

Burgundy The large number of producers and appellations in Burgundy can make this region seem very complicated. However, in essence Burgundy is quite simple. It is the home of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir and this region still provides the benchmark of excellence for these varieties against which all other producers of these wines around the world are judged.

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CLIMATE AND GRAPE GROWING

Burgundy covers a wide area and the climate ranges from cool continental in the north around Chablis to moderate continental further south. Rain can frequently disrupt both flowering in early summer and harvest later in the year. Pinot Noir is particularly susceptible to grey rot and this can also be a problem in a wet growing season. Among the other natural climatic hazards that the grower may face are spring frosts, particularly in the Chablis region, where they can appear as late as May, and localised summer hailstorms, which can often destroy considerable proportions of a grower's crop.

A vineyard's location is extremely important in determining its quality level in the appellation hierarchy. Basic village-level vineyards tend to be located on flat sites or at the bottom of slopes, whereas those of *premier cru* or *grand cru* level are often found mid-slope. These desirable hillside locations are less prone to frost than those on flat land. The highest-quality vineyards generally have a south or east facing exposure, offering protection from prevailing westerly winds.

The soils in Burgundy are very varied. A large number of small geological faults, combined with gradual erosion, mean that precise soil types change significantly over small areas. These variations are often linked to subtle changes in the styles of the wines although the exact role the soil plays in this is the subject of much debate. What is certain is that the soils on the hillsides tend to be shallower with better drainage, whereas the soil on the flat land is deeper and more fertile.

GRAPE VARIETIES AND WINEMAKING

The vast majority of wines in Burgundy are produced from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, although other grape varieties including Aligoté and Gamay are also grown.

Pinot Noir

Pinot Noir accounts for over a third of the total vineyard area. It is grown throughout the region, but the most important plantings are in the Côte d'Or. Classic Burgundian Pinot Noir has red fruit flavours in youth that evolve into flavours of earth, game and mushroom as the wine matures. The wines tend to have high acidity and low to medium levels of tannins, but this can vary according to the vineyard, the producer and the vintage.

A wide range of winemaking techniques is used on Pinot Noir, varying from producer to producer. The use of whole bunches has gradually become more popular.

For the best wines, 16 to 18 months' barrel ageing is normal. Generally speaking, the better wines will be aged in a proportion of new oak, although this will depend on the producer.

Chardonnay

Chardonnay accounts for nearly half the total vineyard area. The character of Chardonnay varies dramatically from the lean, steely, high-acid wines of Chablis in the north of the region, via the often fabulously complex, expressive wines of the Côte d'Or, to the more full-bodied, riper-fruited wines of Mâcon in the south.

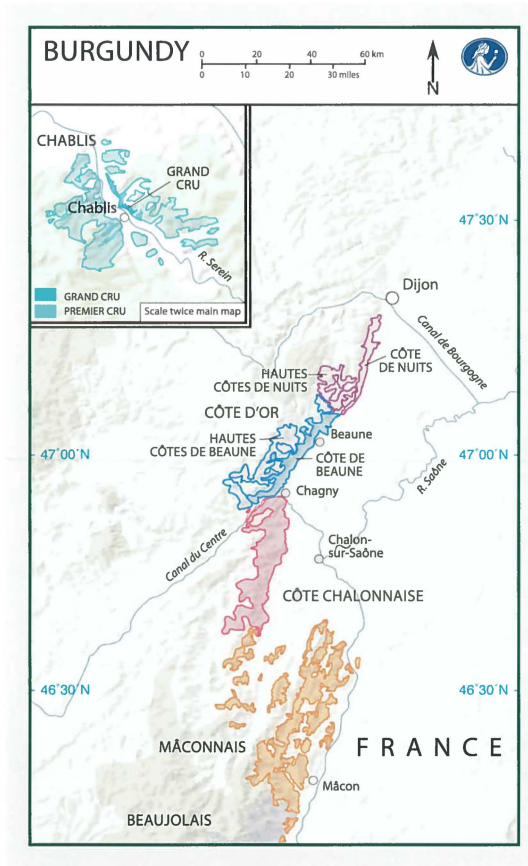
Burgundian winemakers were the pioneers of the techniques that are now associated with premium Chardonnay production around the world: barrel fermentation, barrel ageing (typically six to nine months), MLF for white wines and use of the lees during maturation. Some of the most expressive and sought-after Chardonnays made using these techniques come from the Côte d'Or. Debates continue regarding how much new oak is appropriate, and the ideal level of toasting for barrels. Whichever techniques are used, the best wines are well-balanced and complex expressions of Chardonnay that can mature in bottle for a decade or more.

Vertical shoot positioning on the hill at Corton. Light can clearly penetrate the canopy and the fruit is unshaded.



KEY

- 1000 m+
- 500–1000 m
- 200–500 m
- 0–200 m



Around 15 years ago it started to be noticed that some Burgundian Chardonnays were not ageing as expected. Some bottles of many premium wines showed signs of premature oxidation for their age. This is now an established problem in Burgundy but as yet no cause, whether it be vineyard- or winery-based, has been identified definitively.

Other Varieties

Aligoté is a white grape that tends to produce neutral wines with high acidity. It is capable of making high-quality wines when grown in sites where it can reach full ripeness, but as these locations are usually reserved for more profitable Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, such wines are rare. Gamay produces early drinking red wines with ripe berry fruit and low tannins. It can be used in some regional appellations, but only Pinot Noir is allowed for wines of village level and above.

BURGUNDY APPELLATIONS (REGIONS, VILLAGES AND VINEYARDS)

Chablis

Chablis is a village appellation that lies in the valley of the River Serein in the northern-most part of Burgundy. The best vineyards are generally planted on slopes with favourable south-facing aspects. Some of these lesser vineyards are classified as Petit Chablis. The major climatic problem of the region is frost. Sprinklers and heaters are both used as protective measures. The only grape permitted is Chardonnay.

The hill of Corton is on the left and the main slope of the Côte d'Or is on the right. Beaune is in the distance. The Villages vineyards are on the flat whereas the premier cru and grand cru sites are on the slopes.



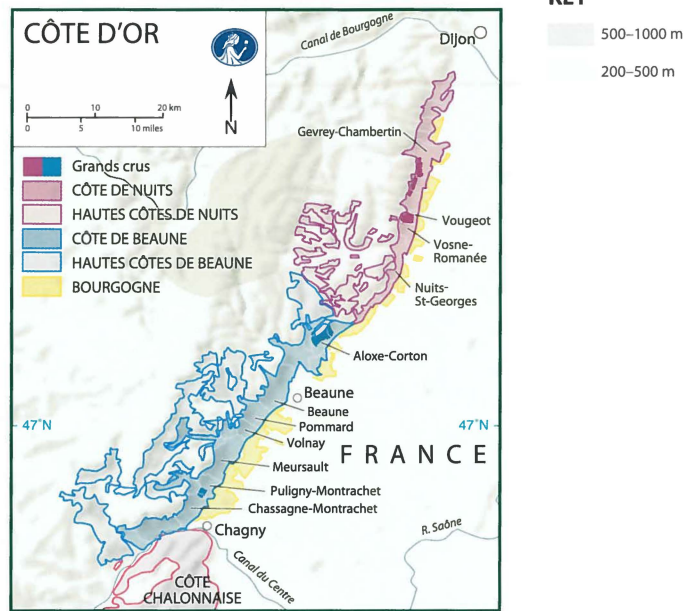
Basic village level Chablis is often grown on north-facing slopes and flatter land, whereas the *premier cru* and *grand cru* vineyards are located on the south-facing hillsides, giving greater concentration and ripeness to these wines.

Petit Chablis and Chablis can be very austere, with green fruit and high acidity; however, the better examples display riper fruit flavours. The wines of **Chablis Premier Cru** and **Chablis Grand Cru** tend to be located on hillside sites with a better aspect. They generally show riper, more concentrated fruit (citrus, rather than green apple), and have more body, yet are still balanced by high acidity. A number of producers ferment or age a portion of their *grand cru* and sometimes *premier cru* wines in old oak, which can give a rounder texture and subtle flavours. Others prefer to retain pure fruit flavours by fermenting and storing the wines in stainless steel or concrete.

The Côte d'Or

The vineyards of the Côte d'Or form the heartland of Burgundy. The Massif Central runs alongside the western limit of the Côte d'Or, providing favourable east and south-east facing hillside vineyard locations.

The Côte is split into two. Many of the fullest-bodied, longest-lived Pinot Noirs are produced in the Côte de Nuits. The more southerly Côte de Beaune also produces red wines from Pinot Noir, generally in a fruitier style, but



it is more famous for producing the best Chardonnays in the region. This is reflected in the appellation system. All of the red *grands crus*, except one, are produced on the Côte de Nuits, while all the white *grands crus*, except one come from the Côte de Beaune.

THE HIERARCHY OF BURGUNDY APPELLATIONS

Regional Appellations

The appellations of Burgundy form a hierarchy based on the quality of the vineyard sites. At the base of the hierarchy are the regional appellations. They account for half of the production of the region.

Most regional appellation wines come from vineyards that do not have the right to a superior appellation, although there are some wines that have been declassified from a superior appellation. Such declassification may be due to excessive yields or because a quality-minded producer wants to preserve the prestige of the superior appellation by not including lower-quality wines.

Bourgogne Rouge and **Bourgogne Blanc** are the most generic appellations and can come from anywhere in Burgundy. They are usually made from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

There are also a number of regional appellations that each cover slightly more restricted areas. These include **Bourgogne Hautes Côtes de Nuits**, **Bourgogne Hautes Côtes de Beaune** and **Bourgogne Côte Chalonnaise**. In the Mâconnais the regional appellations include **Mâcon** for red and white wines or **Mâcon Villages** for white wines only.

Commune Appellations

The next step in the hierarchy is that of commune appellations such as Chablis or Gevrey-Chambertin. These account for about a third of the total production. Usually, just the name of the commune will be given

on the label. Occasionally, if the wine comes entirely from a single vineyard that is not recognised as a *premier cru* or *grand cru*, the vineyard name may appear as well. Note the term 'village' is sometimes used instead of commune.

Single Vineyard Appellations: Premiers Crus and Grands Crus

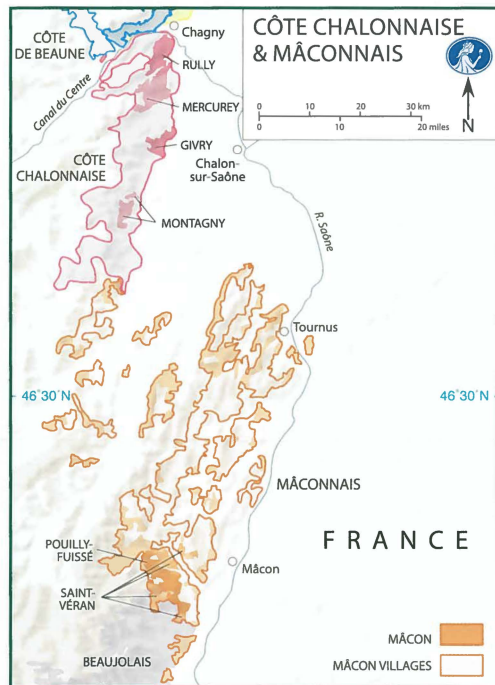
Above the village appellations are the *premier cru* and then *grand cru* sites – vineyards that have consistently made high-quality wines. It is rare that the vineyard will belong to just one owner (this is termed a *monopole*); most vineyards will be divided between a number of different owners, each of whom will grow and harvest their individual parcel of vines.

In all, there are more than 600 *premiers crus* spread between Chablis, the Côte d'Or and the Côte Chalonnaise. Together, they provide approximately a tenth of Burgundy's production. These wines must state *premier cru* on the label. If the wine comes from a single vineyard the name of the vineyard also appears on the label. Producers may also blend wines from various *premier cru* vineyards within a village in which case no vineyard name appears on the label.

At the top of the hierarchy are the *grand cru* vineyards accounting for little more than 1 per cent of the total production. There are 33 of these in the Côte d'Or and one in Chablis. They can be recognised by the fact that only the vineyard appears on the label. The term *grand cru* must appear on the label.

KEY

-  500–1000 m
-  200–500 m



From north to south, the key villages of the Côte de Nuits (with their most famous *grands crus* sites) are **Gevrey-Chambertin** (*Chambertin, Chambertin Clos de Bèze*), **Vougeot** (*Clos de Vougeot*), **Vosne-Romanée** (*Romanée-Conti, La Tâche and La Romanée*), and **Nuits-Saint-Georges**.

Well-exposed vineyards in Pouilly-Fuissé under the Roche de Solutré.

On the Côte de Beaune, the important villages (and their *grands crus*) are **Aloxe-Corton** (*Corton, Corton-Charlemagne*), **Beaune, Pommard, Volnay, Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet** (*Montrachet*), and **Chassagne-Montrachet** (*Montrachet*). All, with the exception of Pommard and Volnay, produce white wine as well as red. The three villages with the highest reputation for their white wines are Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet, with the last two villages sharing the *grand cru* of Montrachet.

Côte de Nuits-Villages can be a red or a white wine and is produced from those vineyards that lie on the Côte de Nuits, but that do not qualify for one of the more famous village appellations. **Côte de Beaune-Villages** must be red and can come from any one, or a combination, of the villages on the Côte de Beaune; however, there are exceptions.

The regional appellations of **Bourgogne Hautes Côtes de Nuits** and **Bourgogne Hautes Côtes de Beaune** are to the west of and at a higher altitude to the main strip of vineyards. Their altitude and greater exposure to winds gives them a cooler climate and means that the wines typically have slightly less body and concentration.

The Côte Chalonnaise

The Côte Chalonnaise lies to the south of the Côte d'Or. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are also the main grapes here, but due to the higher altitude of these vineyards the harvest is later and ripening less reliable. Also, although the vineyards are still found on hillsides, their aspect is less consistently towards the east. As a result the wines



are lighter and tend to mature earlier. These wines are seen as less prestigious than those of the Côte d'Or.

There are four village appellations. **Rully** produces more white wine than red. It is also an important centre for the production of sparkling wine. **Mercurey** is the village on the Côte Chalonnaise whose red wines enjoy the highest reputation. **Givry**, whose reds are particularly admired, is the smallest of the village appellations. **Montagny** produces only white wines. These communes each have *premier cru* vineyards but no *grands crus*.

Bourgogne Côte Chalonnaise applies to all wines made on the Côte Chalonnaise from Pinot Noir for red, and Chardonnay for white. It is classified as a regional appellation.

Mâconnais

Chardonnay is the most widely planted grape of the Mâconnais, and the reds tend to be made of Gamay, although some Pinot Noir is still grown.

Mâcon, the local regional appellation, can be red or white. The better white wines show a good balance of fresh apple or citrus fruit, medium acidity and medium

to full body. There may be a hint of creaminess from MLF. The reds tend to be light and fruity and made for early drinking.

Wines labelled **Mâcon Villages** or Mâcon, followed by the name of a particular village, are white wines that generally represent excellent value for money. Certain individual villages, such as Lugny, have built up a considerable following for their wines. A wine called Mâcon Villages may come from any one, or a combination, of the villages. The wines are generally similar in style to white Mâcon, but tend to display more ripeness, body and character.

There are a number of village appellations in the Mâconnais region, of which the two most famous are **Pouilly-Fuissé** and **Saint-Véran**. The best wines from these villages display ripe notes of tropical and stone fruits and most are matured for a period of time in barrel to enhance texture and add flavours. The vines are planted on the limestone slopes of the Roche de Solutré with east and south-east exposures. These amphitheatre-like slopes, which act as natural suntraps, help produce some of the richest and ripest Chardonnays in Burgundy, which are often complemented by toasty oak flavours.