



AURIC PACIFIC

“selling wine with passion!”

Auric Pacific Fine Wines

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Hi Burg-hunt,

Négociant versus Domaine

Négociant Éleveur - Syndicates of Merchant.

Issue 34

Written by Andy Tan

Récolté, Vinifié, Élevé et Mis en bouteilles - harvest, vinify, upbringing and bottled.

Mis en bouteilles à la propriété - estate bottling.

While, those were the little lines that lies at the bottom of every burgundy you pick up from the shelves, which indicates to you if the bottle of burgundy you bought is belonging to a domaine bottling or bottled by merchant. The first two lines referred to the later one.

I was recently being asked, if the domaine bottle was much better than those bottled by merchant? Let's first look at the formation of these two practices in burgundy.



Background

Traditionally, the grape growers, or the *vignerons* spend the year round nurturing their vineyard and harvesting their fruit. They vinify their wines, using mobile bottling plants (till these days, such practices are still very common in burgundy, as not many burgurdian owns a bottling line) to bottle the wine and sell right away to merchant and get paid immediately. Despite traditionally, the *vignerons* would bottled a few cases themselves, selling to occasion tourist who visited the area.

Négociant, or merchant will gather those wines where they purchased from various *vignerons*, aged them, later make the selection and provide adequate stock to supply to the market. Like Champagne, such *négociant* roles are essential for the economy health of burgundy. As most *vignerons* does not have sufficient production or the financial ability to market and sell their wine independently. Their tiny few cases of production were unable to satisfy the demand from those chains of hotels and shops, which requires regular supply. Neither can they make any significant impact of winning any return customer or customer abroad. Where else, the *négociant* can or will fill in such gap.

In the 70s, private consumers and foreign buyers (mostly Belgians, the Swiss and later, the British) realized they could go direct to the producer, cutting off the merchant middleman role and paying less from those "hand-crafted" domaine bottling. They also soon realized, those domaine-bottling were more individualistic compared to those *négociant* bottle. As what **Anthony Hanson** has so accurately put it, " In theory, a *négociant* cellar should be able to express the multiple subtleties of Burgundy's sites with more diversity than a group of growers' wines. But in practice, this has been hard to achieve, and most *négociants'* ranges have sameness to them, and an overriding family resemblance....sometimes be ascribed to a lack of imagination by the cellar-master ...handle from Chablis through to Pouilly-Fuissé in the same way".

However to assume all domaine bottling to be a quality assurance is also a mistake. Before the technical education became value, most *vignerons* learn their winemaking skills through trial and error, from father to son. Unlike vineyard work, where the length of year enable the *vignerons* to think and correct their mistake. In the *cuverie*, one must act fast, and many *vignerons* only have thirty or forty times in their life to learn, whereby conditions and raw materials can vary from year-to-year. Many mistakes can be made through lack of training, sloppy winemaking. Added to that, not many *vignerons* are able to cope with the cashflow issue required by domaine-bottling, with 18 months or longer without getting paid, buying new equipment, new barrel. They would have to sell quite substantial of their holding to *négociant* in order to finance the expenses for such money tied-up. The case with **Louis-Michel Liger-Belair**, which took him a long time to bottle his own domaine-bottling and till these days, he still sells a big chunk of his crop to *négociant*. Many growers also chose to lease some of their holding (like the case with **Frédéric Mugnier** that only recently took back his family vineyard of Clos de la Maréchale when the lease expired with Faiveley) or making their wine through share crop (*métayage*) arrangement in order to have the luxury for owing their label. The famous *métayage* arrangement are those of **Henri Jayer** with **Méo-Camuzet** and **Ponsot** with **Chézeaux**. So, domaine-bottling continue to remained as a rarity and only fewer who could afford (people like Henri Gouges, Marquis d'Angerville, Armand Rousseau..).

The proliferate of wine critics in the 80s have resulted an increased number of domaine-bottling, since there are more growers in burgundy than *négociant* firm for the media to write about. In the past, the export market has been dominating by those well-established *négociant* (name like **Louis Latour**, **Louis Jadot**, **Joseph Drouhin**, **Bouchard**). With the change of focus for consumer who now look upon domiane-bottling has encouraged many families to practice estate-bottling and younger member of the family return to their family business with this new found fortune. This group of new generation winemaker with their open thinking and well-traveled background, people like **Dominique Lafon**, **Anne-Claude Leflaive**, **Christophe Roumier**, **Jacques Seysses** where they constantly meet together in exchanging winemaking information and experienced. Over time, they have become the driving force behind all the quality-driven, domaine-bottling producer in burgundy.

Conclusion

It's really hard to pen down if domaine bottling is so much better than *négociant* bottling. Obviously in burgundy, there are such things as Gevrey-earth, Vosne-spice, and a good *négociant* bottling should underline those subtle differences where the wines are from. In the case of Domaine-bottling, to translate what their respective village the *vignerons* are resided in, look to be easier, as they seem to live and grow with the vines for generations where culture and history influenced is inevitable. However we all know that, it all scales down to the skill of the winemaker and his personal agenda. Whether or not, he permits the house-style or terroir to show through in his wine instead of his personal ego. Those are the critical elements for a truly memorable burgundy. Otherwise, we must as well drink Oregon or New Zealand Pinot Noir.

This issue, I am pleased to introduces you two of my favorite *négociant* films. One is the well-established **Louis Jadot**, the other, being the new emerging **Frédéric Magnien**, which operates a small *négociant* business as well as his family domaine, Michel Magnien.

Louis Jadot

When spoke about Jadot, the current winemaker and technical director, **Jacques Lardière** comes immediately in mind. I have always wondered, how can a guy like him handle 90 different wines a year and still keep everything tasted so different? From the humble Beaujolais Village to the great Le Montrachet, all with their distinctive *terroir* and yet retained that sense of house-style, which is elegant, with great fruit purity and details. Always austere at start, but achieve fullness and depth with age. I have always been fascinated with what Lardière once said, "I only used more new wood in lesser vintage and lesser wine. When the raw materials are less sounding, the additional wood tannin and aeration from new wood will supplement those deficiency. Lardière red wine winemaking favor higher temperature at 35-40°C, he destems 100% and vinification take place in open-top wooden vats with two *pigeages* (punching down) a day. He does practice pre-fermentation maceration, however he does not intentionally cool the

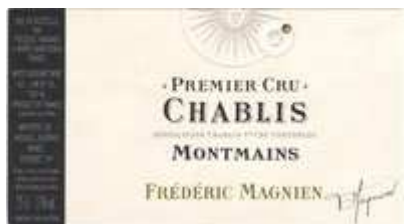
soaking and it can last for a month. He used only natural yeast for his primary fermentation and as said earlier, he is not particularly keen on new wood treatment for his better *cuvée*. Unlike many of his peers, he does not believe in *débourbage* (cold settlement) for his white wine to separate the gross lees, instead, the juice is press directly to barrel for fermentation. Minimum new wood is used and unlike many, he habitually blocks the malolactic fermentation to conserve the natural acidity. Increasingly, he also elected not to *bâtonnage* (lees stirring) his white, especially in the rich and fatter vintages. Jacques Lardière is a highly talented and passionate winemaker. To him, winemaking should never be a formula, "you must use your tastebuds, your imagination, your intelligence. Not a rule of book!"

12 x 2004 Louis Jadot Gevrey-Chambertin 1er Cru "Les Poissenots" at 100.00 nett each

12 x 2004 Louis Jadot Gevrey-Chambertin 1er Cru "Lavaut St.-Jacques" at 108.00 nett each (BH's 88-91 points)

12 x 2004 Louis Jadot Gevrey-Chambertin 1er Cru "Clos St.-Jacques" at 145.00 nett each (BH's 90-92 points)

12 x 2004 Louis Jadot Chambolle-Musigny 1er Cru "Les Fuees" at 115.00 nett each (BH's 88-91 points)



Frédéric Magnien

I first met Frédéric some two years ago in his facility at Morey-Saint-Denis. Unlike many domaine I visited, most of my tasting of young wines were all conducted in the barrel room and drawn directly from barrel, in the environment that sometime filled with smells of sulphur, charred wood, ethanol (alcohol). In *Chez Magnien*, I was offered to seat in the long bench that crowded with many *demi-bouteilles* with chalk marking code. Frédéric is from a fifth-generation grape grower in Morey-St.-Denis. He managed both his family, **Domaine Michel Magnien** and his small *négociant* operation, where he sourced his fruit from various growers that followed his strict prescription of low-yield fruit through severe pruning, green harvest. He also very fond of old-vines, with many of his *cuvées* indicated *vieilles-vignes* on the label. Nothing systematic in Magnien winemaking approach. I used to think he produced modern burgundy that was filled with big fruit and oak after tasted his 2002. He later confronted to me that 2002 was perhaps more extracted (fermentation lasted for 21 days instead of previous 12 days), which featured ripe and round, almost sweet palate. He generally preferred his 01 for better *terroir* definition, however he like his 2002 for it immediateness and density. He told me that 2004 was a challenging vintage for winemaker. In the vineyard, he did three green harvests in order to bring down the yields, especially dropping those grapes that were infected by oidium and hail. Eliminate those inferior grapes were the key to succeeding in this vintage. In the *cuvée*, one must focus on the juice not the skins, as the skins is relatively thin and fragile, which require very gentle extraction. Fermentation lasted for 12 to 14 days and only one punch down per day. One could easily notice that, 2004 has a significant quality gap when compare the *village cru* to the *primer/grand crus* and this vintage has a good *terroir* definition, added Magnien. I like Magnien's style. It is neither old or new, there are some old-fashion rusticity and earth, underbrush notes with occasion leather, *sauvage* that closely recalled those Nuits-Saint-Georges from **Henri Gouges**. However, equally, one could be seduced by the deliciously sweet, crushed red berries, red pinot fruit that is dense, sappy and well delineated. Much like those made from **Jean-Marie Fourrier**. One of the highlight on my trip is to be able to taste Magnien's Montrachet. I must confess, I have very little experience with Le Montrachet. The lofty price tag is simply out of my reach (if is from Leflaive, Sauzet, Lafon it can cost anything from 1000-3000 a bottle). The white initially tasted quite telltale Puligny-like, with its stylish, refine elegant, chamomile, barley subtle like flavors. When it goes down-the-gullet, the favors expanded and turned bigger, richer, more powerful, muscular that filled with explosive favor of

peach, honeyed, hazelnut, *pain grillé* that stained the palate and lasted in my memory for days. This is perhaps the most incredible white I have tasted from my wine journey! What a monumental effort!

Domaine Michel Magnien

- 2004 Morey St.-Denis "Tres Girard" at 65.00 nett (BH's 86-88 points)**
- 2004 Gevrey-Chambertin "Aux Echezeaux" at 68.00 nett (BH's 87-89 points)**
- 2004 Gevrey-Chambertin "Les Seuvrees - Vieilles Vignes" at 68.00 nett (BH's 87-90 points)**
- 2004 Chambolle-Musigny "Les Fremieres at 72.00 nett (BH's 86-89 points)**
- 2004 Gevrey-Chambertin 1er Cru "Goulots" at 95.00 nett (BH's 89-91 points)**
- 2004 Charmes-Chambertin (Mazoyeres) Grand Cru at 145.00 nett (BH's 89-92 points)**
- 2004 Clos de la Roche, Grand Cru at 150.00 nett (BH's 91-94 points)**
- 2004 Clos St.-Denis, Grand Cru at 170.00 nett (BH's 90-93 points)**

Maison Frederic Magnien

- 2004 Gevrey-Chambertin Vieilles Vignes at 58.00 nett (ST's 86-89 points)**
- 2004 Nuits St.-Georges Vieilles Vignes at 58.00 nett (BH's 86-89 points)**
- 2004 Chambolle-Musigny Vieilles Vignes at 62.00 nett (ST's 85-87 points)**
- 2004 Morey St.-Denis 1er Cru "Les Ruchots" at 80.00 nett (BH's 88-91 points)**
- 2004 Gevrey-Chambertin 1er Cru "La Perriere" at 86.00 nett (BH's 88-90 points)**
- 2004 Gevrey-Chambertin 1er Cru "Les Cazetiers" at 90.00 nett (BH's 89-91 points)**
- 2004 Nuits St.-Georges 1er Cru "Les St.-Georges" at 91.00 nett (BH's 89-91 points)**
- 2004 Vosne-Romanee 1er Cru "Les Suchots" at 98.00 nett (BH's 88-90 points)**
- 2004 Chambolle-Musigny 1er Cru "Les Charmes Vieilles Vignes" at 108.00 nett (ST's 89-91 points)**
- 2004 Echezeaux, Grand Cru at 138.00 nett (ST's 89-91 points)**
- 2004 Chambolle-Musigny 1er Cru "Les Amoureuses" at 150.00 nett (ST's 90-92 points)**
- 2004 Chambertin Clos de Beze, Grand Cru at 180.00 nett (ST's 89-93 points)**
- 18 x 2004 Le Montrachet, Grand Cru at 465.00 nett each (BH's 91-93 points)**

Despite the last minute notice, I wish to announce that, on the coming **Friday, February 16, 2007** at 7.30 pm at Sage Restaurant. I will be hosting a grand cru tasting for **Frédéric et Michel Magnien**. The dinner will feature the following six grand crus,

- 2004 Charmes-Chambertin (Domaine)
- 2004 Chambertin Clos de Beze (Négociant)
- 2004 Clos de la Roche (Domaine)
- 2004 Clos St.-Denis (Domaine)
- 2004 Echezeaux (Négociant)
- 2004 Le Montrachet (Négociant)

Dinner is limited to 8 people and is based on first-come-first-serve basis. Dinner will be priced at **S\$200 nett per person** which is inclusive of all six grand crus and a four-course dinner. For those who are interested, please reply me from this message or simply call me at **9836 1921**.

Vicomte Liger-Belair

Under the request of my faithful burgundy buyers in Jakarta. I have made a trip there to host three separate tastings. Over the past years, Jakarta has emerged to become one of my most important market for fine & rare burgundy. Initially, those second generation entrepreneurs buyers of mine were mainly focused on "Cult" Californian, since many of them were formerly educated in States. Over time, due to their desire for quality and immense opportunity given, they have quickly realized the only wine that truly speaks for its earth was in fact in burgundy. Since then, they drink nothing but wine from the golden slopes.

The afternoon tasting took place in one of my client's Miele showroom, which I have previously hosted several tasting here, and enjoying the food prepared by Chef Antoine Audran of Java Bleu Traiteur.

Before I go on with my tasting notes, here are some background of the part-one tasting.

La Romanée Vineyard

The story of this rarest vineyard of burgundy (annual production of 250-350 cases) has always been closely tied with La Romanée-Conti.

The prime section of La Romanée-Conti is said to have nine owners during eight and a half centuries ago. In the twelfth century, it was in the hand of Vergy family, and in 1232 Alex de Vergy donated the land to Abbey of Saint-Vivant. During then La Romanée-Conti was part of Romanée St. Viviant that was owned by the Abbey. In 1584, La Romanée-Conti was separated from Romanée St. Viviant and eventually sold to a Monsieur de Croonembourg that later change the name to Romanée. Croonembourg family at that time also bought the neighbouring vineyard of La Tâche, and it was through their ownership that the vineyard became well known.

In 1760, the Croonembourg decided to sell the vineyard, which was by that time, already regarded as the finest vineyard in Burgundy. The sale eventually went into the hands of Prince de Conti, who later attached his name to the vineyard and renamed it - Romanée-Conti. After the French Revolution, La Romanée-Conti vineyard was confiscated from the Prince de Conti and sold "for the good of Republic". The purchaser was a Parisien, a Nicolas Defer de la Nouerre. However, the vineyard was subsequently acquired by Liger-Belair family, which put all the 6 parcels of *Aux Echanges* together and formerly declared them La Romanée and since then, it has become the *monopole* of the Liger-Belair family. Despite the Liger-Belair family firmly believing that La Romanée was one time part and parcel of La Romanée-Conti. However, the current owner of La Romanée-Conti, De Villaine has a different explanation. It was said that, the original La Romanée-Conti was a separate parcel of *lieu-dit* called *Au-Dessus-de-La-Romanée*, which was sold to Jacques-Marie Duvault-Blochot after the Revolution. Aubert de Villaine, the current co-owner, also the descendant of M. Duvault-Blochot eventually inherited the vineyard.



Domaine du Vicomte Liger-Belair

Much like the Gros family, many family vineyards was forced to split to multiple ownership due to the French taxation. So today, you see Jean Gros, Michel Gros, Anne Gros, Gros Frère et Soeur were all previously belonging to one origin family. The case with Thibault Liger-Belair in Nuits St. Georges and Vicomte Liger-Belair were all part of the Liger-Belair family that also co-owned a *négociant* business called Maison C. Marey et Comte Liger-Belair (1852-1982). The ancestor of the current owner Louis-Michel Liger-Belair, Louis Liger-Belair was a general to Napoléon that started his domaine in 1815. Together with his son, Louis-Charles, they put together a holding of vineyards that includes La Romanée (*Aux Echanges* was acquired through marriage), the original La Tâche (1.45 ha at that time, when Edmund Gaudin de Villaine acquired that in 1933, he merged it with his parcel of Les Gaudichots and became today's holding of 6 hectares) and Vosne-Romanée 1er Cru Reignots. At their prime, the Liger-Belair also owned a large parcel of Richebourg, Les Malconsorts, Les Gaudichots with a total vineyard holding of 40 hectares. After the passing of Louis-Michel Liger-Belair's great grandfather in 1924, the vineyard holding was passed down to

his wife. However, during 1933 when Louis-Michel Liger-Belair's great grandmother passed away, the grandchildren were too young to take ownership by the French law. It was during then, the other members of the Liger-Belair family that have no desire to continue the family business and were anxious to receive their lawful shares that forces the sale of their vineyards properties. Fortunately, Juste Liger-Belair, one of the member of the family decided to retain a portion and purchase both La Romanée and Reignot from the public auction. The vineyard was subsequently passed to Juste Liger-Belair's nephew, Michel, who was also Louis-Michel's grandfather. He was however killed in 1941 during World War II. Louis-Michel's father did not want to be involved with the wine business and he later signed an sharecropping arrangement with the Forey family. From 1946 - 2001, the Forey tended the vines and raised the wines, until 2001, Régis Forey, son of Jean Forey returned the vineyard to Liger-Belair family when the sharecropping agreement expired.

Louis Michel Liger-Belair

For a number of generations, not until Louis Michel took over the responsibility. Liger-Belair family was not directly in the wine business, they opted to rent out their prime vineyards in exchange for money to deal with their inheritance tax-bill for the land. So, Maison Leroy bought the wines of La Romanée from 1951 till 1961, with Maison Bichot following the lease until 1975 and Bouchard Père et Fils from 1976 until 2001 as the exclusive agents for La Romanée wine. From 2002 until 2005, there were actually two different bottling of La Romanée as Bouchard was entitled half of the production, the remaining half went into Vicomte Liger-Belair. Little has been told that, Louis-Michel Liger-Belair actually handles the vinification and *élevage* of both Bouchard and his own version. He however clarifies that, Bouchard has their instruction along with their own barrels supply.

2003 Vosne-Romanée "La Colombière"

Louis Michel's style has always have that refine, polished feel. This *village lieu-dit* perhaps is the only 2003 I got a trace of dehydrated element. Very profound sexy, with candied sweet, almost currant, but mixed of dark and blue berries fruit. There is however good underlying purity despite the somehow exotic, ripe personality. The lighter of all the line-up with traces of chalk dry finish.

2003 Vosne-Romanée "Clos du Château"

This cuvée has always been the best value from Vicomte Liger-Belair and the fruit source was entirely from the vineyard surrounded the estate - Château Vosne-Romanée. Showing more smoked stock element, but cooler pitched, more cherry, Vosne's spice. This beauty has clearly better define, shown better purity and sappiness, which I was surprised by how the 03s has evolved. The wine also offered better details and outline, which clearly, there must be some acidification adjust here, since most malic & tartaric acid were burned from this heat-laden vintage.

2003 Vosne-Romanée 1er Cru "Chaumes"

This premier cru lies on the border of Nuits St. Georges, which explained, this cuvée drawn some neighbor stern, muscular personality. More tightly wound, structured frame, with the usual black fruit of this vintage, but less sexy, somehow shown more extracted, mouth coated tannin feel. Only two barrels being made, from vines planted in 1945.

2003 Vosne-Romanée 1er Cru "Reignots"

This wine is clearly denser than any of the previous cuvée. Some cold soak, anthocyanins-purple trace on the color. This clearly shown darker fruit, with more roasted exoticness. More creamy, layers and hard to say "no" kind of seductiveness. I however found some trace of Brett? But the unusual combination of lift with rich palate somehow overcome the deficiency.

2003 Vosne-Romanée Grand Cru La Romanée

There is no question, along with de Vogue Musigny, both are the finest 2003 burgundy I have tasted. If one think that, this beauty is going to throw me more richness, more profoundness. The answers is exactly the opposite. This discreet, subtle beauty came as unnoticed at first, in fact, any of the earlier premier crus could easily taken the attention from this wine by their sheer size. However, oxidation will

unveil its true potential. The intensity of this wine, with its persistent flavor that lasted throughout the tasting. Nothing fades away. In fact, toward the end, when we compared this elegant beauty with the rest of the early cuvées, the refinement of La Romanée somehow made the rest of the wines taste rough and clumsy (some of the early bottles were already deteriorated with aeration). This old style (same as for Romanée-Conti) Burgundy, patience is needed to truly display its greatness. Amazing stuff!

Our Stocks

- 11 bts. 2003 Vosne-Romanée "La Colombière" at 128.00 each (Parker's 92 pts)**
- 5 bts. 2002 Vosne-Romanée "La Colombière" at 136.00 each (Burghound's 89 pts)**
- 48 bts. 2003 Vosne-Romanée "Clos du Château" at 135.00 each (Burghound's 89 pts)**
- 59 bts. 2002 Vosne-Romanée "Clos du Château" at 135.00 each (Burghound's 90 pts)**
- 8 bts. 2001 Vosne-Romanée "Clos du Château" at 130.00 each (Burghound's 90 pts)**
- 7 bts. 2000 Vosne-Romanée "Clos du Château" at 115.00 each (Burghound's 88 pts)**
- 12 bts. 2004 Vosne-Romanée 1er Cru "Reignots" at 265.00 each (Burghound's 91-93 pts)**
- 22 bts. 2003 Vosne-Romanée 1er Cru "Reignots" at 360.00 each (Parker's 96 pts)**
- 2 bts. 2004 Vosne-Romanée Grand Cru La Romanée at 1250.00 each (Burghound's 92-95 pts)**

All prices are subjected to 5% GST charges.

All prices quoted for per bottle in Singapore dollar. Prices indicated "in red" are inclusive of 5% GST.
Free delivery for purchases of S\$350 and above, otherwise S\$15 per delivery will apply.

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