

# Jura & Savoie

## Wink Lorch

A record number of young *vignerons* have been setting up in the Jura wine region for vintages 2003 and 2004, with at least 10 registered for official subsidies.



WINK LORCH

Julien Mareschal, 24, of Domaine de la Borde in Arbois-Pupillin, farms 4.5 ha and has built his own vinification cellar. Born into a cereal-farming family, with no wine connections, he was drawn to wine because he wanted to follow production right from the land to the end product. From the north of the Jura *département*, he is also passionate about the region and enjoys the mystery of the winemaking process. He followed his agricultural studies with an oenology diploma in Dijon, doing stints with producers in Burgundy and Bordeaux, as well as with Jura *vignerons* Xavier Reverchon, a highly respected traditionalist, and Pascal Clairet, who has a more modern outlook.

Frost damage and drought conspired to give Mareschal an average yield of just 18 hl/ha in his first vintage, 2003, allowing him, he confesses, "to start slowly". It was a baptism of fire. He had to draw on all that he had learned in order to cope with his press breaking down just when the 2003 Chardonnay had been picked. The result came close to making the *Wine Report* Top 10 lists. In his stainless-steel-equipped warehouse cellar he makes Chardonnay and Savagnin as well as reds

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in a modern style, but he still managed to put 10 barrels of Savagnin aside for a potential *vin jaune*, following the Jura tradition.

Rémi Treuvev, also 24 years old, joined his family business in Villette-sur-Arbois after his father retired and his elder brother fell ill. Another passionate youngster, Rémi; who trained in Beaune and has done harvests in both Spain and Chile, has started to buy or rent old-vine plots in addition to his family's 3 ha. He is keen to work with all the Jura grape varieties and plans one day to turn to biodynamic production because, he says simply, "the best wines I've tasted were from biodynamic producers".

Other young *vignerons* who have set up recently in their own name (giving priority over the minuscule regional planting rights) include Julien Labet, Philippe Dugois, and Christophe Benoit – all sons of prominent local producers.

Jean-Michel Petit of Domaine de la Renardière, now established for more than a decade, seems pleased that there is a passionate younger generation to take over the mantle of 'young Turks'. The region needs youngsters with one foot firmly rooted in local traditions and the other turning towards future tastes.

## Jury out on sulphur

Views are split as to whether the trend for a handful of growers to produce some or all of their wines completely without sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) additions is a positive one. With the good-quality fruit of 2003, several growers have produced a sulphur-free wine for the first time.

Whereas this trend exists among a small number of growers in every region of France, the Jura, with its tradition of oxidative wines, seems the most appropriate region to experiment in going completely sulphur-free. For *vins jaunes* and other oxidative styles, there is little point in adding SO<sub>2</sub> post fermentation, because it will combine instantly with the ethanal (acetaldehyde) that forms in the process of ageing under a veil of yeast. Heike Zimmer, technician at the official Jura wine-testing laboratory, is very enthusiastic about sulphur-free wines, asserting that the true taste of the wine is allowed to emerge. However, she also warns that healthy grapes are essential and that any slight winemaking fault is all the more evident without sulphur.

A big worry is that, if customers do not have cool storage facilities, the wine will spoil quickly after sale. This has never daunted now-retired Arbois-Pupillin *vigneron* Pierre Overnoy, considered the father of sulphur-free wines in the region, or his successor, Emmanuel Houillon, whose Ploussard and other wines are widely admired.

Stéphane Tissot of Domaine André et Mireille Tissot has vinified several sulphur-free wines in the past three vintages but is cautious, saying that he finds that sulphur-free wines can all taste the same, so he will never bottle his vineyard-specific wines without sulphur, preferring instead to limit the total to a modest 35 g/l.

## New housing threatens Savoie crus

The construction boom, linked with the general population increase in the French Alpine corridor Geneva–Chambéry–Grenoble, is threatening the future of some of the best Savoie vineyards.

A new housing estate next to the vineyard of Domaine Genoux in Arbin saw its first house completed in 2004, and occupation is likely to be by families with work around Chambéry, rather than vineyard owners. This limits the future expansion of Arbin and poses restrictions on nearby growers in terms of use of anti-fungicides, for example. In Ayze, the only *cru* to grow the Gringet grape variety, Dominique Belluard from the largest producer predicts that the current 35 ha will reduce to 25 ha within the next decade. He cites the combination of younger people's unwillingness to take over their parents' vineyards and the potential land value, which is up to 500 times greater for construction land than for vineyard land. In Crépy, near the southern shore of Lake Geneva, 2004 saw the second-largest vineyard owner, Jacques Métral, starting a programme of grubbing up 20 ha of vines, due to the combination of declining wine consumption in France and the potential value as construction land.

## Grapevine

- **The Percée du Vin Jaune**, the biggest annual festival celebrating Jura wines, will take place in the departmental capital, Lons le Saunier, on 4–5 February 2006. It will take over about a third of the old town, which is full of cellars ideal for the *vignerons* to host their tastings.

- **The Répression des Fraudes** (fraud squad) arrived mid-harvest 2004 at Arbois Domaine André et Mireille Tissot and blocked sales of all remaining stock (400 half-bottles) of Le Spirale 2000. Too low in alcohol for AOC Vin de Paille, the objection was to the use of the statement "passerillé sur paille" (dried on straw, which it

was!) and the official Jura bottle. The wine has already been exported to 40 countries, claims Stéphane Tissot, who has bottled the 2002 Spirale in a tall, elegant, clear bottle with the words "passerillé à l'ancienne".

- **Château d'Arlay** is also in trouble over its delicious *vin de paille* 2000, which was not passed by the AOC tasting panel: it was deemed to be too sweet and therefore atypical. Authorities will not even allow it to be sold as Vin de Table, because it was originally destined for AOC. Owner Comte Alain de Laguiche may have to drink it all himself.

# Opinion:

## INAO reviews Jura opportunity

At present, many Jura wines are labelled with the simple AOC (Arbois, Côtes du Jura, or Etoile), but there is no mention of grape variety or, even more importantly, style. This is a big problem, especially if the sales and reputation of these wines are to extend beyond the very local market. Many white wines are still made in the traditional oxidative, or partly oxidative, style – aged under *voile* (a layer of yeast similar to *flor* and essential for *vin jaune* production). Others are made in the more conventional, fresher, burgundian way of topping up barrels or vats completely. Some producers name the former style *typé* or *tradition* and the latter *floral*, but there is no agreed standard term and the two styles of wine taste completely different. Some producers do not state the grape variety either, so the wine may be Chardonnay, Savagnin, or a blend of the two. Current appellation laws make an exception in unofficially allowing Jura producers to name a single variety, but blends may not be stated.

Pierre Rolet, the Jura INAO representative, agrees that varieties should be allowed on the label, and Alain Baud, president of the Jura Société de Viticulteurs, would go even further, using terms to designate styles. However, they may not get sufficient support from local committee members. Discussions are taking place following René Renou's proposals to reform the AOCs; proposals for change have to be submitted by March 2005. No solution will please all producers, but it is essential to end the current confusion, and the AOC reforms offer a chance to address the situation. A compulsory back-label explanation would be a simple solution, though even that requires education of all the local *vignerons*, some of whom do not even understand the difference between *floral* and *typé* white wines.

### Straw law needs to be flexible

The rules on *vin de paille* production need to be reviewed to give growers more flexibility. At present, *vin de paille* is required to have a minimum of 14.5 per cent alcohol (actual, not potential) and three years in oak. This limits the styles that can be produced and often results in unbalanced wines. Indeed, some producers have produced a similar style of wine but outside the auspices of the appellation. If the appellation is to survive, the

law should specify only minimum potential alcohol at the pressing stage and back labels should be used to describe the style.

### Pressure mounts on bad producers

The quality of wines sold by some local *négociants* and small growers in Savoie is still too low, bringing down the image of the area. The tourist market (principally the winter-sports visitors) is all too easy to satisfy with thin, acidic wines to wash down a fondue or *tartiflette*. The worst quality is to be found in the largest and best-known *crus* of Apremont and Aymes. The Comité Interprofessionnel has taken steps to improve this by invoking the INAO initiative to check systematically on yields in the vineyards at the *véraison* stage, by taking the AOC *agrément* laws seriously, and by practising random sampling in local shops and restaurants. This is still not strict enough. With the French wine consumer drinking less but becoming more demanding in quality, Savoie needs to be very careful to maximize its potential. The culprits should listen carefully to the views of proprietors of the leading quality estates.

### Cerdon authenticity still under threat

Vin du Bugey Cerdon VDQS is the only quality *rosé* sparkling wine to be made by the *méthode ancestrale*, and the region is officially seeking to promote this by phasing out *méthode traditionnelle* wines by 2008. However, the large Boisset-owned Varichon & Clerc in Seyssel currently sells only *méthode traditionnelle* Cerdon and, confusingly, has also been marketing Pellin Rosé Vin Mousseux Demi-Sec, labelled "Méthode Ancestrale", made from bought-in (probably Loire) Gamay. They have agreed with the Syndicat des Vins to phase this out during 2005. Elsewhere in the region, many carbonated *rosé vins mousseux* are made from grapes bought outside and sold side by side with Cerdon. If the Cerdon appellation is to mean anything, this practice should be stopped.

## Grapevine

- **Conversion to sustainable agriculture** is being actively promoted by the Cave de Chautage, Savoie's second-largest cooperative, which has employed a technician specifically to advise its members on conversion. Consumer demands for more environmental awareness and compliance with new traceability guidelines are cited as key reasons.
- **The disease *esca*** has become a serious problem for the first time in Savoie, possibly due to the drought conditions of 2003. With up to 5 per cent of vines dying each year from the disease, the region has put in an urgent request for assistance in finding a cure. Jura vineyards are also suffering.

# Vintage Report

## Advance report on the latest harvest

### 2004

**Jura** – After a very dry winter and spring, the summer saw much rainfall, and both mildew and rot made an appearance. However, September was dry, warm, and sunny, stabilizing any rot development. Much Chardonnay was picked for Crémant, making up for the lack of it in 2003, and the grapes were also sufficiently healthy for drying for *vin de paille*. Savagnins were picked at good sugar and acidity levels. Green harvesting was practised by many growers with red varieties, and Trousseau was harvested in particularly good condition. Results will be varied, depending on producers' willingness to be selective at the vine, but overall this will not be a bad harvest at all, despite high crop levels.

**Savoie** – All but the youngest vines recovered well from the 2003 drought. However, this was another extremely dry year right up until the second week of August, with growers fully expecting a similar harvest to 2003. But then rain arrived in abundance, and by early September growers were pessimistic. Rot was evident on Chardonnay, Gamay, and Pinot Noir. But September saved the harvest with constant fine, sunny weather that dried out the rot. Excess quantity was a problem, even among more conscientious growers but, despite this, the grapes were healthy and sugar levels were extremely reasonable, with some varieties such as Bergeron (Roussanne) requiring little or no chaptalization. Late varieties Altesse, Jacquère, and Mondeuse did particularly well, and there is surprisingly good promise of reasonably concentrated flavours for those who were selective.

## Updates on the previous five vintages

*Ratings for vin jaune and vin de paille are included in the scores for white wines.*

### 2003

**Vintage rating:** Jura – Red: 86, White: 74;  
Savoie – Red: 83, White: 81

**Jura** – The harvest was around five weeks earlier than normal, and overall quantities were down 30 per cent, having been reduced in many places by frost damage as well as localized hail. Dealing with the low acidity was the big challenge, especially for Savagnin wines destined for *vin jaune*, which

need to withstand nearly seven years of ageing. Other 2003 whites were ready early, though some producers were still loath to bottle early; overall this is a very atypical vintage with some overripe fruit flavours taking away any *jurassien* character. However, reds, for once, are actually red in colour and taste of ripe fruit! Little Crémant was made because the grapes were already too ripe, but it was a good vintage for *vin de paille*.

**Savoie** – The unusual hot, dry conditions led to an unprecedentedly early harvest of supremely healthy grapes that required extremely careful handling in the cellar, especially of low acidity levels. Average quantity was down only about 15 per cent, but some drought-exposed areas lost as much as 40 per cent, affecting Chignin Bergeron and Roussette de Savoie in particular. Normally criticized for wines that are too thin and acidic, Savoie producers were offered the perfect rebuff with 2003, and many succeeded in releasing deliciously fruity whites that still retained some alpine freshness. Pinot Noir and Gamay have surprisingly intense red-fruit levels and are good for the short term; Mondeuse can be overtannic despite the high level of fruit, proving again that this grape needs supremely careful cellar handling.

### 2002

**Vintage rating:** Jura – Red: 86, White: 90;  
Savoie – Red: 79, White: 77

**Jura** – After a difficult summer, the north wind dried the grapes at the end of August, and a period of fine weather in autumn gave overall good quality. Nearly all varieties showed both good natural ripeness and high acidity levels. This bodes well for *vin jaune* in the future. Trousseau reds and Chardonnays are proving excellent, with good weight and balance.

**Savoie** – Three weeks of fine, warm weather, accompanied by a cold north wind from late September, saved the harvest, following a relatively cool, wet August. Mondeuse did well in places, with some good results. Altesse is also varied, though some interesting late-harvest versions have been made.

### 2001

**Vintage rating:** Jura – Red: 65, White: 73;  
Savoie – Red: 60, White: 68

**Jura** – A difficult, fairly small, and variable vintage. However, good weather at the end of harvest should produce decent *vin jaune*, though no AOC Château-Chalon, because this was declassified. For the rest of the wine styles, there is much variation, but those who made a severe selection have made elegant and balanced Chardonnays and Savagnins.

Savoie – A difficult year, with some mildew and intermittent hailstorms in places reducing quantities. Careful selection at the vine produced reasonable wines across the board, but it was a medium-quality vintage and especially difficult for reds.

## 2000

**Vintage rating:** Jura – Red: 79, White: 83;  
Savoie – Red: 79, White: 85

Jura – A rather cool summer gave, in the end, a good-quality vintage overall, with attractive fruit characteristics and reasonable structure but some lack of concentration, often due to high yields. Enjoy these wines before the 1999s.

Savoie – A good year overall, with concentrated Bergeron and Altesse, but a lack of weight and structure in Mondeuse has resulted in quick-maturing reds.

## 1999

**Vintage rating:** Jura – Red: 88, White: 92;  
Savoie – Red: 80, White: 80

Jura – An extremely sunny year gave the highest sugar levels ever seen in most varieties, great fruit concentration, and good yields, too. There were excellent overall results, especially for Chardonnay. Savagnins show good weight and even though there was some lack of acidity, this may bode well for *vins jaunes*.

Savoie – Some variation, but overall a good year, with some Altesse and Mondeuse wines still showing well.

## GREATEST WINE PRODUCERS

### Jura

- 1 Domaine André & Mireille Tissot
- 2 Domaine Labet Père & Fils
- 3 Jacques Puffeney
- 4 Jean Rijckaert
- 5 Domaine Berthet-Bondet
- 6 Domaine Jacques Tissot

### Savoie

- 1 Domaine Prieuré Saint-Christophe
- 7 Domaine Dupasquier
- 3 André & Michel Quenard
- 4 Domaine Louis Magnin

## FASTEST-IMPROVING PRODUCERS

### Jura

- 1 Domaine de la Renardière
- 2 Domaine Ligier Père & Fils
- 3 Domaine Pignier
- 4 Frédéric Lornet
- 5 Domaine de la Tournelle
- 6 Paul Benoit & Fils

### Savoie

- 1 Jean-Pierre & Jean-François Quenard
- 2 Pascal & Annick Quenard
- 3 D&P Belluard
- 4 Jean-Pierre & Philippe Grisard

## NEW UP-AND-COMING PRODUCERS

### Jura

- 1 Domaine de la Borde
- 2 Rémi Treuvey

### Savoie

- 1 Gilles Berlioz
- 2 Domaine Genoux
- 3 Domaine St-Germain
- 4 Denis & Didier Berthollier

## BEST-VALUE PRODUCERS

### Jura

- 1 Daniel Dugois
- 2 Domaine Baud Père & Fils
- 3 Domaine Rolet Père & Fils
- 4 Fruitière Vinicole d'Arbois

### Savoie

- 1 Domaine Dupasquier
- 2 Domaine de l'Idylle
- 3 Edmond Jacquin & Fils
- 4 Domaine Jean Vullien & Fils
- 5 Cave du Prieuré
- 6 Cave de Chautagne

## GREATEST-QUALITY WINES

*Jura: The 1997 vin jaune and Château-Chalon can be drunk a little in advance of 1996, but still need at least five years' ageing. The Chardonnays are made in burgundian style and Renardière's Les Terrasses is a non-oxidative Savagnin.*

- 1 Côtés du Jura Vin Jaune 1997  
Château d'Arlay (€27)
- 2 Arbois Vin Jaune 1996  
Jacques Puffeney (€28)
- 3 Château-Chalon 1997  
Domaine Berthet-Bondet (€28)
- 4 Arbois Chardonnay La Mailloche 2003  
Domaine André & Mireille Tissot (€13)
- 5 Côtés du Jura Vin de Paille 2000  
Domaine Labet Père & Fils (€19 per half-bottle)

- 6 Arbois Pupillin Les Terrasses 2002  
Domaine de la Renardière (€10)
- 7 Côtés du Jura Chardonnay Vigne des Voies 2003  
Jean Rijckaert (€11.45)

### Savoie

- 1 Roussette de Savoie Altesse 2003  
Domaine Prieuré Saint-Christophe (€15)
- 2 Vin de Savoie Mondeuse Prestige 2002  
Domaine Prieuré Saint-Christophe (€30)
- 3 Vin de Savoie Chignin Bergeron Vieilles Vignes 2003  
Jean-Pierre & Jean-François Quenard (€10.50)

## BEST BARGAINS

### Jura

- 1 Côtés du Jura Rouge Ancestrale 2003  
Domaine Baud (€6.80)
- 2 Crémant du Jura Blanc NV  
Clos des Grives (€6)
- 3 Côtés du Jura Chardonnay Grusse Vieille Vigne 2002  
Domaine Ganevat (€9.50)

### Savoie

- 1 Roussette de Savoie Marestel Altesse 2002  
Domaine Dupasquier (€7)
- 2 Vin de Savoie Chignin Mondeuse Vieilles Vignes 2003  
André & Michel Quenard (€6.25)
- 3 Vin de Savoie Mondeuse d'Arbin 2003  
Domaine de l'Idylle (€6.30)
- 4 Roussette de Savoie Château de Monterminod 2003  
Domaines Perrier (€7)
- 5 Vin de Savoie Arbin Mondeuse Cuvée Comte Rouge 2002  
Domaine Genoux (€8.50)
- 6 Vin de Savoie Chignin Bergeron 2003  
Pascal & Annick Quenard (€8)
- 7 Roussette de Savoie Marestel Altesse 2003  
Edmond Jacquin & Fils (€8)

