

Burghound.com's 2015 Vintage Selections

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Maison Joseph Drouhin (Beaune)

2015	➤➤ Beaune "Clos des Mouches" 1er	red
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2015	Chambertin-Clos de Bèze Grand Cru	red
2015	➤➤ Chambolle-Musigny	red
2015	➤➤ Chambolle-Musigny "1er" 1er	red
2015	➤➤ Chambolle-Musigny "Les Amoureuses" 1er	red
2015	Charmes-Chambertin Grand Cru	red
2015	Chorey-lès-Beaune	red
2015	➤➤ Côte de Beaune	red
2015	Clos de Vougeot Grand Cru	red
2015	➤➤ Gevrey-Chambertin	red
2015	Grands Echézeaux Grand Cru	red
2015	Griotte-Chambertin Grand Cru	red
2015	Mazis-Chambertin Grand Cru	red
2015	Musigny Grand Cru	red
2015	➤➤ Nuits St. Georges "Procès" 1er	red
2015	➤➤ Vosne-Romanée	red
2015	➤➤ Vosne-Romanée "Les Petits-Monts" 1er	red

I met this time with enologist and winemaker Jérôme Faure-Brac as well as Véronique Drouhin who collectively noted that the 2015 growing season "wasn't nearly as difficult as the prior seasons and particularly so with our parcels in the Côte de Beaune. You had to be really careful pruning the vines as the accumulated effects from three consecutive years of hail in the Côte de

Beaune had made many of them quite fragile. We also had significantly different yields as they were normal in the Côte de Nuits but quite low in the Côte de Beaune. One of the really nice things about the vintage is how clean the fruit was and given that the harvest weather was so clement we could basically pick each parcel when we felt it was ready, a luxury that isn't always available.

While we didn't use whole clusters for every wine, we did use between 10 and 50% for many of them. Another interesting aspect of this vintage is how much the wines have changed over time as initially they seemed almost heavy and a bit flat at first but as the *élevage* progressed, they tightened up and actually became fresher and more focused. At that point we said that there was nothing further to be gained from keeping the wines in cask so we bottled the entire range between December 2016 and January 2017.

I was seriously impressed with the quality of the Drouhin 2015s as their style for lighter and more elegant burgundies seemed to marry especially well with what is effectively a notably ripe, rich and concentrated vintage. While the Musigny is almost without fail excellent at this address, I also found the Clos de Vougeot, Griotte, Petits Monts and the straight Chambolle *villages* to be particularly fine.

If you enjoy the Drouhin style then these are wines to make a special effort to find and cellar over the next 8 to 15 years. See also the associated Domaine Hospices de Belleville in the En Plus section for those Beaujolais reviews.

2015 Chorey-lès-Beaune: 87/2019+

This initially displays a touch of reduction though it quickly dissipates to reveal pretty and ripe red berry fruit and earth scents. The delicious middle weight flavors possess a lovely sense of energy that also characterizes the refreshing finish. This isn't particularly complex but it is certainly attractive in its fashion and would make for a good all-around and inexpensive house red.

2015 Côte de Beaune: 88/2021+

Here the expressive nose offers up notes of violet, plum and black cherry that complements well the delicious, round and seductively textured medium-bodied flavors that possess slightly better depth on the ever-so-slightly rustic finale. This too would make for a fine all-around and age-worthy house red as it needs a few years to unwind.

2015 Beaune "Grèves": 90/2027+

(from a .80 ha parcel in the *climat* of Sur les Grèves; 35% whole clusters). There is a whiff of *surmaturité* to the violet, plum, cassis and mocha-infused aromas. The medium-bodied flavors are rich to the point of opulence yet the palate impression is quite serious as the supporting tannic spine is quite firm. This may ultimately prove to be better than I surmise but the nose is a mild concern.

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2015 Beaune "Clos des Mouches": 91/2025+

(40% whole clusters). This displays a peculiar kind of reduction the Burgundians call cassis flower, which isn't unpleasant per se but it's not desirable either; it's difficult to say whether it will eventually dissipate though my rating offers the benefit of the doubt. The middle weight flavors possess a notably finer mouth feel with a bit more minerality as well, all wrapped in a well-balanced and impressively persistent finish. This isn't technically perfect today but everything else is in place for this to age well.

2015 Vosne-Romanée: 89/2023+

(from several *lieux-dits* including a bit of the 1er Les Chaumes). This too is mildly reduced and it's enough to mask the fruit while still providing glimpses of the underlying spice elements. The supple, round and delicious flavors possess both good volume and punch while the phenolically mature tannins are well-integrated on the balanced and vibrant finish. This is a relatively firmly structured Vosne *villages* and one that will need at least 4 to 5 years of cellar time first.

2015 Chambolle-Musigny: 90/2022+

A discreet application of wood easily allows the elegant and beautifully layered red berry fruit, floral and anise-scented nose to shine. The mouth feel of the equally refined medium-bodied flavors is sleeker than that of the Vosne, indeed this is silky and with more minerality as well on the saline and impressively persistent finish that is very Chambolle in character. This is a most impressive *villages* and highly recommended.

2015 Gevrey-Chambertin: 89/2022+

A completely different aromatic profile is present here with its pungently earthy and brooding nose of plum, humus, violet and a touch of forest floor. There is once again a lovely sense of energy to the well-detailed and moderately robust finish that culminates in a lingering and youthfully austere finale. This too is good enough to be worthy of your interest.

2015 Nuits St. Georges “Procès”: 92/2027+

(from a .40 ha parcel; 40% whole clusters). An overtly floral-inflected nose displays a lovely array of aromas that include ripe plum, violet and plenty of earth influence. There is a beguiling sense of underlying tension to the relatively refined medium weight flavors that contrast somewhat with the robust but not really rustic finale that delivers outstanding persistence. Good juice that is worth a look provided that you have the patience to cellar it for at least 6 to 8 years first.

2015 Chambolle-Musigny “1er”: 91/2023+

(typically made from 6 or 7 different 1ers depending on whether the parcel of Les Baudes is included; 35% whole clusters). A distinctly ripe yet pure, elegant and still fresh nose consists of essence of red berries, spice elements and a hint of tea. There is evident minerality to the wonderfully textured middle weight flavors that are perhaps not quite as elegant as those of the *villages* yet there is better depth and length on the slightly firmer finish.

2015 Vosne-Romanée “Les Petits Monts”: 94/2027+

(from two parcels that total .39 ha; they are worked by horse because there is no path for a tractor; 50% whole clusters). Once again there are plenty of floral elements adding breadth to the notably ripe and ultra-spicy cassis, plum liqueur and Asian tea-scented nose where the whole cluster ferment is evident. The classy, wonderfully refined and admirably pure medium-bodied flavors evidence an abundance of minerality on the strikingly complex, balanced and sneaky long finale. This is first-rate and highly recommended.

2015 Grands Echézeaux: 94/2030

(45% whole clusters). A beautiful combination of ripe and fresh red and dark pinot fruit isn't quite as spicy but it's just as complex and floral. As one would expect, the broad-shouldered flavors are bigger and richer if somewhat less refined, all wrapped in a sappy, structured and hugely long finale. This beauty is very clearly built-to-age and is absolutely going to need it and I would suggest allowing this a minimum of 8 to 10 years first as it's not likely to be a good candidate for early consumption. +

2015 Clos de Vougeot: 95/2032+

(Drouhin owns .91 ha in two parcels that are rarely blended as the lower portion is typically sold; 40% whole clusters). A very ripe nose features notes of plum, cassis, humus, forest floor and violet. The velvet-textured, concentrated and very serious big-bodied flavors possess seemingly endless reserves of sappy dry extract which helps to buffer the very firm tannic spine on the mocha-infused finish. This beautifully complex effort is less austere than it usually is at this point though the structure makes it pointedly clear that this is going to age for a very long time.

2015 Chambolle-Musigny “Les Amoureuses”: 93/2027+

(50% whole clusters). This too is quite aromatically ripe with its overtly floral-suffused aromas, and in particular rose petal, lilac and violet, along with nuances of spiced tea, dark cherry and raspberry scents. There is a beguiling mouth feel to the stony and well-detailed medium weight flavors deliver terrific length on the firm but not austere finale. Curiously though, this isn't presently as complex as the best in the range and while more will undoubtedly develop

with time in bottle, it's not clear that this is necessarily a standout in 2015. With that caveat duly noted however, I underscore that it's certainly still excellent.

2015 Musigny: 96/2032+

(from a .68 ha parcel; 40% whole clusters). This too is very ripe yet the reserved array of plum, black currant, violet and wonderfully broad range of spice elements manages to remain quite fresh. There is seriously good concentration to the powerful yet refined and elegant flavors that coat the palate with dry extract on the intensely mineral-driven finish that seems to last for minutes. This is a bona fide 'wow' wine but note well that it's one for the patient.

2015 Charmes-Chambertin: 93/2027+

(30% whole clusters). This is the first wine to display any appreciable amount of wood and in this case it's generous to the point that there are menthol nuances on the otherwise layered nose that is very Gevrey in character with plenty of game, forest floor and earth scents. The rich, round and seductively textured medium weight plus flavors possess fine depth and length if not the sheer potential of the best here. Still, this is really quite good and should make for a lovely wine with 10 plus years of age on it.

2015 Griotte-Chambertin: 96/2030+

(45% whole clusters). This is sufficiently reduced that I would strongly suggest decanting it if you're going to open a bottle young in the name of 'science'. In contrast to the nose there is excellent freshness and verve to the well-delineated and intensely mineral-driven middle weight plus flavors that are finer yet more powerful than those of the Charmes, all wrapped in a beautifully textured finale due in large part to the very fine-grained tannins. This is a very classy wine that competes with the Musigny for the best in the range. In a word, gorgeous.

2015 Chambertin-Clos de Bèze: 94/2030+

(50% whole clusters). An attractively spicy and notably ripe if markedly reserved nose offers up notes of plum, cassis and red currant that are copiously laced with floral nuances. The rich, full-bodied and quite serious broad-shouldered flavors also possess first-rate mid-palate concentration along with evident minerality on the driving and powerful if less refined finish. This is certainly impressive but the Griotte has that something extra in 2015.

2015 Mazis-Chambertin: 93/2027+

A somewhat grapey nose of black cherry, cassis and *sauvage*-infused aromas is trimmed in notes of menthol and earth. The succulent, mouth coating and admirably powerful broad-shouldered flavors possess much better depth than does the nose at this point on the lengthy if slightly warm finish. I suspect that the grapey character will eventually dissipate with 5-ish years or so of age but even so, I don't foresee this being at quite the same level as the better wines here.

Domaine des Hospices de Belleville (Joseph Drouhin – Beaune)

2015	Brouilly	red
2015	➔ Fleurie	red
2015	➔ Morgon	red

The Hospices de Belleville is an historical charitable institution who own 13.6 ha of vineyards in the *crus* of Beaujolais – a single 4.4 ha parcel, Le Sigaud, in Brouilly, a single 4.8 ha plot, Château Gaillard, in Morgon and three parcels totaling 6.4 ha in Fleurie. In 2014, Maison Joseph Drouhin signed an exclusive partnership with the Hospices de Belleville to manage the viticulture, vinification and commercialization of these parcels. (Dreyfus, Ashby & Co., www.dreyfusashby.com, NY, NY)

2015 Brouilly: 89/2019+

A pepper and earth-inflected nose combines notes of violet and dark berry fruit liqueur. There is fine richness to the vibrant and delicious flavors that are quite ripe though stop short of being heavy or flabby though there is a touch of backend warmth. To enjoy young.

2015 Fleurie: 92/2021+

A similar if slightly more elegant nose that is a bit spicier if less earthy introduces notably finer middle weight flavors that possess a velvety texture before terminating in an impressively persistent finish. This is really very good and a wine that could be enjoyed young or aged for a few years to good effect.

2015 Morgon: 91/2023+

There is enough wood and menthol on the earthy and *sauvage*-infused black currant nose to mention. There is more volume and power to the robust medium-bodied flavors that are imposingly-scaled but not really rustic or especially austere. In sum this is a big Morgon that will need a few years to shed at least some of its firm tannic spine.

The CÔTE DE BEAUNE REDS – The 2015 and 2014 Vintages

2015 Côte de Beaune Summary – A High-Quality and Impressively Consistent Vintage

As I asserted in Issue 65, the 2015 vintage in the Côte de Nuits is the best vintage since 2005. In the Côte de Beaune 2015 is the best vintage since 1999. It is not however without a few concerns that I will address though as a broad-sweeping generality, the 2015 reds are wines to search out and acquire. Moreover, it is a vintage that is excellent from top to bottom and to underscore the point, in 17 years of writing Burghound Issues, I have never had more recommended Top Value wines in the Burghound Selection chart. To be sure, it's great at the top as well but if ever there was a vintage to explore for value, it's this one. And of course it naturally follows that when the bottom of the *appellation* hierarchy is exceptional, it's no stretch to imagine that the top portion is exceptional as well.

There are many intriguing aspects of the 2015 vintage but arguably the most impressive is how fruit that was clearly very ripe and had very little in the way of malic acidity, managed to produce wines that are so remarkably fresh. Moreover, for the most part they do not drink like “hot vintage” burgundies because they do not have particularly high alcohol levels, and the aromas, while definitely arising from the darker side of the fruit spectrum, are not roasted or particularly *surmature*. They also drink like they have good acid support because even though total acidities were below average, if not actually low, and as mentioned, very little of that acidity was malic, the post-malo pHs are entirely respectable. This is important because analytics aside, from a purely gustatory perspective the average 2015 does not appear to lack acid support.

Another important aspect of 2015 relates to a kind of derivative artifact from the 2005 vintage. This is to say that many growers expressly wanted to avoid making firmly tannic wines and thus did much less punching down than they did in 2005. In both cases the tannins are very ripe and thus will eventually successfully resolve but if there was a lesson learned in 2005 that was applied to the 2015s, it is a sort of “less is more” approach with respect to the vinifications. This is to say that many growers chose to rely primarily on pump overs rather than punch downs. This resulted in firmly structured but not hard wines as the supporting tannins are typically dense but fine-grained and this is true even among *terroirs* that are often rustic.

Yet another critical facet contributing to why wine quality is so impressive in 2015 was the extremely rapid flowering. The key import of a rapid flowering is that it engenders much more uniform ripeness levels at harvest time. This, coupled with an immaculately clean crop, contributed enormously to the consistency of the reds. Combine all of this with lower to sometimes much lower than average yields in the Côte de Beaune, with concomitant strong levels of dry extract and concentration levels, and you have an ideal recipe to make great red burgundies!

Yet another contributing factor as to why 2015 is so appealing from a consumer standpoint is quite simple: wine quality is great everywhere in the Côte de Beaune and no one commune really stands above the others. As such, it's not necessary to be careful about which communes you buy from, which obviously stands in stark contrast to the vintages such as 2012, 2013 and 2014 where hail damage makes buying wines from certain communes problematic. That said, if I had to give the nod to just one commune in 2015, I found Beaune to be particularly outstanding, if for no other reason than the habitual over production simply wasn't possible and thus the wines have unusually good concentration levels. In the same vein and for the same reason, the Hill of Corton is also exceptionally good.

So, after all of those glowing accolades it would be natural to wonder what is not to like. And in fact, there are very few attributes to reproach but no vintage is ever perfect and thus when a given example from 2015 isn't very good or a bit lackluster, it's usually due to some combination of over-ripeness, a lack of freshness, not enough acidity, too much alcohol, which translates to noticeable warmth or, in a very few cases, some degree of over-extraction or the presence of brett. If I had to choose just one nit that I saw with some regularity, even if it's a relatively minor one, it's that there is some level of backend warmth. The second problem that I encountered with some frequency was the presence of *surmaturité* (over-ripeness) that

manifests itself in several possible ways but primarily with notes of prune or cooked fruit, which I personally have difficulty tolerating. I hasten to underscore that neither are near the levels seen in 2003 or 2009 so if you weren't bothered by the warmth or overly mature aromas in those vintages then you certainly won't be in 2015.

I would observe that the occasional instances of excess ripeness that I encountered in the Côte de Beaune were a bit more prevalent than what I found in the Côte de Nuits. The primary reason is simply the lower yields in the Côte de Beaune due to the accumulated battering that vines suffered in 2012, 2013 and 2014 from hail. Lower yields necessarily mean higher levels of ripeness and thus the harvest date was somewhat more important in the Côte de Beaune relative to the Côte de Nuits. I repeat though that the quality in the Côte de Beaune is generally excellent and the low yields had its positive side as well in terms of much better concentration than is typical.

Otherwise there really isn't much not to like and this goes a long way to explaining why 2015 is in large part a highly consistent vintage in the Côte de Beaune. As to comparing 2015 with other recent vintages, I would describe the average wine as less powerful and concentrated than 2005 and less electric (read less energetic) and brilliantly pure than 2010. But overall 2015 ticks all of the boxes for what constitutes a great vintage and after that, stylistic issues are what make the differences between whether you prefer one vintage versus another.

One last characteristic of the 2015 vintage bears addressing in this summary portion, which is the potential aging curve. Making such predictions is always fraught and this is all the more true of vintages that naturally possess high tannin levels. As we saw with 1999 and again in 2005, both of these vintages shut down hard after the bottling and in some cases still have not reemerged. *Vignerons* were mostly of two points of view, e.g. those who believe that the 2015s will drink well all their lives and those who believe that the wines are going to close up once they're bottled. At this early juncture I cautiously side with the first camp; that being said, there is so much structure in some of the wines that I will not be the least bit surprised if the second camp is ultimately proven correct -- either way, what seems clear and certain is that the best wines should age effortlessly for years.

2015 – The Weather and Harvest in the Côte de Beaune:

As I emphasized in the summary portion, one of the reasons that the 2015 vintage is such a success is its uniformity and this is true between the two Côtes as well. As such, and unlike what you read in these pages in 2012, 2013 and 2014, there is very little from a growing season perspective to relate so I repeat, with few modifications, what I wrote in Issue 65.

Over the years I have recounted in these pages seemingly one drama after another as one vintage after another was ostensibly snatched at the last moment from the jaws of certain catastrophe! In 2015, there is no such drama, no tales of near misses, no heartbreak hail, and no last minute sunshine and North Wind arriving to save the day. In fact, if a growing season could truly be reduced to just two words, then the recurrent theme mentioned by grower after grower would be this: stress free.

The 2014/2015 winter was largely quite clement as January was slightly warmer than normal and February slightly cooler than normal. From that point on though from March all the way to August the season was warmer and drier than what has been recorded over the last 25 years. June was 1.8° C warmer and July was an incredible 2.5° C warmer than normal and then August continued the trend at 1.2° C. To provide a different sort of perspective, there were 2.5 times as many days where the temperatures exceeded 30° C compared to a typical growing season! Moreover, several daily records were set on the 7th and 8th of July but the one that stands out was on the 4th of July when it hit 39.2° C, which easily beat the prior record. During this one week period even the night time temperatures exceeded 30° C! Not surprisingly with that much heat, luminosity levels were much higher than normal and consistent with the July heat spikes is when the greatest levels of luminosity were recorded.

The season was also extremely dry and if we consider the January to September period, there was 20% less rainfall than normal. Spreading that 20% over 9 months though masks the extreme deficits that were recorded in March, May, June and July and in particular July that was between 75 and 90% drier than usual! Indeed some communes recorded as little as 5 mm of rain for all of July. To provide another point of comparison, the meteorological station based in Beaune recorded only 327 mm of rain between April to September versus 562 mm for the same period in 2013.

Between the heat and the dryness, it was at times enough to provoke varying degrees of hydric stress. When vines suffer hydric stress, it's a condition the Burgundians call *bloquage*, or literally a blocking of the photosynthetic process. If it's extended it can result in under-ripe phenolic components and in particular, hard or angular tannins. Among recent vintages where this was a concern include 1990, 1997 and 2003. Happily there was just enough rain in August to reignite the maturation cycle and overall, the amount of damage done by hydric stress was de minimis.

Bud break in 2015 was in-line with both the 20 year average recorded from 1994 to 2014 as well as the last similar growing season of 2009. This is to say April 10th for pinot in the Côte de Nuits and April 12th for chardonnay. The higher than normal May temperatures galvanized an early June flowering that concluded incredibly rapidly and was one of the fastest recorded in a number of years. The fruit set was abundant, which turned out to be highly serendipitous for reasons I will explain.

This chain of events was both good news and bad news and is one of the key factors that partially explains why 2015 is the way that it is. A rapid flowering is always highly desirable because it results in uniform ripeness levels. Unfortunately, the very heat that triggered the early flowering also caused a relatively high incidence of shatter with a consequent loss of yield, and in particular due to the development of lots of shot berries. This was great for wine concentration but obviously not for volumes.

As to disease and pest pressure, there was only one that amounted to anything and that was a relatively severe attack of oïdium (powdery mildew). This is not completely surprising given that unlike most forms of vineyard fungi, oïdium is not dependent on moisture to thrive. It is also a vine malady that cannot be eradicated though, it can be slowed. However, the only way to do this is to treat in advance of seeing the symptoms because by the time they are noticed,

the disease is already well-installed and much harder to stop; worse still, the efficacy of the sulfur-based treatments is compromised when temperatures exceed 30° C. Thankfully most growers did treat in anticipation of an attack and thus ultimately, the damage from oïdium was limited.

The very first signs of *véraison* were reported in mid-July but once again the heat and dryness caused it to slow considerably. Conditions finally moderated in August because even though it was slightly warmer than normal, the warmth was finally accompanied by slightly elevated levels of rainfall. Normally this would have provoked immediate fears of an attack of rot but the vineyards were so dry that the rainfall was immediately absorbed. The second reason is that the extreme conditions extant in July had caused the skins to thicken such that they were all but impervious to any incipient rot attacks. The other effect of the more moderate conditions was to cause the *véraison* to terminate in short order which is to say by mid-August.

There was a relatively heavy storm on the 15th of August that did an enormous amount of good in reigniting the growth cycle and from that point forward maturities rapidly rose. What is interesting however is that despite the improvement in phenolic maturities, sugars climbed grudgingly and acidities were more stable than growers dared hoped. Most domaines began the harvest for their pinot between the 3rd and the 8th of September under near-ideal conditions. As is always the case, some began at the end of August and a few wouldn't begin until the third week of September. But most began in the first week of September and thus would make 2015 among the most precocious vintages in recent memory, joining those of 2003, 2007 and 2011.

A few domaines opted to begin later under the rationale that a full 100 days between the mid-point of the flowering and the beginning of the harvest had not yet been attained. For those that did wait for the full 100 days, they were inconvenienced by an extremely heavy storm on the 12th that dropped between 60 and 90 mm of rain depending on where the measurement was taken! That is a lot of rain in less than a day. This of course rendered the vineyards difficult to traverse and harvesting in the slick conditions is never ideal. Growers that did get caught though argued that the rain pumped into the fruit actually served to re-equilibrate it, which may be true though that claim is difficult to prove definitively. Each time I heard this argument I was reminded of the 2003 vintage where there was a highly animated debate between those who picked early and those who picked late and both sides believed they were right; 2015 is no different.

As an aside, while it is generally true that the late pickers won more than they lost in 2003 in that they made more balanced wines because of the more phenolically mature tannins, it is also true that those same wines tended to have riper aromas and in many cases jammy and/or prune characters. My view is that ultimately it was less a question of early or late than it was early or late *relative* to the crop load in a given parcel. For example, if one of your parcels had been damaged by the April frost and those vines there were carrying only two bunches per vine, then picking those vines in the first wave of the harvest in late August made sense. Picking that same parcel 7 to 10 days later in September virtually guaranteed you would be making wine from raisins with consequent negative effects on wine quality. In short, early or late is always a relative concept as crop loads dramatically affect ripeness levels.

Irrespective of when the fruit was picked however, one universal positive was that it was immaculately clean and as noted earlier, uniformly ripe. As such, domaines were able to harvest very rapidly as there was virtually nothing to sort beyond the odd leaf or insect. Potential alcohols were relatively strong and on average I would put them at between 12.5 and 13.5% though some of the late pickers saw levels that exceeded 14%. Total acidities averaged about 4.5 g/l (H₂SO₄ basis) which historically is quite low, indeed the lowest of any vintage between 1998 and 2014 with the exceptions of 2003 and 2009; by comparison, during this same period 2008 had the highest at slightly more than 7 g/l; as I pointed out in the summary though very little of this 4.5 g/l was malic acidity and thus the malolactic fermentations would have little impact, which is the exact opposite of what occurred with such vintages as say 2008, 2010 and 2012.

Yields though were another story and depending on the domaine in question, the location of their vines as well as the age of their vines, they were off on average 20 to 25%. Some domaines were seemingly unaffected and produced normal volumes and others reported yields off as much as 50%. What is interesting though, and consistent with the vagaries of the flowering, almost every domaine reported considerable disparities with one parcel producing normal yields and another down 50%. The key takeaway is that 2015 will go down as yet another vintage with below average yields.

The other material detriment contributing to the lower yields was that there was just not much juice in the berries. In fact it is instructive to point out that the bunch weights in 2015 were the lowest of any vintage from 1999 to 2015; by comparison, the next lowest was recorded in 2003 and the highest during this period was logged in 2001.

The very thick skins and high solid to liquid ratios explains why most growers performed relatively soft vinifications with fewer punch downs and more pump overs. Many growers told me that the imposingly structured 2005s were fresh in their minds while acknowledging that with so much potential concentration, it would have been ridiculously easy to create tannic monsters. Most wines were not chaptalized, partially because potential alcohols were already sufficient and partially because there was no need to prolong the vinifications by adding a bit of sugar towards the end of the fermentations. Just as was the case in 2014, another reason that most growers chose to vinify softly was that the colors and extractible elements came easily and thus it wasn't necessary to lean on manipulative techniques to obtain more. Given the cleanliness of the fruit and the softer vinifications almost no one reported any difficulties getting the primary fermentations to finish, or at least none that they chose to discuss. In the same vein, the malos largely concluded earlier than usual though that clearly varied from one grower to another depending on the ambient conditions of their respective cellars.

I should point out that more and more domaines are using at least some whole clusters in their vinifications. This trend has been on the rise for the better part of a decade and in 2015 those growers who had been tempted in the past but not pulled the trigger, reasoned that it was the perfect time to do so. The stems were ripe and either mostly or completely brown (*aoûté* as the Burgundians call it) and completely clean, which isn't always the case. As such you will find a relatively high percentage of the tasting notes that follow make reference to whole cluster fermentations. I believe that in a hot vintage like 2015 this was a positive development as the fermentations typically unfold at slightly lower temperatures which

helped to freshen the very ripe fruit aromas. For example, I found that in 2009 those wines made with a significant amount of whole clusters were generally more successful than those that weren't. That said, there are plenty of sensational 2015s that were vinified with no whole clusters so there is no rule that says that one-technique is necessarily better than another.

The 2015 Côte de Beaune Reds:

So, as with every vintage, the two questions that take precedence over everything else always are: Should I buy the wines and if so, how much of them? As I observed at the very beginning of the 2015 vintage summary, the best wines are wonderfully refreshing, concentrated yet highly drinkable with solid but not aggressive tannic spines supplemented by sufficient but not high acidities. They are balanced wines built for medium to long-term aging yet should be reasonably approachable young if youthful fruit is your preference.

I noted several times the generally softer approach to extraction that many growers elected to use and thus most 2015s have relatively fine-grained tannins which should also help them to be reasonably accessible young. This is partially because the tannins are generally fully mature and partially because there is an excellent level of tannin-buffering dry extract that tends to render them less prominent at this early stage. Another reason is because the generally thicker skins of the grapes coupled with larger seeds relative to the generally small berry sizes made many growers opt for using fewer punch downs to avoid producing overly extracted wines.

As to longevity, the average upper level 2015 is built for mid-to longer term (and in some cases, very long-term) cellaring though as I also noted, many wines will very likely drink well on the younger side. By contrast some 2015s are unapologetically built-to-age and will require a minimum of 15+ years of cellaring before they will be reach their apogees. Moreover, there is not an insignificant segment of the 2015s (mainly the Pommard 1ers and the *grands crus* from the Hill of Corton) that possess the scaffolding to improve over a very long period of time, which is to say 20 to 30 years or in a few cases, even longer. In general I would say that the average 2015 is more structured than its 2009 or 2010 counterparts but somewhat less structured than its equivalents from 2005.

So as good as the 2015s are, as I have already observed, it's not a perfect vintage. Some wines are flabby, some are over-extracted and some possess somewhat roasted fruit characters or even brett. Perhaps the most pervasive nits, as noted above, are the roasted or prune-inflected aromas and the presence of finishing warmth. To be clear, and fair, neither of these faults is at the same levels exhibited by the average 2003 or 2009 but neither are they invisible. I should also point out that I am definitely sensitive to brett, prune and warmth plus it's my job to point it out where they exist. Each of you is sensitive to these factors to varying degrees and thus you may or may not find them to be an issue. As I commented, if you weren't bothered by these elements in the 2003 or the 2009 vintages then I very much doubt that you will be discomfited by them in the 2015s.

What to Buy from the Côte de Beaune in 2015:

As I observed in the vintage summary, wine quality is not only generally very consistent in 2015 but it's good everywhere in the Côte de Beaune as well as up and down the *appellation* hierarchy. But as I took pains to emphasize, it is particularly good at the lower levels and

especially at the regional level. I have never recommended so many examples of Bourgogne and its related *appellations* and you can of course check out the Burghound Top Value Selections for an abundance of ideas. Virtually any of these will make for great choices for age-worthy all-around house reds and for very reasonable prices. In the same vein, there are a huge number of exceptionally fine, if requiring substantially longer cellaring times, Sweet Spot and Don't Miss Selections that would make any Burgundy collector proud to own.

I should clarify that my stressing the superb quality of the entry level wines is not to imply that the *appellation* hierarchy was unimportant to wine quality because it was. The higher you go the better the quality and this is exactly what you would expect. The key point is that unlike some vintages when wine quality is not especially good at the regional and *villages* levels, that is most definitively not the case in 2015.

As I mentioned in the summary portion, quality is excellent everywhere in the Côte de Beaune and this is true from Maranges to Ladoix. Volnay and Pommard of course made some superb wines but a commune that rarely outperforms yet did so in 2015 was Beaune. I attribute this to the fact that too many wines from Beaune typically lacks concentration but such is surely not the case in 2015 and there are any number of outstanding wines to choose from. The Hill of Corton also did extremely well and this includes all three of the communes of Pernand, Aloxe and Ladoix. However, if I'm really splitting hairs, and admittedly I am, 2015 is as good a vintage that I can remember for Ladoix *villages* and 1ers and Aloxe performed almost as well. Another commune that I found to have made many really lovely reds was Chassagne and you will also see many recommended Top Value wines from Savigny-lès-Beaune.

2014 Côte de Beaune Reds Revisited – No Opinion Change, e.g. A Highly Variable Vintage:

My in-bottle tastings of the 2014 Côte de Beaune reds have served to largely confirm what I concluded last year, which is to say that when the wines are good, they're lovely and when they're not, well, they're difficult. The third consecutive year of hail that battered the center section of the Côte de Beaune (basically from Meursault to the northern sector of Beaune) had its predictably negative effect on the quality of the fruit and this of course was often reflected in the wines themselves.

On the plus side good examples are balanced wines built for medium-term aging yet should be reasonably approachable young if youthful fruit is your preference. Not surprisingly, the communes with the best performers in 2014 were those that were not hailed upon, which would include Chassagne, Santenay, Maranges, St. Aubin, Monthélie and Auxey in the south, and Pernand, Aloxe, Ladoix and most of Savigny in the north. If I had to name just one area that really stood out, I would suggest the Hill of Corton, in which I include Pernand, Aloxe and Ladoix. In particular the *grands crus* are excellent but don't ignore the 1ers either as they offer both fine quality and, in the context of what is typical today, very fine value.

What I like best about the 2014s is their transparency to the underlying *terroir* coupled with their sheer drinkability. This transparency is enhanced by terrific vibrancy because the wines really do taste alive in the mouth as they've got energy, or what I like to call underlying tension. They're ripe yet they are what the French call *digest*, or refreshing, where the first sip invites the next which is in fact what makes them so drinkable.

On the less positive side, when the 2014 reds are found wanting it is almost always because the supporting tannins aren't as ripe as would be preferable. This is true even for fruit that was harvested late in the context of the vintage. In the worst cases there is an unpleasant combination of slightly under-ripe tannins coupled with tangy acidity and this renders them noticeably drying, austere and clipped. With few exceptions these would all best be drunk young for whatever fruit that they offer. This of course is the broad brush description. I cannot stress enough that just because a given wine comes from a commune that suffered hail damage does NOT mean that it can't be good, or in a few rare cases, even excellent. It does mean though if the wine does come from one of these communes, that it is absolutely not one to buy blind as the risks of landing upon something that is imperfectly balanced is simply too great.