

Bruce Sanderson Decanted



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To De(stem) or Not to De(stem)

Posted: 09:09 AM ET, February 13, 2007

Sometimes I'll be cruising along in a blind tasting of red Burgundies and a wine will throw me a curve ball. Aromatically, it is fresh and distinctive, with floral and spice notes (sandalwood comes to mind most often) along with the fruit. Its texture is typically softer, without lacking structure or concentration. These characteristics are a result of using the stems, or whole clusters, during fermentation.

Fermenting with whole clusters isn't easy. In the beginning, you can't punch down because the solid mass is too hard and you can't pump over because there's no juice. The stems leach out color, acidity and alcohol. And if extraction isn't gentle, green, bitter aromas and flavors occur. But those who retain the stems swear by the gentle oxidative process and the draining properties when the wine is ready for pressing. The producers also like the aromatic complexity and the freshness the wines retain as they evolve.

Several domaines I visited on this trip use this technique, and one experimented with it for the first time in 2005. Today, I want to share my experience at two of them: [Domaine Dujac](#) (and its négociant range Dujac Fils & Père) in the Côte de Nuits and [Domaine Chandon de Briailles](#) in the Côte de Beaune.

Everything was in bottle at Dujac, where Jeremy Seysses was clearly pleased with the results. "In 2005, we had beautiful fruit and an easy extraction, everything you need to make really good wine," he says. Of the three négociant village wines, I prefer the **Morey-St.-Denis** and **Chambolle-Musigny**. The Morey is aromatic, very floral, with a lovely silky black cherry flavor. The Chambolle is seductive, offering violet notes along

with blackberry and long on the finish.

There is also a juicy, refined **Vosne-Romanée Beaux Monts**, packed with spice, red cherry and blackcurrant flavors. This is under the négociant label because it is from both domaine and purchased fruit.

The **Romanée-St.-Vivant** reveals a hint of blackcurrant leaf, coffee and blackberry aromas. It's intense and concentrated, yet ethereal at the same time, with terrific harmony and length. However, I slightly preferred the **Chambertin**, with its scented blackcurrant and black cherry aromas, focused fruit and regal stature. It ends with a long mineral aftertaste.

Of the domaine wines, the **Chambolle-Musigny Les Gruenchers** shows plenty of rose, sandalwood and black currant notes woven into a silky texture. The **Vosne-Romanée Les Malconsorts** is more leafy and herbaceous in aroma for the moment, yet full of brooding black cherry and plum tones supported by firm tannins. The finish is very long and finely textured.

A reticent **Charmes Chambertin** exhibits richness and a cherry note backed by hefty tannins. The **Echézeaux** is all coffee, spice and black cherry, turning meatier in the mouth, finishing with chocolate and cocoa powder accents.

The **Clos de la Roche** displays Asian spices and a combination of black cherry, juicy fruit and a firm structure, then picks up mineral on the complex finish. The **Clos St.-Denis** is simply gorgeous, with sappy black cherry, coffee and spice flavors, lush texture and expansive finish. A powerful, muscular red, the **Bonnes Mares** is compact right now, but deep and concentrated, with a long mineral finish.

At Chandon de Briailles, Claude de Nicolay-Drouhin and her team had bottled three of the four whites. Two reds were being [fined](#) using egg whites so we skipped those. The remaining wines were approximate blends prepared from cask.

I like the **Pernand-Vergelesses Ile des Vergelesses** for its spicy, red fruit aromas and peppery, mineral-tinged flavors. The wine comes from 15- to 60-year-old vines, so the fermentation is done with 80 percent whole clusters because the quality of the stems from the youngest vines is lower than those from the older vines.

Tasting the three Corton reds is an exercise in *terroir*. The **Maréchaudes** is round and inviting, with sweet, fresh cherry notes on the midpalate and fine, soft tannins. An altogether precocious wine from deeper clay soils lower on the east-facing slope. Directly above it lies **Les Bressandes**. The wine from this site shows lovely aromas of *fraises de bois* (wild strawberries) and is very juicy, with more density and structure, but also elegance, building to a long finish.

Above the southern half of Les Bressandes is **Clos du Roi**. The soils are thinner here, and the site is more exposed to the wind. The vines are 60 years old, and a large part of the

crop suffers from millerandage, a condition at flowering where some berries are small and seedless with thicker skins, and are thus more flavorful. The wine is less showy and more powerful, with more aggressive tannins. The flavors range from black cherry to mineral and spice. This needs time.

“I think the whole bunches really add freshness,” de Nicolay-Drouhin explains. “They give a natural aeration during the fermentation.”

The **Corton Blanc**, from parcels in Bressandes, Chaumes and Renardes is all lemon, pear and butter with a creamy texture. The **Corton-Charlemagne**, still in barrel, is tight and steely, with intense apple and mineral flavors that build to a lengthy finish.

2 comments on this post

Reader Comments

User Name: **Alex Bernardo, Millbrae, CA** Posted: **01:16 PM ET, February 13, 2007**

Perhaps since Henri Mayer, destemming and other techniques he practiced have become widespread. But before the crusher's arrival whole-cluster was the traditional Burgundian method. Wine made this way, in particular Dujac's and Chandon de Briailles', tend not to show well young as they're more austere and both tannins and acid are very evident. I love the purity in the wines of Dujac and Chandon de Briailles, though, and I know with time these wines are glorious. Today's palates though may not be patient enough with such wines. On Dujac, is Jeremy Seysses' wife the winemaker now? It looks like Dujac's wines extend well-beyond Morey St. Denis. Which ones of these are the newly purchased parcels?

User Name: **Bruce Sanderson, New York** Posted: **11:42 AM ET, February 14, 2007**

Alex, My fear with the great 2005s is that many will be drunk too young, denying wine lovers, especially those new to Burgundy, the rewards of well-cellar, mature Pinot Noir. Dujac and Chandon de Briailles are good examples, particularly the latter, because of the lack of new oak for the reds. These wines require time to hone all their facets and complexity. My understanding is that Diana Seysses works together with Jeremy and her father-in-law Jacques Seysses in making the wines at Dujac, in addition to her family's wines at Snowden in California. With the 2005, you will see some new wines under the Dujac Fils & Pèrè label, from the newly purchased parcels: Nuits-St.-Georges Aux Thorey, Vosne-Romanè Beaux Monts, RomanèSt.-Vivant and Chambertin.