

RISK and REWARDS

Despite challenges, Burgundy delivers a classic vintage for red wines in 2009

BY BRUCE SANDERSON // PHOTOGRAPHS BY JON WYAND

In November 2009, a few days before its annual charity auction in Burgundy, the Hospices de Beaune presented a tasting of its newly made wines in barrel. The reds were delicious, full of ripe fruit, charming and precocious.

Yet the previous day, a grower in another cellar was concerned about high alcohol and low acidity in the 2009s. Some cuvées had reached 14 to 15 degrees of alcohol naturally, particularly those from vineyards where there had been hail.

Fast-forward. After blind-tasting more than 400 red Burgundies from the 2009 vintage, as well as sampling hundreds of others from barrel and bottle during visits to the region, I have found plenty of exciting wines. The best vintners were able to overcome the dangers of overripe fruit.

"The risk was having too much alcohol and low acidity, but there's freshness," said

Christophe Roumier of G. Roumier when I visited his cellar in January 2011. Roumier interpreted the vintage beautifully. The G. Roumier Bonnes Mares (98 points on the *Wine Spectator* 100-point scale, \$320) is the top-scoring red Burgundy in this report. It is tightly grained and muscular, yet detailed and pure, with black cherry, floral and spice aromas and flavors and a mineral element lingering on the finish.

In total, I have tasted more than 550 wines since last year's report ("A Sleeper Vintage in Burgundy," June 15, 2011), about one-quarter of them late-releases from the snappier, 2008 vintage. Among the 2009 reds, 22 scored a classic 95 points or higher, while approximately two-thirds rated outstanding (90 to 94 points) overall. Given this brilliant performance, I give the 2009 reds a vintage rating of 95 points in the Côte de Nuits and 93 points in the Côte de Beaune.



Christophe Roumier of G. Roumier made the top-scoring 2009 red in this report, a classic Bonnes Mares.

The best 2009 red Burgundies show a balance of ripe fruit, juicy texture and soft structure while maintaining a freshness that gives them life and energy. It's that balance that will allow them to age gracefully over the next 20 to 30 years. Bruno Clavelier's Corton Le Rognet (96, \$200) and Jean Grivot's Richebourg (96, \$700) are fine examples.

"It was a vintage where everything was easy," says Guillaume d'Angerville, who runs his family's estate in Volnay. "Picking the harvest date was the most difficult, because if you picked too late, the fruit was overripe." His Marquis d'Angerville Volnay Caillerets (95, \$110) demonstrates his skill.

Mounir Saouma, owner and winemaker at boutique négociant Lucien Le Moine, earned four classic and four outstanding ratings among the eight '09 reds I tasted. "It's what we call a dream become a reality," he told me in January 2011. But, he cautioned, the key to making well-structured, long-lived reds was to slow down the processes and allow a long *élevage*. "The reds that finished their malos by December will be easy wines to drink within 10 years, like the 1997s," he stated. Though pleasant, they will not achieve the full potential of the vintage.

Le Moine's Chambolle-Musigny Les Amoureuses (95, \$250) and Volnay Caillerets (95, \$120) are two of the best *premiers crus* from the vintage. The former exudes cherry, raspberry, floral and spice flavors in a sleek and harmonious manner, while the latter captures the purity of the vintage with its blackberry and black currant fruit, all the while remaining lithe and resonant.

Other top '09 reds include Joseph Drouhin's silky Musigny (97, \$594), whose subtle power builds to a long finish, and the Chambertin-Clos de Bèze (97, \$160) from Pierre Gelin, which exhibits freshness, energy and great intensity.

The '09s draw you in with aromas of red and black cherry, raspberry, strawberry, blackberry and black currant. At this stage, most have flesh covering their structure, but the tannins are there. It was a slightly above-average crop in terms of size, so except in cases where yields were excessively high, there is concentration and density.

The wines that fall short are still attractive and offer ripe fruit, but they lack a bit of liveliness. Shy on the balance and structure to age for

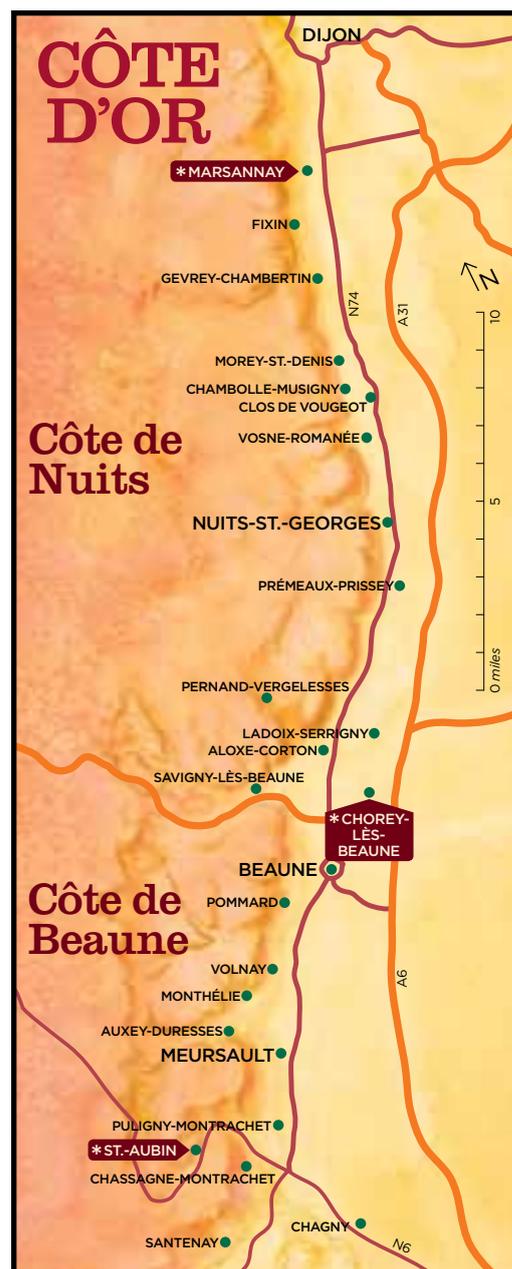
more than a decade or so, they should instead be enjoyed over the next 10 to 12 years.

The downside to the 2009 reds is pricing. Coming on the heels of the difficult 2007 and 2008 vintages, not to mention a global economic crisis, growers, merchants, importers and distributors have increased prices. Thus, the most sought after '09s are expensive. A handful of the *grands crus* will set you back more than \$500 per bottle; most are ticketed in the \$150 to \$400 range. The *premiers crus* fall mainly into the \$75 to \$200 bracket.

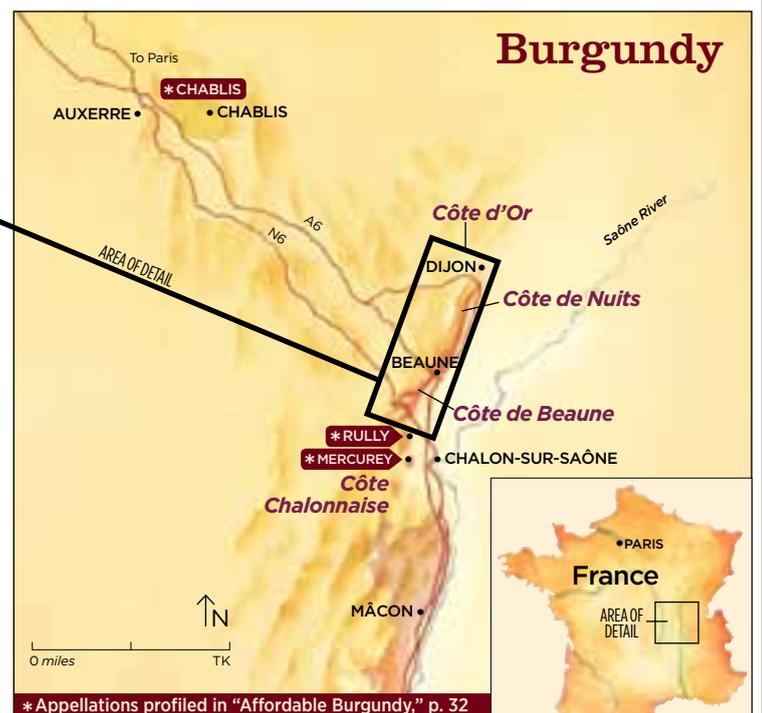
Overall, prices for '09s jumped anywhere from 8 percent to 47 percent above those for their '08 counterparts, depending on the producer. Most producers held firm on their 2008s compared to their '07s, due to weaker demand for the '08s, and have raised prices on the '09s to compensate.

"In general, most of the price increases were about 6 percent to 10 percent," says Shyda Gilmer, Burgundy buyer for New York retailer Sherry-Lehmann. "In most cases, I felt those were fair increases given that '09 was a big crop." The exchange rate did not play much of a role in the bump in pricing, he adds.

However, there are values. Albert Morot's Beaune Toussaints (92 points) is reasonably priced at \$59. Even more affordable is the Champy Beaune Les Champs Pimont (92, \$45). The reds of Denis



D'Angerville's *premier cru* Clos des Ducs in the village of Volnay.



*Appellations profiled in "Affordable Burgundy," p. 32



The father-and-son team of Stéphen (right) and Pierre-Emmanuel Gelin of Domaine Pierre Gelin made a classic-rated 2009 Chamberin-Clos de Bèze emphasizing freshness and intensity.

Mortet actually decreased in price at the *grand cru* level, down about 10 percent, albeit prices for Mortet's *premiers crus* held steady.

Wine lovers willing to broaden their horizons can find terrific wines throughout the region. Thanks to benevolent weather during the growing season, wines at the lower level of the hierarchy that often struggle to ripen are full of bright, juicy fruit in 2009. Look for the *villages* or Bourgogne reds from your favorite producers, plus regional appellations such as Côte de Beaune-Villages, Côte de Nuits-Villages and those of the Hautes-Côtes. (For more on this, see "Affordable Burgundy," page 32, a guide to finding authentic and well-priced wines from the region).

Worth searching for are Philippe Colin Chassagne-Montrachet Red Les Chênes (90, \$23), Vincent Girardin Savigny-lès-Beaune (90, \$26), Ramonet Chassagne-Montrachet Red (90, \$35), Alex Gambal Savigny-lès-Beaune Vieilles Vignes (91, \$35) and Domaine d'Ardhuy Savigny-lès-Beaune (90, \$35).

Compared with the two previous years, whose summers were marked by a series of storms (2007) or cold and wet (2008), the 2009 growing season was uneventful and relatively easy.

"The summer was good, so we ended up with ripe, clean fruit," remarks Roumier. "It was an easy year." He describes the vintage as a hybrid, having the healthy grapes and charm of 1985 and 1990, with a little less concentration than '90 and less acidity than 2005, Burgundy's most recent great vintage.

It was dry in 2009, but not too hot. Le Moine's Saouma notes that there were no extremes in the weather pattern. There was

enough heat and rain, yet not too much of anything.

Jeremy Seysses, who makes wine at his family's Domaine Dujac and Dujac Fils & Père, described 2009 as a vintage that gave wine-growers a lot of choice: "There was no pressure from the weather or rot, so you had a choice of when to pick for acidity. We find that Pinot Noir is better when picked for freshness."

In 2009, producers who maintained that freshness took full advantage of the vintage's potential to make balanced wines that should age gracefully over the next 25 to 40 years. Despite this, the seductive quality of the fruit in 2009 will no doubt result in many wines being drunk young.

Pricing aside, 2009 is also the type of vintage that will attract new followers to Burgundy. It has the kind of rich, charming fruit and easy accessibility that will appeal to Burgundy neophytes.

Connoisseurs, on the other hand, are touting the clarity and finesse of 2008 and 2010, the next vintage waiting in the wings. After a difficult growing season, the 2008 harvest was saved by the north wind, which ripened the small crop. The best wines are vibrant and racy, with precise fruit flavors and leaner profiles.

In '08, the hierarchy is clear. The *grands crus* show their pedigree, with the likes of Louis Jadot Bonnes Mares 2008 (95, \$180), Denis Mortet Chambertin 2008 (95, \$650) and Perrot-Minot Mazis-Chambertin Vieilles Vignes 2008 (95, \$300). In fact, I gave Jadot's Bonnes Mares '08 a slight edge over its Bonnes Mares '09 (94 points). A good value from the 2008 vintage is the Joseph Drouhin Volnay 2008 (90, \$42).

The principal difference between 2009 and 2008 is one of style. The younger is a more consistent vintage; 2008 is a year where it

is crucial to stick with the top producers. Factor in that the 2009s are likely to show well over the course of their evolution. This feature is a bonus when it comes to Burgundy, where vintages often go through phases in which the wines are sullen and unexpressive. The '09s can be enjoyed while waiting for earlier years such as 2002, 2003, 2005 and 2006 to open more fully.

In January of this year, during a visit to Burgundy, I tasted more than 250 reds from the 2010 harvest, some from barrel or tank and some recently bottled. They were a pleasant surprise, because '10 was another challenging growing season. Winter damage to the vines, a poor flowering, a cool summer and rot all combined to reduce yields by 30 percent to 50 percent. In the end, a north wind ripened what grapes were left, and the results are favorable. Ripe fruit flavors are balanced by bright acidity and, most importantly, the tannins are ripe and well-integrated.

"Having a vintage like '09 perched between '08 and '10 shows just how lush and delicious and forward those [2009] wines are," says Gilmer. You can open them now and they're very pleasurable. It's a great vintage for everyone."

Now wine lovers have the choice. The best of the remaining 2008s provide the most advantageous pricing. The 2009s will be approachable earlier and have broader appeal, yet are more expensive. If you are eager for the 2010s, don't hesitate when you see your favorite wines offered; there won't be much to go around. But then, that is the core dilemma of Burgundy: High quality and limited supply makes these wines as challenging as they are alluring.

Senior editor Bruce Sanderson is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Burgundy.



Arnaud Mortet of the family-owned Domaine Denis Mortet crafted a top-scoring 2008 red from the *grand cru* Chambertin.

Rating Red Burgundy Vintages in the Côte de Nuits

2010	91-94	Ripe fruit and tannins; vibrant, charming reds with balance and focus	Drink or hold
2009	95	Charming and fluid, with ripe, pure fruit; some wines soft, overripe, for early drinking	Drink or hold
2008	91	Late harvest and small crop due to dehydration, botrytis; strict sorting necessary for vibrant reds with flesh and concentration	Drink or hold
2007	90	Meticulous sorting produced very good grapes; fruity, vivid, elegant reds for early to midterm drinking. Good success in Gevrey-Chambertin	Drink or hold
2006	91	A surprise; charming, fruity reds, with ripeness and balance. The best will age	Drink or hold
2005	98	Ripe and dense, yet pure and balanced, with plenty of structure. A sensational vintage with longevity; ranks among the best since 1978	Hold
2004	88	The best wines are elegant, pure and balanced, despite difficult growing conditions	Drink
2003	93	Exotic, ripe and concentrated; the best are destined to be classics	Drink or hold
2002	96	Fresh, balanced and elegant; successful from top to bottom, with regional wines offering value	Drink or hold

Rating Red Burgundy Vintages in the Côte de Beaune

2010	88-91	Fruity, ripe and vibrant; more rain than Côte de Nuits, so quality is less consistent	Drink or hold
2009	93	Charming and fluid, with ripe, pure fruit; some wines soft, overripe, for early drinking	Drink or hold
2008	89	Late harvest and small crop due to dehydration, botrytis; pure, vibrant reds at best, but inconsistent	Drink or hold
2007	88	Good ripeness and structure, especially in Beaune, Pommard and Volnay; some lack balance and depth	Drink or hold
2006	88	Less density and fleshy textures than the Côte de Nuits, but vibrant and elegant	Drink or hold
2005	95	Beautifully balanced, with vibrant structures; rich in fruit and tannins. The top wines will age well	Hold
2004	85	Hail and oidium were major problems, but meticulous sorting yielded some fine, structured wines	Drink
2003	90	Exotic, ripe and rich; some wines very high in alcohol	Drink or hold
2002	92	Balanced and fruity; slightly less ripe than the Côte de Nuits in some cases	Drink or hold

Noteworthy older vintages: 1999, 1996, 1993, 1990, 1989, 1988, 1985

A score range indicates preliminary analysis based on barrel samples and/or a limited sampling.

Vintage ratings: 95-100, classic; 90-94, outstanding; 85-89, very good; 80-84, good; 75-79, mediocre; 50-74, not recommended **Drinkability:** "NYR" means the vintage has not yet been released; "drink" means most of the wines of the vintage are ready to drink; "hold" means most of the ageworthy wines have yet to fully mature.

Bruce Sanderson's Top-Scoring Red Burgundies

More than 550 wines were tasted for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at www.winespectator.com/063012. WineSpectator.com members may access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

WINE	SCORE	PRICE	WINE	SCORE	PRICE
G. ROUMIER Bonnes Mares 2009 Complex aromas and flavors of sandalwood, jasmine and black cherry converge in this tightly grained, muscular red. Detailed and pure, showing balance and energy.	98	\$320	DOMAINE DES LAMBRAYS Clos des Lambrays 2009 Beautiful character of sandalwood, rose, strawberry and raspberry married to a lacy frame. Intense yet light-weight, with fine complexity.	95	\$170
JOSEPH DROUHIN Musigny 2009 A profile of silk and finesse belies the underlying power. Cherry, strawberry, currant and mineral build in intensity to a terrific finish.	97	\$594	LUCIEN LE MOINE Chambolle-Musigny Les Amoureuses 2009 Graphite aroma gives way to cherry, raspberry, floral and spice in this sleek, harmonious red built for the long haul. Elegant, the sweet fruit has absorbed the oak at this stage.	95	\$250
PIERRE GELIN Chambertin-Clos de Bèze 2009 This pure red is infused with black cherry, black currant, licorice, spice and mineral. Intense, yet stays focused and harmonious.	97	\$160	LUCIEN LE MOINE Clos de Vougeot 2009 A muscular red saturated with cherry, bacon fat, smoke and mineral flavors. Concentrated and structured, with fruit that just won't quit. Terrific balance.	95	\$250
BRUNO CLAVELIER Corton Le Rognet 2009 Wild berry, macerated cherry and chalky, mineral flavors are intense and succulent, with silky texture and vibrant energy. Tannins and mineral vie for attention on the finish.	96	\$200	LUCIEN LE MOINE Mazis-Chambertin 2009 Smoke, bacon fat and spice notes accent the black cherry flavor in this meaty yet supple red. Open and succulent at midpalate, with a fresh finish.	95	\$300
DOMAINE FAIVELEY Chambertin-Clos de Bèze 2009 Some whole-cluster action here. Spice, cherry and berry character is accented by vegetal and licorice notes. Dense, with sweetness balancing the structure.	96	\$347	LUCIEN LE MOINE Volnay Les Caillerets 2009 Beneath the smoky, spicy oak is a layer of pure blackberry and black currant fruit, with coffee and mineral accents. Sleek and resonant.	95	\$120
JEAN GRIVOT Richebourg 2009 Black cherry and blackberry flavors lie at the core of this monolithic red. Though unexpressive now, floral, spice and mineral notes add depth. Beautiful texture and freshness.	96	\$700	MÉO-CAMUZET Corton Clos Rognet 2009 Evoking plum and blackberry, this dark red also shows somber earth notes, smoke, licorice and spice tones. Tannins are buried in the rich texture, and it stays fresh.	95	\$312
LOUIS JADOT Clos Vougeot 2009 Aromas of flowers, cherry, strawberry and spice, with hints of leather and licorice. A wall of tannins shuts it down, for now. Long finish.	96	\$130	MÉO-CAMUZET Nuits-St.-Georges Aux Murgers 2009 Concentrated, with black cherry, blackberry, licorice and mineral. The texture is supple, yet there's plenty of grip. Fresh and harmonious.	95	\$203
DENIS MORTET Chambertin 2009 A regal red, ripe and smooth, with a mix of dark berry, tar, spice and mineral flavors. Has the structure and balance to develop well, with sweet fruit and oak spice aftertaste.	96	\$579	DENIS MORTET Chambertin 2008 Racy style, with pure cherry, raspberry and floral flavors underscored by mineral notes. Not big, but has intensity, balance and harmony.	95	\$650
DENIS MORTET Clos de Vougeot 2009 Unabashedly modern, with dark and polished black cherry, blackberry, vanilla and smoky toast aromas and flavors allied to pure fruit notes and a harmonious profile.	96	\$386	PERROT-MINOT Mazis-Chambertin Vieilles Vignes 2008 Rich and spicy, beginning to show the sweet spice and complex fruit flavors of a more mature red Burg. Sophisticated and harmonious.	95	\$300
MARQUIS D'ANGERVILLE Volnay Caillerets 2009 Pure, silky and harmonious, with cherry, raspberry and mineral flavors, hints of animal and earth. Turns sleeker and more tightly grained on the finish.	95	\$110	SÉRAFIN PÈRE & FILS Charmes-Chambertin 2009 Opulent, with black cherry, raspberry and pomegranate, hints of smoke and mineral. Oak emerges on the finish, with a dense texture and a licorice accent.	95	\$280
CLOS DE TART Clos de Tart 2009 Ripe and exotic, offering wild berry, black currant and violet aromas and flavors. Oak is well-integrated, and this is firmly structured, with a detailed aftertaste.	95	\$525	MARQUIS D'ANGERVILLE Volnay Taillepieds 2009 Elegant, a touch oaky in aroma yet packed with pure cherry, raspberry and spice. Shows a vibrant structure, and a lingering spice- and mineral-tinged finish.	94	\$110
DOMAINE FAIVELEY Corton Clos des Cortons Faiveley 2009 Silky and complex, with black cherry and black currant aromas. So fleshy the tannins are buried now. Smoke, spice and mineral emerge through the finish.	95	\$200	DOMAINE D'ARDHUY Corton Hautes Mourottes 2009 Dense and brooding, delivering blackberry and black currant on a muscular frame. Laced with tannins on the back end, with plenty of fruit for balance.	94	\$113
MICHEL GROS Clos Vougeot Grand Maupertuis 2009 Ripe style, with plum, blackberry jam, smoke and toasty oak. Impressive on the attack, with the concentration persisting on the fresh, sweet fruit- and spice-tinged finish.	95	\$185	JOSEPH DROUHIN Corton-Bressandes 2009 Hints of herbs add interest to lively, juicy black cherry, raspberry and oak spice character. Almost racy, with firm tannins and fresh finish.	94	\$189
ALAIN HUDELLOT-NOËLLAT Clos de Vougeot 2009 Luscious, with black cherry, plum, sweet wood smoke, licorice and bacon and an aftertaste of spice and mineral. Terrific balance.	95	\$170	DOMAINE FAIVELEY Chambolle-Musigny La Combe d'Orveau 2009 So seductive it's almost drinkable now. Yet below the floral, cherry, baking spice and mineral flavors is a firm structure. Ends with an earthy richness.	94	\$175
LOUIS JADOT Bonnes Mares 2008 Dense and full-bodied, with black cherry and blackberry; spice and mineral add complexity, and the vibrant structure keeps it defined.	95	\$180	JOSEPH FAIVELEY Volnay Santenots 2009 Harmonious and sophisticated, with black cherry, licorice, black currant and spice flavors and dense yet ripe tannins. Well-proportioned.	94	\$94