd of cows, based at a summer chalet in pastures at an altitude above 1,500m. It has the punchiest flavour of the three.

The traditions of Beaufort go back a long way. A thousand tonnes of Beaufort's predecessor, Grovire, produced only in the Beaufortain valley, was sent to Paris during the French Revolution to feed the starving. Soon after, when Grovire production extended to the surrounding valleys, the cheese became known as Beaufort, after the small village of the same name. Modern producers (most Beaufort is made by cheese co-operatives) use the same traditional heating, coagulation, pressing and maturation methods to create every Beaufort cheese wheel.

A typical Beaufort wheel weighs around 40kg with a 50cm diameter – some are even bigger. The wall of the cheese is concave: it's made this way because farmers used to wind ropes around the wheels to secure them to the donkeys that transported the cheese down the valley for ageing or sale.

Beaufort must be aged for a minimum of five months, producing a yellow or brown rind, but it is preferable to buy Beaufort at least 12 months old. The cheese is often sharper than Gruyère or Comté, somewhat less nutty and more creamy. This is an expensive but often sublime treat.

Comté AOP

You might think of Comté as the cheese *par excellence* of the Jura, but it is also produced in neighbouring Ain, close to the Cerdon wine region in Bugey, although this rarely matches the top-quality Jura versions. It was one of the first French cheeses to be protected by an AOC, in 1958. The cheese's characteristics are similar to many in the Gruyère-type family – raw milk from cows grazing on Alpine pastures is made into large wheels of cheese through heating, adding rennet and pressing to remove moisture before brining and maturation. A typical Comté cheese weighs around 40kg, with a diameter of about 60cm.

Ageing is for a minimum of four months, although eight months is typical, and up to 36 months for a stronger taste. During this time, the cheeses rest on spruce wood shelves and are turned, rubbed and salted regularly. The best cheeses are aged in a cold cellar (below 14°C); the length of time in the cellar – as well as the season when the cheese was made – affects the flavour.

Emmental de Savoie IGP

Produced in the departments of Savoie and Haute-Savoie, a single Emmental de Savoie cheese weighs around 75kg and requires 850 litres of milk to make the 75cm diameter wheel, qualifying it as one

of the world's largest cheeses. Production ramped up in the 19th century, and after a decline it was bolstered with IGP status in 1996.

This firm, pressed cheese is made from raw milk and is matured for at least 75 days. Golden to pale yellow in colour, with holes ('eyes') as large as hazelnuts, it has a golden rind on which the red Savoie coat of arms and wording is stamped. This supple cheese has a smooth, chewy texture and a subtle fruity, buttery taste.

Raclette de Savoie IGP

The word *raclette* comes from the French word *racler*, 'to scrape'; a cheese with raclette in its name is expected to be melted and scraped with a spatula, and served hot (see here).

The cheese originates in the Swiss area of Valais but over the years was adopted in many mountain areas of France. In 2010, after a twelve-year legal battle between the two countries, nobody won outright: raclette remained a general term, allowing any cheesemaker to produce it worldwide, and Raclette du Valais was granted AOP certification. France didn't give up, resulting in the certification Raclette de Savoie IGP in January 2017. Raclette de Savoie can be produced in the departments of Haute-Savoie and Savoie, and some communes within the departments of Ain and Isère.

Fromage AU LAIT CRU & ENTIER des Moines Trappistes de l'Abbaye de Tamié
Abbaye de Tamié
Tradition monastique depuis 1132

Made by monks, Abbaye de Tamié cheese has the consistency of Reblochon.

Made from raw milk, this pressed, semi-hard cheese is matured for at least eight weeks. Each wheel weighs around 6kg, with a 30cm diameter. The cheese is creamy and smooth with a slightly salty, nutty taste. The fruity aroma of the cheese intensifies when melted, as does the flavour. Raclette de Savoie can also be used in cooking or served cold.

Brézain, created in 1992, is a pasteurized smoked raclette cheese.

Tome des Bauges AOP

The name of this raw milk, pressed cheese is not misspelt: it's a variation of the Savoyard word *tomme*. Tome des Bauges was originally made for personal consumption by families in the Bauges mountain range, which straddles Savoie and Haute-Savoie. An AOC cheese since 2002, production is restricted to villages in the Bauges.

The Tome is matured for at least five weeks to produce a firm yet creamy, pale yellow cheese with a rather uneven grey rind. It is around 5cm high, 20cm in diameter and weighs just over 1kg. It has a more delicate, balanced fruity flavour than many Tommes de Savoie.

Tomme de Savoie IGP

Historically, Tomme de Savoie was made from the milk remaining after the cream had been skimmed off for butter-making. Today's Tommes are available in various fat contents, from 10 to 40%.

The cheese is made from raw or thermalized milk. After pressing, it is aged for at least 30 days to produce a mild flavour, and up to three months to strengthen the notes of lactic acid and farmyard character. It is pale yellow with small holes throughout, firm and supple.

Tomme de Savoie usually weighs 1.2–2kg and is 5–8cm high with a 20cm diameter and a grey speckled rind. It gained IGP status in 1996 and can be made in the departments of Savoie and Haute-

Savoie, and some communes in the departments of Ain and Isère. Local cheese-sellers and market stalls tend to offer a range of Tommes of different styles – do ask to try them before buying. This is a supremely good value and tasty mountain cheese.

Reblochon AOP

Originating in the Aravis mountain area above Annecy in Haute-Savoie, farmers who produced Reblochon in the 14th century did not own their land; they were charged rental according to how much milk their cows produced. Farmers therefore stopped milking their cows before the udders were empty, resulting in lower output for the landlords to measure rental charges. After paying their fees, the farmers returned to the cows to collect the remaining milk. From this milk, Reblochon was made. The cheese was named after the old dialect word *reblocher*, which means to re-milk the cow.

Granted AOC status in 1958, Reblochon can be made throughout the mountain areas of Haute-Savoie and in the Val d'Arly area in Savoie, right by the Haute-Savoie border. Reblochon is a raw milk cheese and Reblochon *fermier* is still made twice daily immediately after milking, before the milk has cooled. Reblochon made at co-operatives and creameries is usually only made once a day.

After an initial pressing, the cheese is placed in a brine bath for two hours, then in a drying area for a week, where it is turned and washed daily. It is then matured for at least 18 days; it develops an edible thin orange rind covered in powdery mould. Reblochon is 14cm in diameter and 3.5cm high, weighing 500g, with some producers offering a 250g version.

Reblochon has a creamy, soft interior, is mild in flavour, with a lingering hazelnut taste; in summer, cheeses usually have more complex flavours because the cows have been grazing on the flower-strewn pastures – indeed, in early summer the scent of the cheese is almost floral. If it is aged for beyond about four weeks, the flavour becomes much stronger, and the rind harder. Many locals believe that in winter Reblochon is simply best for cooking (see tartiflette), but it is very versatile in the kitchen. If you are visiting the region, you may

find at some restaurants a salad made with **Tomme Blanche** – this is a young, fresh version of Reblochon, normally less than 48 hours old. It needs salt, pepper and herbs to add flavour, but has a lovely texture.

Abbaye de Tamié

Every day, Trappist monks at Tamié Abbey, not far from Albertville, produce 400kg of cheese, using raw milk from eight farms in the surrounding area of the Bauges mountains. Cheese has been made at the abbey for centuries, and commercial production of Abbaye de Tamié began in the 19th century. This pressed cheese is made in a similar way to Reblochon, but in larger sizes: 600g and 1.6kg. It has a saffron-coloured rind with a white bloom, and is sold wrapped in paper with a distinctive blue cross.

Visiting cheesemakers

All of the cheese co-operatives (sometimes called *fruitières*) have shops selling their cheese, and often other local products too. At some of them there are explanatory panels showing how the cheese is made and you can tour the facilities at certain times or by arrangement. The co-operative in the village of Beaufort is particularly good. Although Reblochon has its co-operative in Thônes, you can also buy Reblochon and other cheeses direct from the farm.

Saint-Marcellin IGP

Historically made from goat's milk, St-Marcellin, from Isère, is now made exclusively from cow's milk. It is available in raw and pasteurized versions, as well as a firmer *sec* style and a softer and more popular *moelleux* style. It is a small cheese of around 8cm diameter and 2–2.5cm high, weighing at least 80g. This unpressed cheese was given IGP status in 2013.

St-Marcellin is normally ready to eat after two weeks' ageing. Left longer, the soft white crust thickens and becomes yellow, and the interior gets runnier. It is often sold in a terracotta ramekin, like those used for crème brûlée, to keep the cheese's shape intact.

Matching French Alps wine to local cheeses

The relatively high acidity and the general lack of strong oak flavours in both red and white French Alpine wines, plus the generally low tannins of the reds, make them a joy to drink with cheese. Personally I choose a white over a red every time to match with a cheese board or with cooked cheese dishes.

Wines from the Altesse variety or an unoaked Chardonnay are the most versatile; for reds, don't underestimate a zippy Alpine Gamay. Identifying a perfect match is impossible. However, below are a few suggestions by grape variety, style or appellation. These do not take into account the age of the cheese, which makes a great difference – generally the older the cheese, the stronger the flavours, so choose a more powerfully flavoured wine to match.

- Abondance: Gringet (still Ayze) or Chasselas
- Beaufort: Altesse, especially Marestel, or Roussanne (Chignin Bergeron). A mature Beaufort might work with a mature Mondeuse
- Tomme de Savoie/Tome des Bauges: Gamay or Jacquère
- Reblochon: Jacquère, dry Altesse, fruity Mondeuse or Pinot Noir
- St-Marcellin/St-Félicien: Altesse or Gamay
- Blue cheese: Chignin Bergeron or late-harvest Altesse
- Chevrotin or sheep's cheese: Altesse
- Stronger goat's cheese: Jacquère
- Cheese fondue or raclette (cooked): Jacquère or Chasselas
- Tartiflette/Péla: Altesse or light, fruity Mondeuse

Saint-Félicien is closely related to St-Marcellin. It is made the same way in the same region, and is often sold in a terracotta ramekin. However, St-Félicien, which only comes in the soft *moelleux* style, has added cream, and it's almost double the size at 150g.

Ramequin is similar to St-Marcellin, made in Bugey.

Bleu de Gex AOP

Bleu de Gex, also called Bleu du Haut-Jura or Bleu de Septmoncel, is a mild, soft blue cheese, made from raw cow's milk by only four producers in the departments of Jura and Ain, close to Geneva and the Swiss border. Roquefort penicillin is added to the milk and, during ageing, the cheese is pierced to facilitate the mould spreading. After a minimum of 21 days of ageing, Bleu de Gex weighs 6–9kg and has a soft rind that can be eaten.

Bleu de Termignon

Only a handful of cheesemakers produce the highly prized Bleu de Termignon, using raw milk from fewer than 60 cows grazing on the high mountain pastures of the Vanoise national park in Savoie, at around 2,000m. It is made using very traditional, manual methods, involving wooden cheesemaking equipment. The blue veining develops naturally thanks to yeasts and bacteria that are unique to the park, and the cheese is matured for four to five months.

When the first cheese of the season, weighing around 6kg, is ready to cut in November, it tends to have a lactic taste with floral tones; the blue veining may be scarcely visible. Once cut and exposed to oxygen, the cheese continues to mature, the blue veins become more pronounced and the flavour becomes more savoury, with herbal and even aniseed notes.

Bleu du Vercors-Sassenage AOP

This blue cheese is made throughout the Vercors plateau near Grenoble in Isère. When production started in the 14th century, the

area was owned by the lords of Sassenage – a small town at the foot of the mountains that controlled access to the Vercors range. Bleu du Vercors-Sassenage was granted AOC in 1998 and must be made within the regional natural park of Vercors, which includes villages in the departments of Isère and neighbouring Drôme.

Raw milk from Abondance, Montbéliarde and the local Villarde cows is used to make this cheese, which is aged for at least 21 days to produce 4kg wheels. The ivory-coloured cheese is dense and mild for a blue cheese, with thin grey/blue veins throughout. It can be melted like a raclette cheese or eaten as is.

Goat and sheep cheeses

A surprising variety of goat's (*chèvre*) and sheep's (*brebis*) cheeses are now made in the French Alps, including blue/green veined cheeses such as Persillé de Tignes and Persillé des Aravis, both made from goat's milk.

Chevrotin AOP

Anyone who has tasted Chevrotin can be forgiven for not recognizing it as a goat's cheese. Indeed, it is the goat's milk version of Reblochon. The production method is therefore unique for a goat's cheese being pressed, then washed. It is matured for at least three weeks and has an unusually creamy paste. The cheese has a thin, powdery, faintly pink rind and is around 10cm in diameter and 3.5cm high, weighing around 300g. It has a delicate goat flavour with some floral and lactic acid notes. Dating back to the 17th century, Chevrotin is made exclusively on farms, from raw milk. It gained AOC status in 2002 and is produced predominantly in the Aravis mountains of Haute-Savoie.

Picodon AOP

This goat's milk cheese is primarily made in Ardèche, but also in the Drôme, close to the Diois area. It is a small round cheese of up to

8cm in diameter and around 2cm high, made from raw milk.

Awarded AOC in 1986, Picodon is available in various styles. The youngest, at ten days old, is a soft, fine, creamy, white cheese. It has subtle hazelnut and goat flavours which strengthen as the cheese ages. Picodon is also available semi-mature and mature, becoming harder, drier and smaller the longer it is matured.

Tomme de Chèvre

This creamy and versatile artisanal cheese has been around since the 17th century and is made similarly to the cow's milk version of Tomme. Unless the cheese is very mature, the goaty taste is not nearly as strong as you might expect.

Goats roam in the Bauges mountains, where there is a growing production of goat's cheese.

Fresh cheeses

Many of the local fresh cheeses are available from a base of cow's, goat's or sheep's milk; they can be used in salads, cooking or desserts.

Fromage blanc is produced throughout France, and dairy farms and cheesemakers in the French Alps sell it freshly made. It is usually (but not always) made with pasteurized milk. After coagulation, and once in pots, it is refrigerated and further fermentation is prevented. Note that in restaurants, when it comes to the cheese course, you may be asked if you want *fromage blanc* – which may be served with sugar and cream and/or a fruit coulis, or even with fresh herbs – or *fromage sec*, which means any of the cheeses earlier in this chapter.

Fromage frais (the same as quark) is produced in the same way as *fromage blanc*, but it must contain live cultures, like yogurt.

Sérac originates from Switzerland but is often made by farms in the French Alps. It is similar to ricotta in colour, consistency and flavour and, like ricotta, is made from the whey left over from cheesemaking and is therefore very low in fat and full of protein. It is lightly pressed in square moulds and you can buy smoked or herb-flavoured *sérac*, as well as a longer-matured version. It can be eaten fresh, added to dishes or fried in a pan and served on salad.

The melting pot of cooked cheese dishes

Fondue Savoyarde

Fondue is often thought of as a Swiss dish, where diners surround a heated pot of cheese melted into wine, armed with long forks and stale bread for dipping. In fact, fondue means 'melted' in French, and different countries and regions each have their own recipes and traditions. Fondue Savoyarde is usually made with equal amounts of grated Beaufort, Comté and Emmental, but some may use Abondance or even Reblochon in the mix, all melted into a light, dry, white wine – a Jacquère or Chasselas is ideal. The pot should first be rubbed with garlic, and kirsch is sometimes added to liven up the taste. A fondue should be the most convivial and social of

meals, and is linked with traditions, such as a dare or a fine (the next bottle of wine?) if anybody loses their bread in the cheese. Scraping the delicious cheese stuck to the bottom of the pot, especially if you add some extra kirsch to it, is considered an honour.

Raclette

This is a quintessential Swiss Valais dish, which has been adopted in the French Alps. Raclette comes from the French word for scraping: traditionally a large piece of raclette cheese is placed next to an open fire until the surface melts and is scraped away from the unmelted part onto a plate or a piece of bread. In restaurants today, a half wheel of cheese is placed under a custom grill which can be lowered or raised to speed up or slow down melting. The cheese and its crust are ready to eat as soon as they're melted, or can be left longer to bubble and turn brown before scraping. It is eaten with steamed waxy potatoes and cured meats such as *jambon cru de Savoie* and *saucisson*, and with a pot of small gherkins and cocktail onions. Home raclette machines are often available in rental properties; they have a grill with several little dishes onto which you place a slice of the cheese.

Tartiflette

Tartiflette is one of the most popular dishes in the Savoie and Haute-Savoie departments. Although the dish was mentioned as far back as 1705 (in *Le Cuisinier Royal et Bourgeois*), the modern-day version is a baked gratin dish full of sliced potatoes and onions, lardons (pieces of pancetta or bacon) and Reblochon cheese. It gained popularity in the 1980s after the French Reblochon authority promoted it to increase Reblochon sales to tourists.

You will sometimes see a vegetarian version (no lardons, and perhaps with local mushrooms or leeks added). *Tartichèvre* is another alternative, made with the local Chevrotin goat's

cheese, and *croziflette* is made with Reblochon and, instead of potatoes, *crozets*, the local Savoie pasta.

Péla is a related dish and probably more traditional. It is made on top of the stove with fried potatoes, fried onions and Reblochon.

A selection of saucissons, other charcuterie and wine at Régis Bozon's shop in the mountain resort of Le Grand Bornand.

OTHER FRENCH ALPINE SPECIALITIES

The regional foods revolve around a few themes and limited ingredients: the pig – traditionally the animal of many poor communities; hardy vegetables that can be grown in cool conditions and stored over winter; variations of grains, pasta and polenta – for many centuries the Duchy of Savoy included what is now northwest Italy; freshwater fish from the Alpine lakes and rivers; and nuts and fruits from orchards in the plains, or berries up in the mountains.

The slaughter of a fattened pig in autumn was an important day in an Alpine family's calendar ahead of the harsh winter. Different parts of the pig would be cooked or preserved to eat throughout the year. Nothing was wasted, and as a result, there are large numbers of pork

recipes. Other meats were rarely eaten, except the occasional elderly chicken or small game.

Wine suggestions are included when there is a particularly appropriate match, but the pairing of food and wine in the Alps is very much a logical exercise, as it might be elsewhere.

Cured meats and sausages

The dry mountain air is ideal for curing meats. Both raw and cured sausages are often combined with local produce such as cheese, bilberries or hazelnuts.

Excellent dried and smoked hams, along with a range of *saucissons* (similar to Italy's salamis), are widely available. Charcuterie is an ubiquitous item on a restaurant menu – usually a rustic pâté will be served alongside ham and *saucisson*, gherkins and a chunk of unsalted butter, which offsets the salty ham. A light Alpine red can pair well with charcuterie, but I find that white wine, especially a simple Jacquère or Chasselas, cuts through the salt and fat perfectly.

Régis Bozon provides some of the best smoked and dried hams in Haute-Savoie.

Atriaux and caillette

Atriaux are meat patties from Savoie and the French-speaking part of Switzerland. They are a mix of minced pork, pork liver and vegetable greens, and sometimes parsley and spices, wrapped in a lacey structure of pork caul (stomach fat membrane). *Caillette* is very similar: it dates back to the 16th century and is a speciality of the Drôme, which you might find in the Diois area. *Atriaux* or *caillette* may be pan fried in butter or lard and deglazed with a little white wine, then served hot with potatoes. *Caillette* can also be eaten cold like a terrine.

Diots

Although every butcher has a unique recipe for these tasty pork sausages (*saucisses*), the most common variations of *diots* (pronounced 'djyo') are unsmoked, smoked or cabbage – *diots au choux*, made with bacon and cabbage. A firm, stocky sausage up to 5cm wide and 10–15cm long, *diots* are typically cooked in white wine and served with polenta, potato gratin or the local pasta, *crozets*. Even though they are cooked in white wine, a young fruity Mondeuse is a classic match with *diots* and polenta.

Pormonier

This lean pork and vegetable sausage is sometimes known as *pormonaise* or *pormonière* and all the names originate from a local word for lungs, although few *pormoniers* are made with lungs today. Most butchers include pork brisket, pork rind and kidneys, plus one or two greens – usually leek and Swiss chard, but sometimes spinach or cabbage.

Grains, pasta and polenta

Crozets

Originating from the Tarentaise, *crozets* are small, flat squares of egg pasta made with buckwheat or wheat. They are a versatile ingredient in many dishes, including gratins, salads and a special version of *tartiflette* called *croziflette*. They are often served as an accompaniment to meat dishes as a gratin, mixed with sautéed onions and grated cheese such as Beaufort or Tomme de Savoie.

Polenta

Polenta as we know it today is made with maize, which was originally brought from North America in the 16th century. However, a similar dish was made with other grains in northern Italy for centuries before and probably arrived in Savoie in the 18th century. It complemented the local pork dishes at a low cost that suited the peasant population.

Today, polenta, called *polente* in Savoie, is served either as a cheesy gratin side dish or as fried rectangular patties.

Ravioles du Dauphiné IGP

Ravioles are a type of mini-ravioli, filled squares of pasta made from soft wheat flour. For *ravioles du Dauphiné* to meet IGP standards, they must be filled with Comté or French Emmental cheese, butter, parsley, eggs and *fromage blanc*. *Ravioles du Dauphiné* are also known as *ravioles de Romans* and *ravioles du Royans*, based on their long history with the Royans region, spanning a section of Drôme and Isère, and the village of Romans-sur-Isère. Sold in sheets of joined-up pieces, *ravioles* are heated quickly in boiling water, when the pieces separate, or fried in a pan before serving in a broth, as a gratin or as a salad topping.

Fish

The region of the French Alps is brimming with rivers and lakes where fishing is popular both commercially and privately, but strictly controlled. The freshwater fish found in these lakes include *truite* (trout), *perche* (perch), *brochet* (pike), *féra* and *lavaret* (almost identical freshwater whitefish, related to salmon and trout), *sandre* (pike-perch or zander), *omble-chevalier* (related to the Arctic char, similar to large salmon trout), as well as *écrevisses* (crayfish).

Féra is mainly fished in Lac Léman and Lac d'Annecy; in Lac du Bourget an almost identical fish is named lavaret.

The Lac du Bourget is renowned for its *lavaret* (sometimes called *féra* on local menus). The tender, succulent fillets are normally grilled, fried, poached or smoked. *Omble-chevalier* is also seen on many lakeside menus, usually from Lac Léman, but it is worth checking that it is local and not an imported frozen fish. There is nothing better to show off one of the finer Altesse or dry Roussanne (Bergeron) wines than a perfectly cooked lake fish dish.

Filets de perche (perch fillets) are particularly popular around Lac Léman. Their delicate flesh requires no added flavours, and they are simply fried in butter and sometimes served with lemon and parsley. They may also be used for what is advertised as *friture du lac* (deep-fried small fish).

Trout is the most common fish in mountain streams and there are several trout farms where the flow of water has been diverted into basins, allowing the trout to grow in a natural environment.

Vegetables, fruits and nuts

Vegetables

Potatoes may be served as a gratin side dish or as part of the main meal, often taking on the flavours from the meat they're served with, but vegetable side dishes are rarely offered. It should be noted that Savoy cabbage is not from Savoie at all and is sold in France simply as '*choux*' or cabbage. The most Savoyard of all vegetables is the cardoon, usually served as a gratin. Only the stalks ('*cardes*') of cardoons are eaten and although it looks like a giant bunch of celery, it is actually a member of the artichoke family.

Mushrooms and herbs

A wide range of wild mushrooms and herbs are picked from the pastures and forests. In spring, prized mushrooms include *morilles* (morels), which are often dried or bottled to accentuate their truffle flavour, along with *girolles* (chanterelles). In autumn, *ceps* (porcini) and *trompettes de la mort* (horn of plenty) are popular.

In summer, wild flowers and herbs are abundant in mountain areas. The most famous 20th-century Savoyard chef, Marc Veyrat from the Annecy area, popularized the extensive use of freshly picked mountain herbs and flowers in fine cooking and now many local chefs emulate him.

Fruits, nuts and honey

The different altitudes and climates of the French Alps are perfect for growing fruits and nuts. Orchards of apples, pears, figs, cherries, apricots, peaches and almonds tend these days to be on the valley floor, though in the past they shared space with the vineyards on the hillsides. High-quality walnuts from Isère around Grenoble have their own AOP *Noix de Grenoble* and account for about one-third of France's production. They are also important in the Diois region.

While hiking you might find wild raspberries, Alpine strawberries, blackberries and the low-growing bilberries (*myrtilles*), which are similar to blueberries, but much smaller. The nuts, berries and tree fruits are preserved to make local specialities including walnut tarts,

bilberry tarts, breads, jams and juices, as well as toppings for *fromage blanc*.

Delicious honey (*miel*) is widely produced, with a typical Alpine honey producer making three honeys, depending on where the hives are placed – *miel des fleurs* from meadow wildflowers, *miel de montagne*, with hives placed higher up, and the strongest of all, *miel de sapin* or *miel de forêt* from the pine forests.

Breads, pastries and cakes

Before potatoes arrived in the Alps, bread was an essential staple, but in mountain communities the wheat or other grain had to be brought up from the plain and stocked for the winter. Every village had a communal bread oven, which was fired up only once a week at most, so a typical bread had to last a long time – when it got stale it was soaked in milk. Today some of these bread ovens (*fours à pain*) have been restored and bread is made and sold once or twice a year at a village festival. Some specialities were originally made for high days and holidays but are now seen throughout the tourist season.

Bescoin

Bescoin is a brioche-style bread from the Arve valley in Haute-Savoie, coloured with saffron and flavoured with fennel seeds. Baked as an elongated loaf or in shapes such as a crown or a heart, the bread was traditionally made for important religious dates but is now offered at personal events such as weddings and christenings. It is usually eaten for breakfast with jam.

Biscuit de Savoie/Gâteau de Savoie

A *gâteau de Savoie*, sometimes called *biscuit de Savoie*, is a light-as-a-feather sponge cake, often made in a *kugelhopf* mould. It may be served with fruit, jam or custard (*crème Anglaise*), or alongside another dessert such as *île flottante*, the classic French dish of

poached meringue floating on custard. The sweet/acid balance of any late-harvest Savoie white would be a treat with this.

Gâteau de Saint-Genix

The *gâteau de St-Genix* is a brioche topped with white sugar lumps and pink sugar-coated almonds called *pralines roses.* The deep pink pralines melt into the brioche, giving it a distinctive and very sweet taste. Today found throughout the region, it was created in 1880 by Pierre Labully from St-Genix-sur-Guiers, near Chambéry, and can still be bought from the original bakery. Although the red and white brioche displays the colours of Savoie, my match of choice would be Bugey Cerdon, the quintessential sweetish pink fizz.

Versions of the gâteau de St-Genix – sometimes with a very generous topping of deep pink sugared almonds – are found throughout western Savoie and southern Bugey.

Croix de Savoie

Similar in size to a croissant, the *croix de Savoie* is a brioche in the shape of a cross – matching the white cross of the Savoyard flag – with a layer of vanilla custard either inside or on top. In Haute-

Savoie, the *croix* is finished with lumps of white sugar, while in Savoie it is topped with chocolate chips.

Most restaurants and patisseries in the Alps have their own recipe for tarte aux myrtilles or bilberry tart.

Mineral waters

Although the water bottled from the Alpine springs is low in minerals, it is famous around the world. Evian's 'healing' properties were discovered in 1789 when the Marquis de Lessert declared his kidney stones were cured after he drank the natural spring water. The town of Evian on Lac Léman soon became a popular spa resort. By 1935, bottles of Evian water from the same spring were marketed as the perfect bacteria-free water for babies, being safe to drink without boiling. The nearby spa town of Thonon-les-Bains produces bottled water from the Versoie spring. Further south, in the old spa town of Aix-les-Bains above Lac du Bourget, locals started bottling the spring water in 1854. These are but the most famous waters.

Coffee with a kick – la grolle

Seen widely in the Savoie region, a *grolle* is a carved wooden shallow bowl with four to eight spouts and a lid. At the end of a rustic meal, the *grolle* is filled with a mixture of hot black coffee and an *eau-de-vie* or liqueur, then passed from person to person to drink from the spouts. If it's your turn for the

slurp, to avoid making a complete fool of yourself, place your thumbs firmly over the spouts either side of the one you plan to drink from. *Eau-de-vie* is often known colloquially as *gnôle*.

Classic French Alpine dishes

Potée Savoyarde

Pork and vegetable stews are found throughout Europe; *potée* is the French name for the earthenware pot that holds the stew. A *potée savoyarde* is usually made with smoked pork belly and the local *diot* sausages, with a mix of onions, carrots, turnips, potatoes and cabbage. Something about this dish cries out for a simple light Alpine red, such as a Gamay.

Fricassée de Caïon

Caïon is the old Savoyard word for a pig. *Fricassée de caïon* (or *fricacha*) was traditionally a celebratory stew prepared on the day of pig slaughter. It was made with the neck of the pig and other edible organs, marinated overnight, and a mix of blood and cream to create a sauce. The modern revival of this dish is usually less adventurous,

using pork loin or shoulder and a mix of white and red wine for the sauce. A fuller-bodied Mondeuse partners this rustic stew beautifully.

Farcement, farçon

Farcement (or *farçon*) was traditionally prepared before church on Sunday mornings, then eaten for lunch after slow cooking through the long service. It is made in a mould similar to a *kugelhopf* cake mould. Many variations of this classic Savoyard dish exist, but a typical *farcement* contains a layer of bacon to line the mould, then prunes, raisins and spices layered with a mix of grated potatoes, eggs and milk. A slice of the pudding-like *farcement* can be served on its own as a main course or to accompany a variety of pork cuts. The sweetness in it cries out for white, rather than red wine. The honeyed and exotic character of Chignin Bergeron makes a fascinating match.

Gratin Dauphinois and Gratin Savoyard

In the French Alps, gratins are almost always served in the signature shallow oval ceramic dish. Gratin Dauphinois is made with thinly sliced potatoes and milk, cooked in a buttered dish rubbed with garlic. Gratin Savoyard is similar, but sometimes made with stock instead of milk, with the additions of nutmeg and Beaufort cheese. *Crozet* pasta and cardoons are generally served as gratins too.

Beignets de pommes de terre

Don't be misled by the word *beignet*: although it generally signifies something deep-fried, such as a fritter or doughnut, in Savoie *beignets de pommes de terre* are flat cakes of grated potato, fried in a little oil until golden and crisp, a bit like small *r*ö*sti*. They may be flavoured with herbs or garlic and are usually served as an accompaniment.

Quenelles (de brochet)

Quenelles are a mousse-like mixture of fish or meat, formed into a small oval sausage shape. A classic from the Ain department, *quenelles de brochet* (pike quenelles) are particularly associated with the town of Nantua and its eponymous lake, and are traditionally served with a rich *sauce Nantua* – a mix of Béchamel sauce, cream and crayfish – although some chefs prefer a simple butter sauce, so the delicate pike flavour is more apparent. Quenelles are usually poached and served in a sauce, but they can be fried, grilled or baked. Today quenelles are sold in a wide variety of flavours and are often rather large, making a very filling main dish. A Bugey Chardonnay is the perfect match.

The remote La Grande-Chartreuse monastery, where monks guard the secret recipe for the liqueur.

FRENCH ALPINE LIQUEURS AND OTHER ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Created in the mountains above Grenoble, Chartreuse may well be the world's most famous mountain liqueur. Its history is the stuff of legends. Like other drinks in this chapter it owes its originality to the raw ingredients found in the mountains. Herbal spirits and liqueurs abound in the Alps, alongside fruit *eaux-de-vie*, nut liqueurs, *marc* and even whisky.

The wine-based, fortified drink vermouth has an almost 200-year history in Savoie, and there is a growing interest in making local beers in the French Alps.

The chequered history of Chartreuse

Strong in flavour and in alcohol, green and yellow Chartreuse are made from a secret recipe that includes more than 130 herbs and flowers. In 1605, a manuscript describing an elixir of unknown origin was given to a community of Carthusian monks living in Paris. They adapted the recipe to make a preparation that soon became known as the 'elixir of long life'.

In 1737 Brother Jérôme Maubec, an apothecary at the remote Monastery of La Grande-Chartreuse, where the order of monks was first established, studied the recipe and created *Elixir Végétal*, a distilled tonic, weighing in at 69% alcohol by volume (138° proof). This was sold in Grenoble and Chambéry and soon became popular. Realizing the appeal extended beyond its medicinal values, in 1764 the monks adapted their methods to produce *Chartreuse Verte* (Green Chartreuse), at 55% (110°); its green colour has always been entirely natural.

After the French Revolution the monks were ordered to leave France in 1793. They made a copy of the manuscript which remained at the monastery while another monk left with the original. Arrested and imprisoned, he was able to smuggle the manuscript to a friend, who promptly sold it to pharmacist Monsieur Liotard. In 1810 Liotard followed Napoleon's orders to hand over all 'secret' medicinal recipes to the government, but it was sent back to him, deemed not secret enough. The manuscript eventually found its way back to the monks when they returned to the monastery in 1816 and restarted production of the elixir and the liqueur; in 1838 they added the milder and sweeter *Chartreuse Jaune* (Yellow Chartreuse), along with *Chartreuse Blanche* (no longer produced); they built a new distillery near the monastery in 1860.

The monks were exiled again in 1903, when the French government nationalized their land and sold the Chartreuse trademark to a group of distillers, who subsequently went bankrupt in 1929. Meanwhile, the monks moved to Tarragona, Spain, where they built a new distillery to continue producing liqueur until their friends in France bought shares in the bankrupt company and gave them to the monks. With the Chartreuse trademark back in their hands, the monks returned to their distillery at Fourvoirie in the Chartreuse mountains. A landslide in 1935 forced the monks to build a new distillery in Voiron, a town down the valley, where more new liqueurs were introduced.

Today, only two monks know the recipe. One likely important component is *vulnéraire*, a yellow flower that grows only in the Chartreuse mountains and is said to heal wounds. The plants and flowers are first dried in the herb room, where they are crushed and mixed into different groups; these are numbered and taken to the distillery. The two monks take each group of dried plants, macerate them, distil them, blend them, then leave the mix in oak barrels to age.

A new chapter in the history of Chartreuse began in late 2018, when the distillery moved closer to the monastery, to a site called

Aiguenoire in Entre-Deux-Guiers (the visitor centre and a shop remain at Voiron). As I was told when visiting the distillery, 'technology can facilitate prayer'.

Visitor centre (open all year):

Caves de la Chartreuse
10 Boulevard Edgar Kofler
38500 Voiron
Tel: 04 76 05 90 34
www.chartreuse.fr

Other herbal spirits and liqueurs

Génépi liqueur takes its name from a high-altitude herb, of the genus *Artemesia*, known in English as wormwood. In mountain areas, génépi gained popularity in the 19th century as a home-made tonic that helped Alpine dwellers stay warm, but today home brews are less common. Black wormwood and white wormwood are the two most important plants in génépi production and recipes might include other aromatic plants to adjust its herbal and slightly bitter flavour. Production techniques vary, and may include mixing extracts, maceration and distillation. As a result, génépi ranges from pale gold to green in colour, with an alcohol content between 20% (40°) and 40% (80°). Génépi is generally served as a digestif or poured over ice cream and other desserts.

Chartreuse quick reference

Elixir Végétal, 69% (138°): High in alcohol with strong, earthy, herbaceous plant flavours. Usually consumed as a tonic or a digestif. Only a few drops are needed – on a sugar cube, in a little sweetened water, in an infusion tea, or in a *grog* (hot water and liquor, often rum) with honey.

Chartreuse Verte, 55% (110°): A milder form of the elixir, full of mountain scents and flavours. Originally considered a digestif, and now added to cocktails. Drink chilled, or poured over ice.

Chartreuse Jaune, 43% (86°): Softer and sweeter than *Chartreuse Verte*, yet full of aromatic complexity, and consumed in the same way.

Chartreuse V.E.P. Verte, 54% (108°): Long maturation (*Viellissement Exceptionnellement Prolongé*) makes this more aromatic than *Chartreuse Verte*, with a more refined taste. Drink chilled, as a digestif.

Chartreuse V.E.P. Jaune, 42% (84°): This was introduced in 1963 together with the *V.E.P Verte*. Drink chilled, as a digestif.

Liqueur du 9ème Centenaire, 47% (94°): Created in 1984 to commemorate 900 years since the founding of the Grande-Chartreuse monastery. The flavour and colour are midway between *Chartreuse Verte* and *Chartreuse Jaune*. Drink over ice, or add to cocktails.

Chartreuse 1605 — Liqueur d'Elixir, 56% (112°): Introduced in 2005 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the presentation of the original manuscript to the monks, this is more powerful than *Chartreuse Verte*, although not as strong as *Elixir Végétal.* Drink well chilled as a digestif, over ice or crushed ice.

Liqueur des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France, 45% (90°): Created in 2007 in collaboration with the best French sommeliers, this is based on *Chartreuse Jaune*, with additional flavours of liquorice and fennel and hints of citrus, and bursting with herbaceous aromas. Drink well chilled.

Numerous collectable vintage, commemorative and limited edition Chartreuse versions have been produced; these fetch high auction prices.

Gentiane *eau-de-vie* is made from the roots of the large yellow gentian plant that grows in the high Alpine meadows, especially in Haute-Savoie. The roots are sliced into fine strips, then macerated for many months before distillation. It is a strong and bitter spirit, served as a digestif or over sorbet. It should not be confused with gentiane liqueur, which is made in the Massif Central.

Fruit and nut spirits and liqueurs

The production of fruit and nut *eaux-de-vie* and liqueurs is common across the region. The visit of the travelling still was once a major feature of winter in village life – the stills tended to circulate from October to January – and some still exist.

Eau-de-vie is a clear, light fruit brandy that is fermented and distilled twice. Any fruits apart from grapes are used in its production.

At the end of a meal in a private home or even an Alpine restaurant, don't be surprised to be offered a digestif from a selection of non-labelled re-used bottles containing home-made liqueurs. Up until 1979, when the practice was officially outlawed, restaurants and mountain refuges throughout the French Alps would add a live snake to one of their *eaux-de-vie*. The viper would release its venom and drown in the bottle. The *eau-de-vie* would then be offered as a digestif to curious diners. Despite the ban, I have experienced this scary offering a couple of times…

Beer flavoured with génépi, an Alpine herb.

Eau-de-vie-de-marc (or simply *marc*) is the name in France for grape spirit, made from the residues of the press – essentially grape seeds and skins. It is the equivalent of Italian *grappa* and must contain at least 37.5% (70°) alcohol. Some French Alps wine producers take *marc* more seriously, ageing it in old oak barrels, which can certainly soften the potentially harsh spirit – a few excellent examples exist in all the regions.

Fruit liqueurs, such as *crème de cassis* (blackcurrant liqueur), are also made in the French Alps, along with nut liqueurs from walnuts, hazelnuts or chestnuts. Thick and syrupy sweet, these liqueurs are often served over ice cream.

Whisky

Whisky production is on the rise in France. In the Trièves area, southeast of Grenoble, the highly regarded Domaine des Hautes Glaces makes whisky from its own certified organic cereals and is powered by renewable and local energy.

Vermouth

Vermouth is a fortified wine, aromatized with plants and spices. Although fortified wine infused with herbs or spices has been around for centuries, commercial vermouth production began in 1786 in Turin, when the Savoy region was part of the Kingdom of Sardinia. In 1821, Joseph Chavasse, a liqueur and absinthe maker from the Chartreuse mountains, started producing vermouth using wines from the Combe de Savoie and local mountain herbs, along with added spices. A bigger factory was established in Chambéry and in 1843 his son-in-law changed the name to Dolin. The Dolin company is one of two remaining vermouth producers in Savoie, the other being Distillerie des Alpes, established by Philibert Routin in 1883. Although Jacquère makes an ideal wine base for vermouth, only Routin Vermouth claims to use Jacquère, blended with Sauvignon Blanc from elsewhere in France. There are three main styles of vermouth: dry (white); *blanc* (white, sweet); and *rouge* (red, sweet); all are popular

as aperitifs and cocktail ingredients. Dolin's Chambéryzette is infused with strawberry liqueur; surprisingly, it is dry and is best served chilled or over ice as an aperitif.

Beer and cider

The Brasserie du Mont Blanc produces a range of excellent beers, including some infused with mountain flavours such as génépi. Smaller breweries are popping up throughout the region – Les Brasseurs du Grand Colombier in the Bugey area, Les Brasseurs Savoyards near Annecy, Brasserie l'Aravissante in the Aravis, Brasserie La Manivelle in Die, just to name a few. Some wineries have joined the beer trend too. For example, Vincent Quenard, part of the family who own La Gerbelle (Claude Quenard et Fils) in Chignin, has started a microbrewery called Brasserie Quardin at the winery.

As there are so many orchards in the Alps, it's inevitable that cider is made. In Hautes-Alpes, an innovative and artisanal product has been made since 2015 by the company Apple des Cimes. The juice is concentrated, either with extreme cold (as ice ciders are made in Canada) or heat, then fermented. The end result is an unctuous but fresh and complex drink that comes in various styles, with 10–12% alcohol and 165–185g/l of residual sugar. One of the partners in the project is Yann de Agostini and the drinks are made in his Domaine du Petit Août winery.

La Pomme Givrée is an ice cider made in Hautes-Alpes.

On the shores of the beautiful bay of Talloires on Lake Annecy are several hotel-restaurants, including the Auberge du Père Bise.

VISITING THE REGION

Close to the French Alps wine regions are some of the most spectacular tourist sites anywhere, ranging from high-altitude mountain resorts geared not only for winter sports but also for hiking and summer activities, to lakeside and spa towns with verdant valleys in between.

The wine areas lie outside the main tourist hubs and if you travel independently it's essential to have a car – there is little public transport and taxis are scarce. It can also be surprisingly difficult to find a decent place to stay, eat or even shop for wine. Plenty of guide books give hotel and restaurant recommendations in and around the larger cities and tourist areas, so the recommendations below are as

close to the vineyard areas as possible. I have included a few wine shops in the main cities, but apart from Savoie and Clairette de Die, it is hard to find wines from the other regions in wine shops – the only solution is to buy direct from the producers.

Although this wasn't always the case, today the top Michelin restaurants, especially those around Annecy (including Auberge du Père Bise Jean Sulpice at Talloires, Clos des Sens at Annecy-le-Vieux and Yoann Conte at Veyrier-le-Lac) and close to Lac du Bourget (some included below) offer fine Savoie wine selections. Sadly though, most of the restaurants in major ski resorts shun the best local wines, believing their clientele prefers wines from classic French regions. It comes as no surprise that younger vignerons are in turn shunning the ski resorts and seeking other markets, often outside the region.

The cities of Annecy, Chambéry, Evian and Grenoble are all well worth a visit; the vineyard villages can also be lovely to wander around to appreciate the architecture of classic vigneron houses, churches, chapels or abbeys. A few villages, museums and sites of interest are listed below as they should not be missed if you have the time. Many of the vineyard areas have marked walks, so do enquire at the tourist offices once in the area, and vignerons will advise too. Some wine regions organize a 'balade gourmande' on a spring or summer weekend, with food and wine provided during a designated walk in the vineyard.

Weekend festivals abound in summer, ranging from music festivals (of all types), to traditional mountain festivals, usually featuring cow, sheep or goat parades. There are also festivals celebrating cheese and other foods, although very few are specifically devoted to wine.

The list is divided into the same geographical zones as Part 3, and then alphabetically within each zone. To plan wine producer visits, see Part 3.

The symbol 🛏 is used for accommodation, 🍴 for restaurants, 🍴🛏🍴 for hotel-restaurants, 🧺 for shops and 🏛 for museums and other attractions. Map references refer to approximate location on the producer maps.

For each accommodation and restaurant recommendation I have given a very basic three-star rating as follows:
★★★ Classy/expensive
★★ Good quality/mid-price
★ Decent/inexpensive

The accommodation includes hotels and *chambres d'hôtes* (bed-and-breakfasts) and have been selected for international travellers, with WiFi and modern facilities. I have not included the many self-catering cottages or *gîtes* – several vignerons own *gîtes* and the best are mentioned in their profiles in Part 3.

Opening hours and days can be unpredictable, especially outside the main summer tourist season. Rather than simply turning up, I recommend that you check the website, or many small businesses have a Facebook page, but these may not be updated; to be really sure I strongly urge you to phone ahead.

Tourism and travel websites

The regional tourism websites have the latest information on local festivals and other activities. Note also that both Bugey and Savoie are part of the Vignobles & Découvertes programme, providing information and inspiration for wine travellers. For **Bugey**, see bugey-vignobles-decouvertes.com and for the main part of **Savoie** see vignobles.tourisme.coeurdesavoie.fr

Savoie Mont Blanc savoie-mont-blanc.com

Grenoble (for Isère) grenoble-tourisme.com/en

Ain (for Bugey) ain-tourisme.com

Diois diois-tourisme.com

Hautes-Alpes hautes-alpes-tourisme.com/en

Alpes-Flaveurs.com or alpes-flaveurs.weebly.com (in English). Bernard Vissoud is both a wine expert and an experienced mountain guide. He runs a range of innovative tours in the region and he speaks good English.

1786.travel runs a range of English-speaking wine and vineyard tours in Savoie and will tailor-make visits for groups too

Lac Léman and Ayze

Be warned that in summer the roads near Lac Léman can be extremely busy. There are many hotels and restaurants along the lakeside from Geneva to Thonon, or you can venture up into the Chablais hills towards the ski areas to find a base. The Ayze vineyard area is best visited quite separately or en route to the Haute-Savoie ski resorts as it is nowhere near the other Savoie vineyard areas. Below are a couple of recommendations very close to the vineyards.

L'Auberge d'Anthy ★ 🛏 🍴
2 Rue des Ecoles, 74200 Anthy-sur-Léman
Tel: 04 50 70 35 00
auberge-anthy.com
Map ref: C4
A little away from the lake, this is an ideal simple hotel base for visiting the wineries on the south side of Lac Léman. The restaurant

is good value for the area and offers local fish specialities, as well as some Savoie wines.

Auberge d'Ayze Chez l'Anaïs ★🍴
780 Route de Bonneville, 74130 Ayse
Tel: 04 50 03 61 50
Map ref: C1
New owners, a couple of retired ski champions, took over in September 2018 and gave this local village auberge a fresh look. Some of the original team has stayed on and the menu offers one part with contemporary dishes, the other with traditional mountain food. All is nicely presented, with friendly service and Ayze wines on offer, of course.

Château de Ripaille 🏛
83 Avenue de Ripaille, 74200 Thonon-les-Bains
Tel: 04 50 26 64 44
ripaille.fr
Map ref: C4
This historic château on the lake is well worth visiting. It produces wine (see here) and the splendid old wine cellars are included in the château tour. There are fine gardens and walks in the adjoining woodlands.

Vins Duvernay 🧺
249 Route de Montagnon, 74380 Bonne
Tel: 04 50 92 20 20
vinsduvernay.com
Map ref: B2
Situated just a few minutes off the motorway from Geneva towards Mont Blanc, this large wine warehouse has an excellent Savoie selection, including wines from Domaine Belluard, Les Vignes de Paradis (Dominique Lucas) and Gilles Berlioz, which are hard to source elsewhere. There is another branch in the middle of Annemasse.

Yvoire 🏛
yvoiretourism.com
Map ref: B4
It is well worth taking time out from visiting vineyards to explore on foot the medieval lakeside village of Yvoire. Within the old streets you will find a selection of pricey but often high quality art galleries.

Around the Rhône and Lac du Bourget

Aix-les-Bains may be a rather faded spa town, but close to Lac du Bourget you are spoilt for choice of hotels and restaurants. Those selected below are particularly convenient when visiting the wine producers of Jongieux or Chautagne, or even the area of Bugey close to the town of Belley. Frangy is also included in this section. Annecy, not far away, is a must-visit city, with a wide range of fine hotels and restaurants near the lake.

Abbaye d'Hautecombe 🏛
73310 St-Pierre-de-Curtille
chemin-neuf.fr/en/pres-de-chez-toi/abbeys/hautecombe-abbey
Map ref: B3
Remote historic abbey in a stunning lakeside location; it's wonderful to arrive by boat from the port at Aix-les-Bains, but you can drive here too.

Atmosphères ★★★ 🛏🍴
618 Route des Tournelles, 73370 Le Bourget du Lac
Tel: 04 79 25 01 29
atmospheres-hotel.com
Map ref: B1
Perched high above Lac du Bourget, this unassuming chalet-like building houses a modern restaurant that has held a Michelin star since 2009. The menus change frequently, focusing on local, seasonal fare. Service is friendly and the wine list has a superb selection of

Savoie wines. The four bedrooms are modest but comfortable and breakfast is excellent.

Auberge du Motz ★ 🛏 🍴
73310 Motz
Tel: 04 79 88 42 86
hotel-chautagne.com
Map ref: B5
A small, simple but clean family-run hotel in a quiet village, and the restaurant is surprisingly decent, so it's a good place to stop for lunch if you are visiting Chautagne or Seyssel, and it's not far from Jongieux or Bugey either.

Restaurant Le Belvédère ★★ 🍴
73410 St-Germain-la-Chambotte
Tel: 04 79 88 44 06
belvedere-la-chambotte.com
Map ref: B3
Close to Chautagne, this is worth a visit for the spectacular location high above Lac du Bourget. I have not eaten there but have heard good reviews.

Bistrot du Coin ★ 🍴
140 Place Charles Dullin, 73170 Yenne
Tel: 09 86 73 30 50
Map ref: A2
Simple, inexpensive, pleasant place for a bite to eat, not far from the Jongieux vineyards.

Château de Bourdeau ★★★ 🛏 🍴
Route du Port, 73370 Bourdeau
Tel: 04 79 62 12 83
chateau-bourdeau.fr
Map ref: B2

Out-of-this-world situation overlooking Lac du Bourget and just five minutes from the Tunnel du Chat that takes you to the Jongieux vineyards. In 2016 the château was converted into a restaurant and seven luxury rooms and suites. A new chef and new management took over in 2019, so I hope the cooking remains as fine as it was. There was an excellent list of local wines.

La Cave de la Ferme ★ 🍴
302 Rue du Grand Pont, 74270 Frangy
Tel: 04 50 44 75 04
Map ref: C7
For years run by the Lupin family, this simple, rustic restaurant was taken over in 2019. Along with some modernizations, it will continue to offer simple mountain fare, alongside Frangy wines.

La Java des Flacons 🧺
49 Avenue du Petit Port, 74940 Annecy-le-Vieux
Tel: 04 50 23 31 39
lajavadesflacons.com
Map ref: E5
Established in 2006 by Bruno Bozzer, formerly chief sommelier for Marc Veyrat's Michelin-starred restaurant in Annecy, this large wine shop combines depth and breadth. Bruno and his team offer a superb range of local wines, as well as classic wines and spirits to suit the deepest of pockets.

Château de la Mar ★★★ 🛏
73170 Jongieux
Tel: 06 26 56 99 33
chateau-de-la-mar.com
Map ref: A3
Also a wine estate (see here). Beautifully renovated château at the bottom of the Marestel vineyards. Luxurious *chambres d'hôtes* furnished with antiques. Peaceful garden. Evening meals are available if you book ahead, or you can walk steeply up to the Morainières.

Les Morainières ★★★ 🍴
Route de Marétel, 73170 Jongieux
Tel: 04 79 44 09 39
les-morainieres.com
Map ref: A3
This restaurant, in a restored vineyard cabin, is on the famous cru Marestel slope with a view down the vineyards to the Rhône river. Owned by chef Michaël Arnoult and his wife Ingrid, the restaurant was awarded a second Michelin star in 2012. The wine list features a good selection from the immediate locality, including various vintages from Domaine Dupasquier, as well as wines from classic French regions.

Château de Bourdeau is steeped in history. The vineyard beside it includes rare local grape varieties.

Novalaise Plage ★★ 🛏 🍴
391 Route des Plages, 73470 Novalaise
Tel: 04 79 71 64 61
novalaise-plage.com
With its own access to the lovely Lac d'Aiguebelette, this is an ideal base for visits to Jongieux, Chignin or even southern Bugey. The young owners renovated the hotel in modern style in 2016 – even if you can't stay, their restaurant **Les Roselières** is perfect for a leisurely lunch.

La Parfumerie ★★🍴
204 Rue du Colonel Bachetta, 73420 Viviers-Du-Lac
Tel: 04 79 54 48 90
Map ref: B2
Very close to the lake, outside Aix-les-Bains, this modern restaurant has a delightful terrace, even if it lacks a view to the lake. The menu is small and changes often, with very good cooking and a selection of local wines, including several of Jean-Claude Masson's Apremont cuvées.

La Pause du Chat ★🍴
Route du Tunnel du Chat, 73370 Bourdeau
Tel: 04 79 62 17 53
Map ref: B2
Just before the entrance to the tunnel is this friendly little restaurant with a view over Lac du Bourget. Run by Pascale and her daughter Emilie, it offers simply prepared food and a small selection of wines with a focus on Savoie. A great spot If you are looking for a late lunch after visiting vineyards – unusual for the area, they remain open in the afternoon.

Le Relais Gourmand ★🍴
501 Route du Canal, 73310 Chanaz
Tel: 04 79 63 22 14/06 32 86 97 61
le-doux-nid.com/relais-gourmand
Map ref: A4
Within easy reach of Jongieux, southern Bugey, Chautagne and Seyssel, the village of Chanaz is so sweet it's worth a visit and here's where to have lunch. They also have rooms. Do visit the walnut mill in the village.

Vinograf 🧺
321 Rue de Genève, 73100 Aix-les-Bains
Tel: 09 83 52 56 94
rhonalia.fr/magasins

Map ref: C2
In the centre of Aix, this wine shop has a wide range, from very good producers, many organic, from Savoie, Bugey and beyond. It is owned by local distributor Rhônalia, which supplies many local restaurants.

Around Chambéry and the Combe de Savoie

Chambéry has a wide range of places to stay, many geared for those en route to the ski resorts; however, its choice of restaurants is scant compared to the Lac du Bourget area. The vineyards of the Combe de Savoie are particularly starved of restaurants; sometimes you need to travel further between visits. From the Combe de Savoie, consider heading along the Maurienne Valley to St-Jean-de-Maurienne, with several restaurants. The town is also home to the Opinel knife museum and an exciting new wine shop, which are detailed below.

Les 400 Crus
11 Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, 73000 Chambéry
Tel: 04 79 85 61 65
400crus.com
Map ref: A4
Small wine shop right in the centre of Chambéry, owned by Maxime Lefèvre, who speaks perfect English and has worked in London and Australia. Good selection of Savoie wines, including Château de Mérande, Jean-François Quénard, Domaine Jean Masson, Domaine Dupasquier and several others. Don't hesitate to ask advice from Maxime on where to eat or visit.

Château des Allues ★★
Les Allues, 7320 St-Pierre-d'Albigny
Tel: 06 75 38 61 56
chateaudesallues.com
Map ref: D4

In a stunning location above the Combe de Savoie vineyards, this old manor house has five characterful rooms and suites on a bed-and-breakfast basis, and three *gîtes* to rent by the week. Stéphane Vandeville offers a very warm welcome and cooks *table d'hôte* dinners of high quality, with vegetables from the kitchen garden. He is happy to help you arrange local wine or tourist visits.

L'Atelier D'YZ ★ 🍴

135 Avenue de l'Arclusaz, 73250 St-Pierre-d'Albigny

Tel: 06 63 25 38 48

Map ref: D4

This bright little restaurant behind the town's car repair shop features period décor with a car theme. A simple menu offers freshly prepared food with a smattering of local wines. It has a pretty summer terrace.

L'Auberge du Lac ★ 🍴

73190 La Thuile

Tel: 04 79 84 04 08

la-thuile.com/services/restauration

Map ref: C3

Small mountain roads take you up to this simple inn by a lovely little lake up in the Bauges. Worth a visit in summer for a break from wine tasting.

Le Cellier des Chênes 🧺

606 Route d'Apremont, 73190 St-Baldoph

Tel: 04 79 28 36 90

Map ref: A3

lecellierdeschenes.com

Willy Blanc has run the shop since 1997, alongside the 5ha family vineyard in Apremont. The shop is renowned for its whiskies, but has wines from all over France. The Savoie selection is useful if you are short of time to visit producers and includes wines from Jean Vullien, André et Michel Quenard, Fabien Trosset and Cave du Prieuré.

La Clé des Champs ★🛏🍴
Quai de l'Isère (D1006), 73800 Montmélian
Tel: 04 79 84 12 01
lacledeschamps-hotels.com
Map ref: C2
Good location for visits in the Combe de Savoie for a night or two; modern style but rudimentary. Its restaurant, Le Cep Gourmand, tries to do a good job with local cuisine and wine, but lacks excitement.

Château des Comtes de Challes ★★★🛏🍴
247 Montée du Château, 73190 Challes les Eaux
Tel: 04 79 72 72 72
chateaudescomtesdechalles.com
Map ref: B3
Imposing old chateau just above the spa town of Challes-les-Eaux. Very well situated for visiting the vineyards. Grand, old-style French restaurant serves good traditional haute cuisine, with a wine list to match; local producers include André et Michel Quenard, Phillipe Grisard and Domaine des Rutissons (Isère), among others, but could be better represented.

Conflans 🏛
Amazing medieval village perched above Albertville. Eat anywhere… but if you want a change from French then try the Greek restaurant Kafeneion.

DiotVino 🧺
37 Rue Alphonse Thibieroz, 73300 St-Jean-de-Maurienne
Tel: 09 54 19 08 26
diotvino.fr
Savoie's unofficial wine ambassador in France, Franck Merloz, known to wine bloggers around the world, opened a wine shop in his home town in December 2018. It will no doubt evolve into a super place to stock up with a range of local wines.

La Ferme de Ramée ★ 🍴
500 Chemin de Ramée, 73190 St-Jeoire-Prieuré
Tel: 04 79 28 03 05
restaurant-lafermederamee.com/le-restaurant
Map ref: B3
Working farm that also produces its own biscuits and ice cream. Close to Chignin and to Apremont, a decent place for a basic Savoyard lunch.

Le K'Ozzie ★★ 🍴
20 Route de Francin, 73800 Les Marches
Tel: 04 79 36 91 76
lekozzie.com
Map ref: B2
The friendly young owners met in Australia, hence the name of this 'cosy' restaurant. Worth a visit for lunch or an evening meal if you are in the area. Excellent food using locally sourced ingredients; not cheap but sensible pricing. Splendid wine list including wines from Les Vignes de Paradis, Domaine Dupasquier, Domaine Jean Masson, Louis Magnin and many other locals.

Château de Miolans 🏛
73250 St-Pierre-d'Albigny
chateau-miolans.com
Map ref: D4
Perched above the vineyards in the Combe de Savoie, visit this strategically placed medieval fortress for the stupendous views and the remarkable castle garden, with many ancient plants. For more than two centuries from 1564, the Dukes of Savoy used the fortress as a prison and its most infamous prisoner was the Marquis de Sade.

Monts & Terroirs 🧺
Avenue Georges Clémenceau, 73800 Montmélian
Tel: 04 79 85 56 61
Map ref: C2

Shop with an ageing cellar built into the rock for cheese and other local foods. It's hard to find, behind the Post Office. Part of an excellent cheesemaking group based in Poligny, Jura; there's another outpost, also ageing Beaufort and Tommes, in La Bâthie, south of Albertville.

With vineyards on its shores and a backdrop of Mont Granier, the Lac St-André is just a few paces from restaurant Le Saint André. There is a walking path around the lake and a picnic area.

Musée Opinel 🏛

25 Rue Jean Jaurès, 73300 St-Jean-de-Maurienne

opinel.com/la-marque/le-musee

The Opinel knife is an important Savoie emblem – you will see the knives on the dinner table instead of steak knives, in the kitchen and in the pockets of any vigneron or mountain man, ready to slice a piece of *saucisson* or cheese. The museum (free entry) unveils the history, and in the shop you can buy every type of knife imaginable.

Musée de la Vigne et du Vin 🏛

46 Rue du Docteur Veyrat, 73800 Montmélian

Tel: 04 79 84 42 23
montmelian.com
Map ref: C2
This lovingly put-together wine museum had a facelift over winter 2018/19 and should be even more interesting to visit when it re-opens in summer 2019. The museum name may be changing too.

Plaisirs du Vin 🧺
209 Avenue du Grand Verger, 73000 Chambéry
Tel: 04 79 33 61 31
plaisirsduvin.com/magasins/chambery.html
Map ref: A4
Part of a small chain, this spacious wine shop is located on the edge of Chambéry, with parking right outside. The manager, Sébastien Toursel, is one of the organisers of the biennial Vins de Montagne tasting, so has a wide stock from exhibitors, alongside other mainly organic Savoie wines, some Bugey, and Domaine du Petit Août from Hautes-Alpes.

Le Saint André ★★ 🍴
Chemin du Lac, 73800 Les Marches
Tel: 04 79 28 11 71/06 58 13 92 54
restaurant-lesaintandre.com
Map ref: B2
The location can't be beaten, with a large terrace and a terrific view across the lake to Mont Granier. Pleasing service and food from a varied menu, widely inspired. The wine list is well chosen, with a decent local range, and fairly priced.

Le St-Jean ★★ 🍴
2496 Route des Bauges, 73230 St-Jean-d'Arvey
Tel: 04 79 75 04 41
lesaintjeanrestaurant.fr
Map ref: B4

Located about 20 minutes' drive up the Bauges mountain from the vineyards of Chignin, the terrace and big windows of this restaurant have a panoramic view of Mont Granier. Taken over in September 2018 by Anaïs and Romain Bonnier; Romain was sous chef at Atmosphères near Lac du Bourget and his cooking is of a high standard, focused on local ingredients. The bar is open for simple platters of cold food between lunch and evening services. Two practical, small, bright hotel rooms too.

Suites de la Tour ★★ 🛏

400 Impasse de Pacoret, Lieu-dit La Tour, 73460 Montailleur

Tel: 04 79 37 91 59 / 06 08 57 41 35

suites-de-la-tour.com

Map ref: E4

Set around a 14th-century tower surrounded by parkland, this classy bed-and-breakfast is well rated (I haven't stayed here) and usefully sited at the eastern end of the valley near Fréterive. Evening meals available if booked ahead.

Syrah & Co. 🧺

12 Rue de la République, 73200 Albertville

Tel: 04 79 38 46 99

syrah-and-co.fr

Former restaurateur and sommelier Nicolas Le Goff opened this wine bar and shop in 2008. He focuses on organic wines, with a small but top-quality selection from Savoie and other Alpine regions.

Isère

Vineyards and producers are scattered here and the producers you visit will help you choose somewhere to eat locally, or even to stay overnight if you contact them in advance. Grenoble has a huge choice of places to stay, eat and shop. Below are a couple of excellent wine shops where you will find local wines and more.

Le Tonneau Gourmand
441 Rue Charles de Gaulle, 38920 Crolles
Tel: 06 79 67 71 80
tonneau-gourmand.fr
Map ref: D5
Joël Ferraud is a wine enthusiast, especially for organic wines. Just north of Grenoble, close to Domaine Finot, he stocks a decent range from Isère and Savoie in his shop on a small trading estate. This is also a simple restaurant with a limited menu, offering regular wine and food tasting events.

Le Vin des Alpes
8 Rue de Strasbourg, 38000 Grenoble
Tel: 04 76 43 04 39
levindesalpes.fr
Map ref: C4
Eric Esnault is a man after my own heart, a lover and promoter of wines from across the Alpine arc. His little shop in the middle of Grenoble is a treasure trove of interesting, mainly organic wines. Very well connected in the wine world and a fluent English speaker, Eric will give you all the help you need for local visits and restaurants.

Northern Bugey

Cerdon is close enough to Bourg-en-Bresse, or to Nantua, to make visits from either town. The area itself is a bit of a desert in terms of good restaurants and hotels, but recently a few upmarket bed-and-breakfast establishments have sprung up, some doing evening meals too – it's worth checking recent guides. I have also heard good reviews of La Cour de Récré, a restaurant in St-Martin-du-Mont.

Au Faisan Doré ★
594 Rue Nicolas Aubry, 01160 Neuville-sur-Ain
Tel: 04 74 37 76 89
aufaisandore.com

Map ref: B2
The only decent hotel in the Cerdon vineyards. It's comfortable enough, with a simple restaurant.

Monts & Terroirs/Fromagerie de la Vallée de l'Ain
ZA Sous la Côte, 01450 Poncin
Tel: 04 74 37 23 46
comte.com/visiter/visitez-les-fruitieres-a-comte/a-faire/fromagerie-de-la-vallee-de-lain
Map ref: B2
You can see Comté cheese being made at this co-operative, and then buy some, in styles ranging from young to very mature. The shop offers a range of other dairy products and cheeses, charcuterie, jams and honey. It's next to the Lingot-Martin wine cellar.

Le Panoramique
Le Belvedere, RN 1084, 01450 Cerdon
Tel: 04 74 37 38 20
restaurant-lepanoramique.com
Map ref: C2
A spectacular location above Cerdon, though the food and welcome could be better – it's worth stopping to look at the view from the car park even if you don't go and eat there. The owner claims to have a wonderful wine cellar but doesn't support the local wines. This may be the only place open, hence its inclusion here.

Southern Bugey

The Belley area is close enough to Jongieux in Savoie to link the visits, but good accommodation is thin on the ground. On the other side of the mountains, the Montagnieu area is close to the Balmes Dauphinoises vineyards of northern Isère. The choice of casual restaurants is increasing and more are open in summer than winter, but as yet few seek out the best of the local wines.

Auberge de Contrevoz ★ 🍴
67 Route du Mollard de Don, 01300 Contrevoz
Tel: 04 79 81 82 54
auberge-de-contrevoz.com/fr
Map ref: C3
Great location with a lovely terrace and good, simply prepared food. One of the only places you can try red and white Manicle from the tiny Domaine André Miraillet, whose final vintage is 2018.

Auberge de la Paillère ★ 🛏 🍴
D992, 01350 Lavours
Tel: 04 79 42 41 18
aubergedelapaillere.fr
Map ref: E3
Ten decent rooms, some with a view of the Rhône. Just off a main road. The restaurant is practical but lacks soul.

La Cure ★ 🍴
01470 Seillonnaz
Tel: 04 74 36 13 61
la.cure.free.fr
Map ref: B3
Pleasant and friendly small restaurant in the heart of the Montagnieu vineyard area. Eat in the vaulted stone dining room or on the terrace.

La Ferme du Marais ★ 🍴 🧺
Aignoz, 01350 Ceyzérieu
Tel: 04 79 42 24 35
restaurantfermedumarais.fr
Map ref: D3
Go for a casual lunch on a farm in the marshes near the vineyards. The shop sells the farm's charcuterie and other local products.

La Fine Fourchette ★★ 🍴
2500 Avenue du Bugey Les Routes, D1504, 01300 Virignin

Tel: 04 79 81 59 33
restaurantlafinefourchette.fr
Map ref: D2
Smartest restaurant in the area, just south of Belley (don't go as far as Virignin – that's just the postal address), with a large terrace with a view of the Rhône canal. Modern cooking with some local touches, although I haven't tried it since new owners took over in 2018.

La Maison des Grains ★ 🛏
5A Rue du Centre, 01470 Serrières-de-Briord
Tel: 04 74 36 13 27 / 06 16 67 35 58
lamaisondesgrains.com
Map ref: B3
Close to the Montagnieu area, this recently renovated, comfortable old vineyard house has one decent-sized and one huge room. The hosts, Odile and Bernard, will go out of their way to give you local recommendations for visits, and to make sure you have what you enjoy at breakfast.

The tiny village of Seillonnaz, with its restaurant La Cure, is close to the vineyards of Montagnieu.

Le Prieuré ★★ 🛏
51 Route de Culoz, 01350 Ceyzérieu

Tel: 07 84 47 62 99
leprieure-ain.com
Map ref: D3
Beautifully restored stone buildings, with three large comfortable bedrooms. Generous breakfast and the owners enjoy preparing an evening meal if you book ahead.

Hotel Rolland ★ 🛏
Les Granges, 01470 Montagnieu
Tel: 09 87 27 00 62
hotel-rolland.com
Map ref: B3
This establishment, in the village before you climb up to Montagnieu itself, is ideally placed for visiting producers in the area. Recently modernised, it offers 20 comfortable rooms. In the same building, the restaurant (tel: 04 74 36 73 45) is under separate management. It is reliable enough with some local wines available.

La Source ★ 🛏 🍴
D1075, 38390 Porcieu-Amblagnieu
Tel: 04 26 09 02 32
hotelrestaurantlasource.fr
Map ref: A3
On a busy main road the other side of the Rhône, this could make a good base for visits to the vineyards of Montagnieu as well as those in the northern Isère. There are 13 simple modern rooms and a restaurant with friendly service and well presented and tasty food.

Les Trois Chapeaux ★ 🍴
1 Grand Rue, 01350 Ceyzérieu
Tel: 04 79 87 52 03
Map ref: D3
Simple and jolly, with well prepared food: a set lunchtime menu and tapas-type dishes in the evening. Somewhat limited, though regularly changing, choice of wines.

The Diois

The town of Die has only very basic hotels, but it is pleasant to wander around and there is a choice of restaurants. Don't miss the historic nougat and sweet shop, Confiserie Achard-Verdurand on the main street (57 Rue Camille Buffardel). At the other end of the wine region is Crest, with several places to eat including the 1-Michelin star Le Kleber, but it is a moving feast – the two restaurants I tried in 2016 and 2018 have since both closed. In summer you will find many more places between Crest and Die, including good-value restaurants on the campsites by the Drôme. The village of Saillans has several restaurants for lunch.

Restaurant L'Ami Rabel ★ 🍴

50 Chemin du Canal, 26400 Mirabel-et-Blacons
Tel: 04 75 40 07 49
Map ref: B2
A warm welcome and decent food. Perfectly located for lunch in between vineyard visits, and for an evening meal it's ideal if you are staying at Domaine de Blacons.

Domaine de Blacons ★★ 🛏

1275 Avenue des Trois Becs, 26400 Mirabel-et-Blacons
Tel: 06 29 40 96 73
domainedeblacons.fr
Map ref: B2
A group of buildings run as an event and wedding venue; in the main house there are five very comfortable en-suite bedrooms available on a bed and breakfast basis. This is a perfect base for visiting the Diois producers and hosts Béatrice and Cédric can give you plenty of local recommendations for other activities.

Hautes-Alpes

The vineyards and producers are scattered (see here), but ask for restaurant recommendations when you visit. The Lac de Serre-Ponçon area is particularly worth exploring. Gap has a good choice of restaurants and simple hotels. The whole Durance Valley area comes into its own in summer, and you will find a wide range of bed-and-breakfast and self-catering accommodation, along with places to eat.

Events

At the time of writing the following events appear to be continuing on a regular basis, but much depends on local budgets and sponsorship. For example, the future of the Biennale des Vins de Montagne in Chambéry, due to be held next in 2020, is uncertain. Unfortunately, websites tend to be updated late, so the best source of information is the local tourist office or your accommodation provider.

Le Printemps des Vins du Bugey
leprintempsdesvinsdubugey.com
On a Saturday in late April or early May; location changes each year. All the fun of the fête, with plenty of wine and food to sample, parades and music.

Festival des Vins de Savoie et d'Ailleurs
valdarly-montblanc.com
Notre-Dame-de-Bellecombe; usually the second Sunday in August.
In a pretty mountain village not far from Beaufort (of cheese fame), a good handful of producers from Savoie and *Ailleurs* (elsewhere) present their wines, along with food, music and other family activities.

Le Fascinant Weekend
fascinant-weekend.fr
Every October, the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region organizes a weekend of wine-related activities such as food and wine tastings, walks and concerts with events (mostly in French) throughout Bugey and Savoie.

Le Festival Millésime (Isère)

lemillesime.fr

Grenoble, October. A two-week music festival, part-sponsored by wine areas and with a final long weekend devoted to a wine show that includes tutored tastings, some in English. The local wines of Savoie and Isère are always represented at the show, and there are wines from elsewhere in France too, depending on that year's sponsors.

The old nougat and sweet shop Achard-Verdurand in Die has original shop fittings.

APPENDIX 1:

ESSENTIAL RULES FOR THE APPELLATIONS (AOCs)

The following rules for Savoie and Bugey have been extracted from the *cahier des charges* (specifications) for each AOC. They are not comprehensive (certain rules have been omitted if they are common to all AOCs in France, or rarely used in practice); however, they are the rules that I believe to be the most essential, in particular those that are specific to the region. After the first use of the official term 'geographic denomination', I refer to the more informal 'cru', as used throughout the book. Note that in addition to maximum base yields shown, a ceiling is granted for each wine style according to the year – these increase the base yield by between 2hl/ha and 8h/ha. These rules expand on those outlined in the chapter 'The appellations'.

SAVOIE

General rules applicable to Savoie/Vin de Savoie, Roussette de Savoie and Crémant de Savoie AOCs

1) The communes (villages/towns) with vineyards entitled to AOC Savoie/Vin de Savoie (hereafter referred to as 'Savoie'), AOC Roussette de Savoie and AOC Crémant de Savoie are listed here by department:

Ain: Corbonod, Seyssel (ONLY for AOC Savoie)

Isère: Chapareillan

Haute-Savoie: Ayze, Ballaison, Bassy, Bonneville, Challonges, Chaumont, Chessenaz, Clarafond, Desingy, Douvaine, Franclens, Frangy, Loisin, Marignier, Marin, Massongy, Musièges, Publier, Sciez, Seyssel (ONLY for AOC Savoie), Thonon-les-Bains, Usinens, Vanzy, Ville-la-Grand.

Savoie: Apremont, Arbin, Barby, Billième, Le Bourget-du-Lac, Brison-St-Innocent, Challes-les-Eaux, Chanaz, Chignin, Chindrieux, Cruet, Francin, Fréterive, Jongieux, Lucey, Les Marches, Montmélian, Motz, Myans, Ruffieux, St-Alban-Leysse, St-Baldoph, St-Germain-la-Chambotte, St-Jean-de-Chevelu, St-Jean-de-la-Porte, St-Jeoire-Prieuré, St-Pierre-d'Albigny, Serrières-en-Chautagne, Yenne.

2) Table A shows denominations (crus), which may be added to AOC Savoie.

3) Permitted grape varieties are shown in Table B.

4) Planting proportions: Grape variety proportions in the vineyard must be, depending on the style and cru, a minimum of 80–90% of 'main varieties' and a maximum of 10–20% of 'accessory varieties' as shown in Table B. One exception is Ayze, where Gringet must be 50% or more and accessory varieties no more than 30% of plantings. See also box here.

5) The minimum vine-planting density is 5,000 vines/ha (except in Ayze, where the minimum is 6,000 vines/ha). Vine rows must be spaced no wider than 2.5m (except in Ayze, where the maximum is 2m) and the distance between each vine must not be less than 0.8m.

6) Permitted training systems: either the vines are pruned short using Gobelet, Eventail (fan) or Cordon de Royat, with a maximum of four cordons each with maximum two buds; or pruned long using Single or Double Guyot with a maximum of 12 buds per vine. Exceptions are made for certain grape varieties.

7) Cultivation rules to protect the surrounding environment are enforced, notably that except in areas that are impossible to mechanize, whenever vine rows are spaced greater than 1.5m apart, the soil must be at least partially grassed down or ploughed.

8) The maximum base yield is set for white and rosé wines at 71hl/ha, for reds at 67hl/ha and for sparkling rosé at 75hl/ha. Yields for crus are reduced by 3–5hl/ha.

9) For white wines the minimum must weight for Jacquère is 136g/l (or 144g/l for crus); for Chardonnay and for Roussanne in Chignin Bergeron it is 162g/l, and for other grapes it is 144g/l (or 153g/l for crus). The minimum must weight for Gamay and Pinot Noir for rosé wines is 153g/l and for red wines is 162g/l (or 171g/l for crus); for other grapes it is 144g/l for rosés, 153g/l for reds (or 162g/l for crus). For sparkling rosés it is 144g/l.

10) Specific rules for varietal content for each wine style: all wine styles released as AOC Savoie (without cru), and red wine crus Chautagne, Chignin or Jongieux can be made from a single grape variety or a blend; still white wine crus Abymes, Apremont, Ayze, Chautagne, Chignin, Crépy, Cruet, Jongieux, Marignan, Marin, Montmélian, Ripaille or St-Jeoire-Prieuré must be made from the varieties specified according to the planting proportions in point 4, with the exception of sparkling Ayze, which must have a minimum of 70% Gringet and a maximum of 20% Altesse.

11) After enrichment (chaptalization), wines must not exceed specified alcohol levels, which for whites vary from 11.5% for Savoie Jacquère (with no cru) to 13% for Chignin Bergeron, and for reds and rosés from 12% to 13%.

12) Residual sugars may not exceed 3g/l for red wines, 5g/l for rosés and 8g/l for white wines.

Rules specific to AOC Roussette de Savoie in addition to the general rules above

1) AOC Roussette de Savoie is only for still white wines from the Altesse grape.

2) The following crus may be added to the name AOC Roussette de Savoie: a) Frangy in the communes of Chaumont, Desingy, Frangy; b) Marestel in Jongieux, Lucey; c) Monterminod in St-Alban-Leysse; d) Monthoux in St-Jean-de-Chevelu.

Table A

Name of cru	**Permitted communes**
Abymes/Les Abymes	Apremont (part), Chapareillan, Les Marches (part), Myans
Apremont	Apremont (part), Les Marches (part), St-Baldoph (part)
Arbin	Arbin, Cruet (part), Montmélian (part)
Ayze	Ayze, Bonneville, Marignier
Chautagne	Chindrieux, Motz, Ruffieux, Serrières-en-Chautagne
Chignin	Chignin
Chignin-Bergeron	Chignin, Francin, Montmélian
Crépy	Ballaison, Douvaine, Loisin
Cruet	Cruet
Jongieux	Billième, Jongieux, Lucey, St-Jean-de-Chevelu, Yenne

Marignan	Sciez
Marin	Marin, Publier
Montmélian	Francin, Montmélian
Ripaille	Thonon-les-Bains
St-Jean-de-la-Porte	St-Jean-de-la-Porte
St-Jeoire-Prieuré	St-Jeoire-Prieuré

Table B

AOC/Cru/Style	**Grape varieties**
Still reds and rosés (no cru)	Gamay, Mondeuse (Noire), Pinot Noir plus (for Savoie only) Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Persan; (for Isère only) Persan, Etraire de la Dui, Servanin, Joubertin
Still whites (no cru)	Aligoté, Altesse, Chardonnay, Jacquère, Mondeuse Blanche, Velteliner Rouge Précoce plus (for Haute-Savoie only) Chasselas, Gringet, Roussette d'Ayze; (for Isère only) Marsanne, Verdesse
Sparkling rosés	Aligoté, Altesse, Chardonnay, Gamay, Jacquère, Mondeuse Blanche, Mondeuse (Noire), Pinot Noir, Velteliner Rouge Précoce plus (for Haute-Savoie only) Chasselas
Crémant de Savoie	Aligoté, Altesse, Chardonnay, Gamay, Jacquère, Mondeuse Blanche, Mondeuse (Noire), Pinot Noir plus (for Haute-Savoie only) Chasselas and Molette
Abymes/Les Abymes whites	Main variety: Jacquère; accessory varieties: Aligoté, Altesse, Chardonnay, Mondeuse Blanche, Velteliner Rouge Précoce plus (for Isère only) Marsanne, Verdesse

Apremont, Cruet, Montmélian, St-Jeoire-Prieuré whites	Main variety: Jacquère; accessory varieties: Aligoté, Altesse, Montmélian, Chardonnay, Mondeuse Blanche, Velteliner Rouge Précoce
Arbin, St-Jean-de-la-Porte reds	Exclusive variety: Mondeuse (Noire)
Ayze still and sparkling whites	Main variety: Gringet; accessory varieties: Altesse, Roussette d'Ayze
Chautagne, Chignin, Jongieux whites	Main variety: Jacquère; accessory varieties: Aligoté, Altesse, Chardonnay, Mondeuse Blanche, Velteliner Rouge Précoce
Chautagne, Chignin, Jongieux reds	Main varieties: Gamay, Mondeuse, Pinot Noir; accessory varieties: Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Persan
Chignin-Bergeron whites	Exclusive variety: Roussanne
Crépy, Marignan, Marin, Ripaille whites	Main variety: Chasselas; accessory varieties: Aligoté, Altesse, Chardonnay, Gringet, Mondeuse Blanche, Roussette d'Ayze, Velteliner Rouge Précoce

3) The maximum base yield is set at 64hl/ha, and at 60hl/ha for the crus.

4) The minimum must weight is 162g/l, or 170g/l for the crus.

5) After enrichment, wines must not exceed 13% alcohol, or 13.5% for the crus.

6) Residual sugars may not exceed 8g/l.

Rules specific to AOC Crémant de Savoie in addition to the general rules above (and not including rules common to all AOC Crémants)

1) AOC Crémant de Savoie is white sparkling wine, made in the traditional method from base wine harvested from vineyards in the communes listed for other Savoie AOCs (excluding Ayze, Bonneville, Corbonod, Marignier and Seyssel), subject to the same cultivation rules.

2) Crémant de Savoie must be from base wines made from a minimum of 40% Jacquère, and the proportion of Jacquère and Altesse, separately or together,

must be at least 60%. The proportion of red grapes must be no more than 20%.

3) The maximum base yield for grapes for Crémant is set at 74–78hl/ha depending on the vineyard density.

4) The minimum must weight is 144g/l.

5) The maximum alcohol following disgorgement must not exceed 13% if the base wine was enriched.

Specific rules for AOC Seyssel

1) AOC Seyssel is for still and sparkling white wines produced in the communes of Seyssel (Haute-Savoie and Ain) and Corbonod (Ain) from Altesse and Molette grapes.

2) Still wines may be 100% Altesse or 100% Molette; if the latter, Molette must be stated on the label. Sparkling wines must include a minimum of 75% Molette and a minimum of 10% Altesse.

3) The minimum vine-planting density is 6,000 vines/ha. Vine rows must be spaced no wider than 2m and the distance between each vine must not be less than 0.8m.

4) Permitted training systems: the vines are pruned short using Gobelet, Eventail (fan) or Cordon de Royat, with a maximum of six cordons each with maximum two buds; Molette vines are pruned with a maximum of eight buds per vine.

5) The maximum base yield is set at 58hl/ha, 68hl/ha for Molette and at 75hl/ha for sparkling wines.

6) The minimum must weight is 162g/l, or 153g/l for Molette, or 144g/l for sparkling wines.

7) After enrichment, wines must not exceed 13% alcohol, or 12% for Molette.

8) Residual sugars may not exceed 4g/l for Molette wines, 8g/l for dry Altesse wines and 15g/l for demi-sec Altesse wines.

9) For sparkling Seyssel, the traditional method is used, with second fermentation in the bottle; the wine must undergo a minimum nine months of lees contact before disgorgement.

BUGEY

General rules applicable to Bugey and Roussette du Bugey AOCs

1) The communes (villages/towns) with vineyards entitled to AOC Bugey and AOC Roussette du Bugey are all in the department of Ain:

L'Abergement-de-Varey, Ambérieu-en-Bugey, Ambléon, Andert-et-Condon, Anglefort, Arbignieu, Argis, Artemare, Belley, Belmont, Bénonces, Béon, Bohas-Meyriat-Rignat, Bolozon, Boyeux-St-Jérôme, Brens, Briord, Cerdon, Ceyzériat, Ceyzérieu, Chanay, Chavornay, Chazey-Bons, Cheignieu-la-Balme, Contrevoz, Conzieu, Cressin-Rochefort, Culoz, Cuzieu, Flaxieu, Groslée, Izieu, Journans, Jujurieux, Lagnieu, Lavours, Lhuis, Magnieu, Marignieu, Massignieu-de-Rives, Mérignat, Montagnieu, Nattages, Parves, Peyrieu, Pollieu, Poncin, Pugieu, Rossillon, St-Alban, St-Benoît, St-Germain-les-Paroisses, St-Champ, St-Jean-le-Vieux, St-Martin-de-Bavel, St-Martin-du-Mont, St-Sorlin-en-Bugey, Seillonnaz, Talissieu, Torcieu, Tossiat, Vaux-en-Bugey, Vieu, Villebois, Virieu-le-Grand, Virignin, Vongnes.

2) Geographic denominations (crus) may be added to AOC Bugey as shown in Table C.

3) Permitted grape varieties are shown in Table D. Note that planting proportions of the 'main grape variety/varieties' must be at least 70% of the varieties within the total planted area.

4) The minimum vine-planting density is 5,000 vines/ha (except for those which are planted along the contour of the hill, where the minimum is 4,500 vines/ha). Vine rows must be spaced no wider than 2.4m and the distance between each vine along a single row must be between 0.8m and 1.3m.

5) Permitted training systems: either the vines are pruned short using Gobelet or Cordon de Royat, with a maximum of ten fruiting branches after flowering; or pruned long using Single or Double Guyot with a maximum of ten fruiting branches after flowering for red varieties and 16 for white varieties.

6) Cultivation rules to protect the surrounding environment are enforced.

7) The maximum base yield is set for white wines at 67hl/ha, for rosés at 65hl/ha, for Gamay reds at 60hl/ha, for Mondeuse (Noire) and Pinot Noir reds at 58hl/ha and for sparkling whites and rosés at 71hl/ha. Yields for crus are: Manicle white 63hl/ha, Manicle red and Montagnieu red 53hl/ha; sparkling wines remain the same.

8) For white and rosé wines the minimum must weight is 153g/l (or 162g/l for cru Manicle white); for Gamay or Pinot Noir reds it is 162g/l (or 171g/l for cru Manicle red); for Mondeuse red it is 153g/l (or 162g/l for cru Montagnieu red); and for sparkling whites and rosés it is 144g/l (or 136g/l for cru Cerdon aromatic rosé).

Table C

Name of cru	Permitted communes
Cerdon	L'Abergement-de-Varey, Bohas-Meyriat-Rignat, Boyeux-St-Jérôme, Cerdon, Jujurieux, Mérignat, Poncin, St-Alban, St-Jean-le-Vieux, St-Martin-du-Mont
Manicle	Cheignieu-la-Balme, Pugieu
Montagnieu	Briord, Montagnieu, Seillonnaz

Table D

AOC/Cru/Style	Grape varieties
Still whites	Main variety: Chardonnay; accessory varieties: Aligoté, Altesse, Jacquère, Mondeuse Blanche, Pinot Gris
Still reds	Gamay, Mondeuse (Noire), Pinot Noir
Still rosés	Main varieties: Gamay, Pinot Noir; accessory varieties: Mondeuse (Noire), Pinot Gris, Poulsard
Sparkling whites	Main varieties; Chardonnay, Jacquère, Molette; accessory varieties: Aligoté, Altesse, Gamay, Mondeuse Blanche, Mondeuse (Noire), Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Poulsard
Sparkling rosés	Main varieties: Gamay, Pinot Noir; accessory varieties: Mondeuse (Noire), Pinot Gris, Poulsard
Manicle whites	Chardonnay
Manicle reds	Pinot Noir
Montagnieu reds	Mondeuse (Noire)
Montagnieu sparkling whites	Main varieties: Altesse, Chardonnay, Mondeuse (Noire); Accessory varieties:

	Gamay, Jacquère, Molette, Pinot Noir
Cerdon aromatic sparkling rosés	Gamay, Poulsard

9) Specific rules for varietal content for each wine style: red wines can only be made from a single grape variety; still and sparkling whites and rosés may be made from the varieties specified according to the planting proportions specified in point 3 with the exception of Cerdon, which must not be made from 100% Poulsard.

10) After enrichment (chaptalization), wines must not exceed specified alcohol levels, which vary from 11.5% to 13%.

11) Residual sugars may not exceed 2g/l for red wines, 5g/l for rosés and 6g/l for white wines.

12) Specific rules for cru Cerdon *méthode ancestrale*: a) final residual sugar must be between 22g/l and 80g/l; b) pressure must be at least 3 bars measured at 20°C; c) use of tanks equipped with carbonation systems are not allowed; d) at the point of bottling the must requires a minimum residual sugar level of 40g/l; e) no addition of yeast and sugar is allowed; f) the wine must rest on lees in bottle for a minimum of two months and may be released on to the market after this date; g) no *dosage* is allowed; h) the deposit may be removed by disgorgement, filtration from bottle to bottle, or transfer via a pressurized and temperature controlled tank, in which the wine may not stay longer than eight days.

13) Specific rules for cru Montagnieu sparkling wines: a) the harvest must be manual; b) the wines may not be released on to the market earlier than 12 months after bottling.

Rules specific to AOC Roussette du Bugey in addition to the general rules above

1) AOC Roussette du Bugey is only for still white wines from the Altesse grape.

2) The following crus may be added to the name AOC Roussette du Bugey: a) Montagnieu in the communes of Briord, Montagnieu and Seillonnaz; b) Virieu-le-Grand in the commune of the same name.

3) The maximum base yield is set at 59hl/ha, and at 53hl/ha for the crus.

4) The minimum must weight is 153g/l, or 162g/l for the crus.

5) After enrichment, wines must not exceed 12.5% alcohol, or 13% for the crus.

6) Residual sugars may not exceed 8g/l.

APPENDIX 2: ABBREVIATIONS, CONVERSIONS AND PRONUNCIATIONS

Abbreviations and conversions

This book uses the metric system as used in France. The following gives the abbreviations used, and conversions when possible.

Temperature

°C degrees Celsius (official conversion when temperature above freezing: °C × 1.8 + 32 = °F) Examples: 5°C = 41°F; 10°C = 50°F; 15°C = 59°F; 20°C = 68°F.

Volume/weight

1 litre (0.22 imperial gallons or 0.264 US gallons)
g/l grams per litre
mg/l milligrams per litre

Area/yield

ha hectare (2.47 acres)
hl/ha hectolitres per hectare (conversion is not exact, as other measurements use weight of grapes rather than volume of grape juice) Example: 50hl/ha is approximately 7 tonnes/ha or 3 tonnes/acre

Distance

km kilometre (0.62 miles)
m metre (3.28 feet)
mm millimetres (0.039 inches)

Pronunciation guide

This guide is for key grape, wine area and place names used in in the French Alps. The hyphen indicates a new syllable or slight pause. The stress should be on the final syllable.

Aix-les-Bains [ex-lay-ba(n)]
Abymes [a-beem]
Allobroges [allo-brozh]

Altesse [al-tess]
Annecy [ann-uh-see]
Apremont [app-ruh-maw(n)]
Arbin [arr-ba(n)]
Ayze [eye-ease]
Belley [buh-lay]
Bugey [boo-zhay]
Cerdon [sair-don]
Chambéry [shom-bair-ee]
Châtillon-en-Diois [shat-ee-on-on-dee-wah]
Chautagne [show-tanne]
Chignin [she-nya(n)]
Chignin Bergeron [she-nya(n) bair-zheron]
Clairette de Die [claire-rett-der-dee]
Combe de Savoie [caum-der-sav-wah]
Crémant de Savoie [kremon der sav-wah]
Crépy [cray-pee]
Cruet [croo-eh]
Die [dee]
Diois [dee-wah]
Frangy [fron-zhee]
Fréterive [fre-treeve]
Gringet [gran-zhay]
Hautes-Alpes [oats-alp]
Isère [izz-air]
Jacquère [zha-kair]
Jongieux [zhawn-zhe-yer]
Lac du Bourget [lack-doo-boor-zhay]
Manicle [man-eekl]
Marestel [marr-eh-tell]
Mollard [moll-ar]
Mondeuse [mawn-derze]
Montagnieu [mont-a-nyuh]
Persan [pair-saw(n)]
Roussette [roo-set]
Savoie [sav-wah]
Seyssel [say-sell]
Thonon [toh-non]

Vongnes [von-yer]

APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY

The terms below are defined as they specifically apply to Savoie, Bugey and other French Alpine wines.

acid the chief acid in wine is tartaric acid. Other important acids in wine are malic and lactic acids. See **malolactic fermentation**.

acidity provides freshness and liveliness in wine and is part of overall wine balance. Whereas most of the world measures acidity in g/l of tartaric acid, in France it is measured in g/l of sulphuric acid. An alternative measure of acidity is **pH**.

alcohol refers to ethyl alcohol or ethanol, produced by the conversion of sugars through the action of **yeast** during fermentation.

ancestral method see **Méthode Ancestrale.**

AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) controlled appellation of origin. The strictest level of regulated appellation in France. See also **AOP**.

AOP (Appellation d'Origine Protégée) protected appellation of origin in the European Union (EU) for agricultural products. Replaces **AOC**, but AOC can also be used for wines in France.

biodynamic philosophy of organic farming and wine production, originally based on the teachings of Rudolph Steiner. Dynamized spray preparations nurture both the soil and the plant, and vignerons work according to lunar and astral calendars. The main certification body is Demeter; another is Biodyvin. See **organic**.

Bordeaux mixture organically approved treatment sprayed onto vines, consisting of copper sulphate with slaked lime.

Botrytis cinerea noble rot, desirable fungus that may appear on ripe white grapes in autumn, resulting in a concentration of sugars, acids and flavours.

CAAPG (Centre d'Ampélographie Alpine Pierre Galet) Savoie-based association dedicated to research, rehabilitation and education about rare Alpine grape varieties. See here.

carbon dioxide/CO_2 gas produced during process of fermentation. A small amount remains dissolved in the wine and helps protect juice and wine from **oxidation**. Dissolved carbon dioxide forms the bubbles in sparkling wine.

carbonic maceration a method of red wine fermentation where uncrushed whole grapes undergo intracellular fermentation in the presence of **carbon dioxide**. Produces a fruit-forward wine with low levels of **tannins**. In **semi-carbonic maceration** the grapes are partly crushed so that both an intracellular and exterior fermentation take place.

cave d'affinage dedicated location for cheese ageing.

chaptalization sugar added to grape **must** before fermentation to increase alcohol content; levels controlled by law. Now often referred to as **enrichment**.

CIVS (Comité Interprofessionnel des Vins de Savoie) regional wine organization, responsible for promotional activities and recording sales.

clonal selection process of selection for vines chosen for their particular characteristics and subsequently propagated.

clone genetically identical vine cultivated from cuttings from the same original vine plant.

CMC (Centre de Méthode Champenoise) technical wine service company based in Savoie, specializing in sparkling wine disgorgement. See here.

commune administrative village or town, which may include several hamlets.

Crémant sparkling wine made by the **traditional method**.

cru geographic denomination or sub-appellation, attached to a bigger AOC, e.g. Apremont within the AOC Savoie. Defines a geographic area (in one or more ***communes***) and other rules may specify, for example, grape varieties or alcohol levels.

cultured yeast see **yeast**.

CUMA (co-operative d'utilisation de matériels agricoles) agricultural co-operative that allows farmers to share vineyard machinery or wine processing equipment.

cuvée used to denote a particular wine selection, e.g. a producer might offer three Apremont cuvées, each from a different **terroir**, or aged in a different manner, etc.

demi-muid size of barrel that varies from 350 to 600 litres – larger than a ***fût*** and smaller than a ***foudre***.

disgorgement removal of **yeast** deposits following ***remuage*** in the making of **traditional method** sparkling wines.

dosage amount of sugar mixed with wine to make the *liqueur d'expédition* added immediately after **disgorgement** of **traditional method** sparkling wines. The *dosage* affects the style and taste, e.g. *brut*.

échalas vineyard post or support, used in the terms *sur échalas* or *en échalas*, to describe Gobelet vine training, where the vine is supported by attaching to a single post, rather than on wires.

enrichment see **chaptalization**.

esca vine trunk disease that is fungal in origin and kills individual vines.

flavescence dorée form of grapevine yellows, a deadly bacterial vine disease, which is spread by a leafhopper. See here.

foudre large oak cask or vat; usually at least 1,000 litres.

fût oak barrel or cask of 228 litres. Also known as a *pièce*. This is the size typically used in Burgundy. If Bordeaux *barriques* are used the size is 225 litres.

glacial till soil created from what is left behind by glaciers, usually clay with varying amounts of sand, gravel, pebbles and rocks.

green harvest crop thinning or cutting off immature grape bunches to reduce yield and concentrate the vine's energy on maturing the bunches that remain.

Guyot cane pruning system; can be Single or Double Guyot.

gyropalette pallet holding sparkling wine bottles that may be turned manually or in an automatic system for the process of ***remuage*** or riddling.

herbicide chemical weed-killer used to control weed growth in the vineyard.

HVE (Haute Valeur Environnementale) sustainable agricultural certification scheme with three levels – vignerons usually aim for the top Level 3, which includes protection of the local biodiversity, managing chemical inputs in the vineyard and water management in both vineyard and winery.

IGP (Indication Géographique Protégée) Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) for agricultural products. More flexible and sometimes deemed inferior to **AOP** or **AOC**.

INAO (Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité a publicly administered institute under the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry that regulates **AOC** and **AOP**.

indigenous grape varieties that are native to a winegrowing region. See also **yeast**.

intercep tractor attachment used to weed mechanically between each individual vine.

lees sediment, such as dead yeasts, left in the wine after fermentation; leaving the wine on the lees for a time can add flavour.

lieu-dit literally a named place, usually referring to a specific area of vineyards.

maceration (time) contact of grape skins with the fermenting juice to extract colour, **tannins** and flavour. Usually refers to red wines, but skin maceration is also possible with white wines, especially in amphorae: these are usually referred to as **orange wine**. See also **carbonic maceration** and ***saignée***.

malolactic fermentation bacterial conversion (usually starting naturally) of harder malic acid into softer lactic acid, deemed essential for red wines and used for some whites, depending on local traditions, the producer and the vintage conditions.

marc distilled grape skins, pips, etc. Sometimes used to make a spirit, marc de Savoie. A *marc* is also an *eau-de-vie*.

marl fine-grained mixture of clay and limestone.

mass selection/massal(e) selection selection and propagation of specific vines from existing vineyards.

Méthode Ancestrale sparkling winemaking method using a single fermentation in the bottle, notably in Bugey Cerdon and in the Diois. See also **Pétillant Naturel**.

micro-oxygenation bubbling small amounts of oxygen into a vat, which may be used for (mainly) red winemaking; it is useful to soften tannic varieties such as Mondeuse.

mildew fungal diseases affecting the vines, provoked by humidity and controlled through vine canopy management and preventative sprays, either chemical or organic-approved. Most prevalent is downy mildew or peronospera (*le mildiou* in France), often controlled by **Bordeaux mixture**. See also **oidium**.

molasse an assemblage of sediments such as sandstones, shales and conglomerates that accumulate next to rising mountains. In Savoie and Bugey, the term is used for soils derived from clayey calcareous sandstone.

must juice from crushed or pressed grapes before or during the start of fermentation.

natural way phrase used in this book to describe winemaking (usually from **organic** or **biodynamic** grapes) with minimal intervention or additives, in particular with low or no additions of **sulphur dioxide**.

natural wine unregulated term for wines made in the **natural way**.

noble rot see ***Botrytis cinerea***.

Oeno Conseil widely used technical wine service company based in Savoie, owned by Olivier Turlais, whose services include bottling, filtration, analysis and consultancy. See here.

oidium also called powdery mildew, fungal disease.

orange wine a white wine made with extended skin contact.

organic method of agriculture forbidding the use of synthetic chemical fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides or other vineyard inputs. Main certification body is Ecocert; another certification body widely used in the French Alps is Alpes Contrôles. See also **biodynamic**.

oxidation/oxidized wine that has been over-exposed to air has unpleasant flavours and ages prematurely. Maderized is an extreme form. It is chemically the opposite of **reduction**.

Pétavins informal group of Savoie organic producers, which comes together to present their wines at professional tastings.

Pétillant Naturel (Pet Nat) sparkling wine made in a similar way to the ***m*éthode ancestrale** with a single fermentation that completes in the bottle. Sold as Vin de France without appellation.

pH measure of **acidity** level in soils, grapes, grape **must** or wine.

reduction/reductive reduction is the opposite of **oxidation**. Wines may be made in a reductive manner, avoiding any contact with oxygen. A wine that

shows or suffers from reduction may have developed undesirable flavours, which may disappear on decanting or aerating the wine.

***remuage* (riddling)** turning and shaking bottles of traditional method sparkling wines to move the sediment to the neck of the bottle before **disgorgement**.

residual sugar sugar remaining in wine after fermentation is complete (fermentable sucrose and glucose). The amount dictates how sweet the wine will taste. Amounts are usually given as g/l (grams per litre).

saignée from the word 'bled', refers to rosé wines made after 'bleeding' or running off some juice after a short maceration of red grapes, then leaving the rest of the juice in contact with its skins to make a more concentrated red wine.

Savoyard a person from Savoie, also used adjectively, e.g. a Savoyard tradition.

semi-carbonic maceration see **carbonic maceration**.

sulphites/sulphur/sulphur dioxide/SO_2 the most important additive in wine, present naturally in very small quantities following fermentation. Acts as an antioxidant, antibacterial and antimicrobial substance, protecting the wine from being spoilt. It may be added in various forms at various stages to protect the grapes at harvest, and/or the wine during production and before bottling. The amount is subject to legal limits. A few asthmatics are allergic to it, hence a warning label 'contains sulphites' is compulsory. An increasing, but still tiny, number of wines are made with no added sulphites.

sur lattes for both **traditional method** and **ancestral method** sparkling wines, the period the wine spends in bottle on its (second) fermentation lees before riddling and disgorgement (or transfer/filtration) is known as the time *sur lattes*. The *lattes* were the wooden slats on which the bottles were traditionally stacked. The minimum time is defined in AOC rules and a longer time is usually desirable.

SRVS (Syndicat Régional des Vins de Savoie) organization that works with the wine producers of Savoie, and with the **INAO**, to ensure rules are followed and also to research and advise on all production aspects. See also **CIVS**.

tannin compound deriving from the grape skins, pips and stalks as well as to an extent from oak barrels (especially new); tannin is a particularly important component of red wines.

terroir can be used in many senses, most often to describe the geographical features of a piece of land or vineyard, incorporating site position, climate, geology and soil.

thermovinification red winemaking method involving heating the fermenting **must** for a short time to extract the maximum colour and flavour.

traditional method sparkling wine method used for Champagne and **Crémant** among others. Involves a second fermentation in the bottle and a period of at least nine months ***sur lattes***, followed by removal of **yeast** through ***remuage*** (riddling) and **disgorgement**.

VDQS (Vin Délimité de Qualité Supérieur) classification (now obsolete) for French wines below **AOC**.

vendange tardive late harvest. Used to describe a wine, which is usually semi-sweet, from grapes that have been left hanging on the vine beyond the main harvest date.

Vin de France lowest classification of quality wine in France with the fewest restrictions, previously called Vin de Table.

vin de paille (literally, 'straw wine') sweet wine made from grapes that have been dried off the vine in small boxes, concentrating the sugars, acidity and flavours.

volatile acidity/volatility fault caused by an excess of acetic acid, giving wine a vinegary smell.

working the soil mechanical weeding, turning the soil or ploughing, used as an alternative or in addition to grassing down, planting cover crops or using herbicide.

yeast microscopic organism responsible for the conversion of sugars in grape juice into wine during fermentation. Indigenous, also called native, yeasts occur naturally in the vineyard and in the cellar. Cultured yeasts, also known as selected yeasts, are grown in a laboratory.

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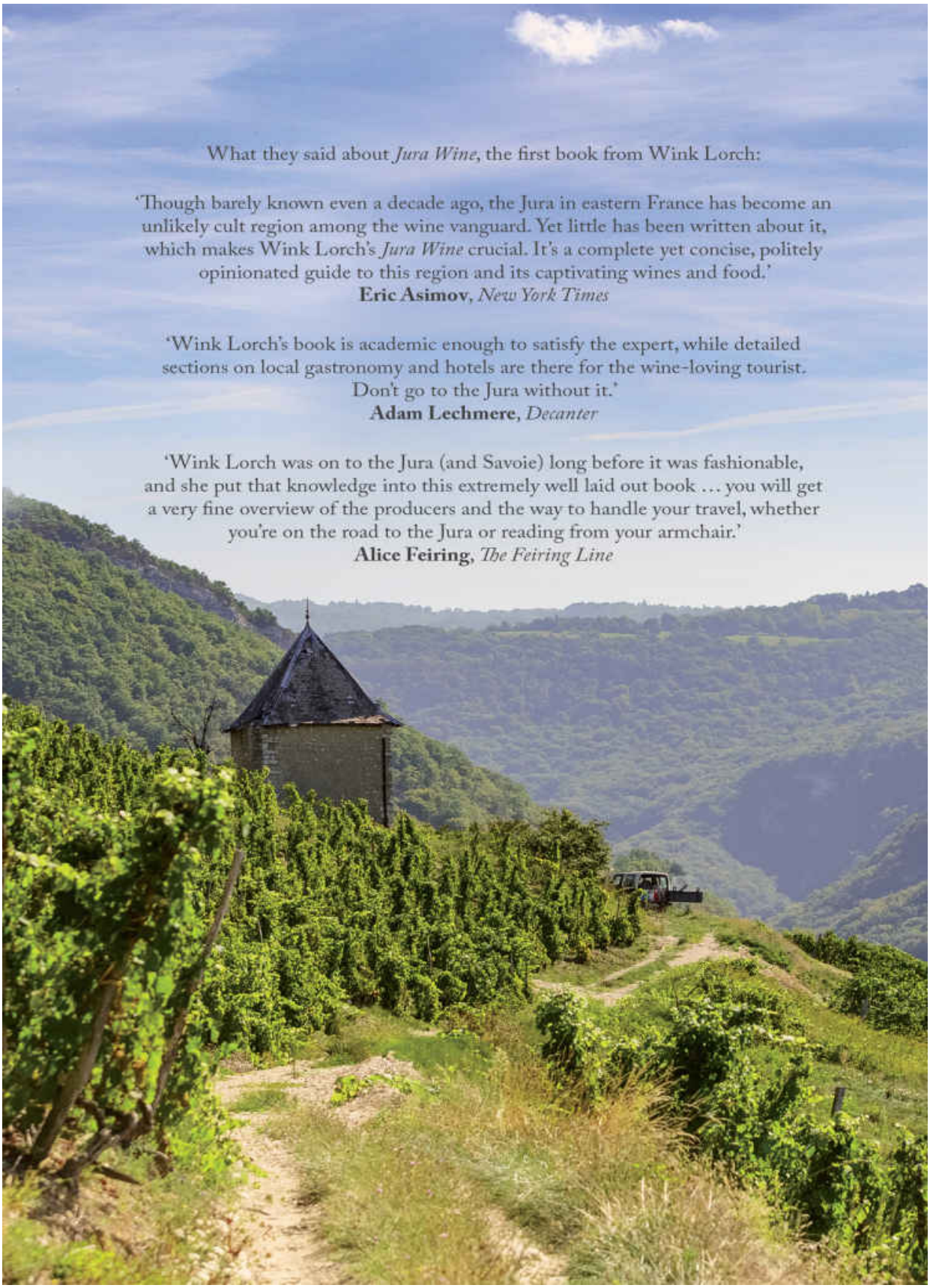
Wink Lorch has worked in the world of wine all her adult life: writing, editing, teaching and presenting tastings. A founder of the Association of Wine Educators and a member of the Circle of Wine Writers, Wink has contributed to books by Jancis Robinson, Tom Stevenson and Oz Clarke and has written for numerous magazines. In 2014 she wrote and selfpublished her first book, *Jura Wine*, which won the André Simon Best Drink Book award and was shortlisted for a Louis Roederer Wine Writers' award.

In the 1980s Wink visited her first Savoie vineyard after a ski holiday, and now divides her time between London and the French Alps. She has become the go-to authority on Savoie and Bugey wines, widening her interest recently to wines from the rest of the French Alps. As a part-time mountain dweller she is always impressed by how wines are made in such challenging areas. As a wine lover, she finds the indigenous grapes endlessly fascinating.

Wink's website is winetravelmedia.com

Photo of Wink Lorch and back cover photo of southern Bugey by Jérôme Genée

Principal photographer Mick Rock of Cephas Picture Library has been photographing the world of wine for over 30 years. Mick joined Wink twice in Savoie to shoot photos for the book, visiting 35 key producers and many more vineyards. Mick's photography can be viewed at cephas.com



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