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Tasting great Burgundy



SHOBANARAYAN

The Wine Connoisseurs, Bangalore, share an intelligently-designed template that enables group members to taste expensive fine wines at a reasonable price

Question: How do you organise a Burgundy wine lunch as a collective?
Answer: Very carefully. Unless you are a collector or a distributor, organizing a wine tasting of great Burgundy wines is a difficult and expensive proposition. But The Wine Connoisseurs (TWC) of Bangalore decided to do just that a few weeks ago and we ended up with quite a lineup.

So how can one create a similar event? The first is to come up with a theme that works for the wine group. The theme in turn is dictated by the wines that are accessible to members of the group. In our case, one member, Ananth Narayanan, had a lot of Burgundy wines. We chose five wines from his cellar and another from the cellar of Devesh Agarwal, co-founder of TWC and the three of us organized the tasting. It took a lot of brainstorming about the lineup of the wines and the food-pairing. For instance, an idea that we batted around was to taste the reds first before palate fatigue set in. But in the end, we stayed with the classical red-after-white route.

We argued a lot about the wines we were to taste, but then, isn't that what makes this region special? We finally included wines of different varietals and years that lent themselves to two different types of horizontal tastings. Despite our best efforts to stick to Burgundy, we compromised by beginning the lunch with a **2008 Dom Perignon** even though it is hardly a wine from the region.

The first course was a side-by-side blind tasting that we called "Clash of the 2009s." A **Louis Latour Corton Charlemagne Grand Cru** versus a **Henri Boillot Clos de la Mouchere Monopole Puligny Montrachet**. Both were stunning wines with a luscious mouthfeel. Both were savoury with hints of salt and pepper. The Corton had aromas of pear and muskmelons and paired well with a Brie. The Montrachet smelt of green mustard, and a hint of yeast buttermilk. As Sharmila Senthilraja, a member of the TWC said, "The Corton is like an opera singer, while the Puligny Montrachet is like a flamenco dancer."

For the second course, we had a Pecorino Crème Brulée paired with a **2012 William Fevre Bougros Côte Bouguerots Chablis Grand Cru**. Since we had only one such wine, we did a small pour. To me, this Chablis was unlike the other, rather austere ones I have tasted. It was fruity, smelling of violets and grass, without the minerality that one expects in a Chablis.

For the third and main course, we had a side-by-side blind tasting of three reds, Pinot Noirs all, from the Chambolle-Musigny area. They were a **2003 Frederic Magnien Les Baudes Premier Cru**, a **2012 Domaine Georges & Christophe Roumier**, and a **2011 Domaine Patrice Rion Les Charmes**. Since we tasted them blind, it was a fun exercise to figure out which one we liked and whether price was linked to taste. Of the three, the Roumier was most expensive at \$393, while the other two were \$112 and \$100, respectively,

on Wine Searcher. Was the price worth it? Well, it was up to us to decide.

Even though it occupies a tiny part of France, Burgundy inhabits an outsize space in the wine world's imagination. Partly because this region cannot supply enough wine to keep up with the insatiable demand by collectors from all over the world, but also because of its history which is linked to a very specific terroir. As Christophe Roumier, who looks after several Grand Cru labels in Burgundy says in a publicly available YouTube video, terroir happens because the single varietal, Pinot Noir is planted in a variety of terrains on hillsides and in the plains. By controlling viticulture in this way, the region has been able to make its vines and wines sing.

How did our wines fare? Well, we discussed all the wines and gave them points. After the big reveal of which glass carried which wine, here's what we found out. The Roumier began life smelling a little damp. We wondered if it needed more time in the decanter than the three hours we had accorded it. But it opened up gradually to become one of the haunting, restrained Pinot Noirs that are eulogized in the movie, "Sideways". It took a whole hour of

swirling in the glass for the wine to truly reveal itself but finally it did and, those of us who waited for it, were glad.

The Patrice Rion had aromas of fennel, coffee, sour cherry, and most interesting of all for me, smoke and cigars. The Magnien was well structured and exhibited the scents and flavours that epitomise what the world imagines a Burgundy wine to possess – restraint, cherry, oak, well balanced tannins and acid, and a long finish.

The TWC follows certain rules which make sense. The first rule is that we all share the cost of the wines and use wine-searcher.com to find the average price. Using Wine Searcher is a good way to decide on the prices because we don't know how each person has acquired the wine. Some members buy wines at auction where we can't control the price. Others buy their wines *en primeur* and get a good rate. If the price goes up, they are happy because they get to share their rare and lovely wines with a group of wine-crazy friends and get some of their investment back in return. Devesh Agarwal creates a spreadsheet calculating who has to pay how much based on equal cost-sharing. The table below explains the process. ♦

THE WINE CONNOISSEURS – Cost Sharing Worksheet, February 2021 Prices based on www.wine-searcher.com. Exchange rate: US\$1 = Rs 72.92

1	2008 Dom Pérignon, Champagne	\$212	Rs 15,500
2	2009 Louis Latour Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru, Cote de Beaune	\$186	Rs 13,600
3	2009 Domaine Henri Boillot Clos de la Mouchere Monopole, Puligny-Montrachet	\$180	Rs 13,100
4	2012 William Fevre Bougros Cote Bouguerots, Chablis Grand Cru, France	\$100	Rs 7,300
5	2003 Frederic Magnien Les Baudes, Chambolle-Musigny Premier Cru, France	\$112	Rs 8,200
6	2012 Domaine Georges & Christophe Roumier Chambolle-Musigny, Cote de Nuits	\$393	Rs 28,700
7	2011 Domaine Patrice Rion Les Charmes, Chambolle-Musigny Premier Cru	\$100	Rs 7,300
Total Price of Wines Rs 93,600		Participants 9	
Average cost per participant shared, rounded off to the next 100			Rs 10,400

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