

# 1999 Red Burgundy Premiers Crus

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**A BLUE-RIBBON PANEL OF NEW YORK CITY WINE EXPERTS AND BURGUNDY HEAVYWEIGHTS BRAVED BELOW-FREEZING JANUARY TEMPERATURES TO CONVENE AT CRU RESTAURANT IN GREENWICH VILLAGE FOR A TASTING OF 1999 RED PREMIERS CRUS.**



As general manager and sommelier of Marc Forgione, formerly known as Forge, in New York City, Matthew Conway is responsible for the restaurant's carefully chosen wine list of classic American and European bottles. Conway has worked at a number of New York restaurants including Aquagrill and Pace, most recently as the beverage director for both Café Gray and Grayz.

When asked to moderate the tasting for *Sommelier Journal*, I went straight to Robert Bohr, the wine director at Cru, who oversees one of the broadest and most comprehensive lists of Burgundies in the country. Digging into his cellar, Bohr assembled 16 premiers crus from throughout the Côte d'Or, all from different producers.

Joining Bohr on the panel were Ned Benedict, Zachys' head wine buyer, who focuses on Burgundy for the giant Scarsdale, N.Y., retailer; Christy Canterbury, corporate beverage director for Culinary Concepts by Jean-Georges; Michel Couvreur, head sommelier at Cru; David Gordon, wine director at Tribeca Grill; Daniel Johnnes, wine director for Daniel Boulud's Dinex Group and the mind behind La Paulée, the biggest Burgundy celebration in the United States; Tim Kopec, wine director at Veritas; David Lynch, general manager at The John Dory and co-author of *Vino Italiano*; John Slover, partner of Grand Cru Wine Consulting; and Aldo Sohm, wine director at Le Bernardin and 2008 honoree as the Best Sommelier in the World.

The 16 wines were tasted blind in two flights, with premier cru vineyards from the Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune divided randomly. One of the wines was flawed and, therefore, not evaluated. According to SJ's tasting policy, panelists scored the wines on a 20-point scale (see box), but were told that their discussion of the wines was more important than their scores.

Like the other great Burgundy vintages of

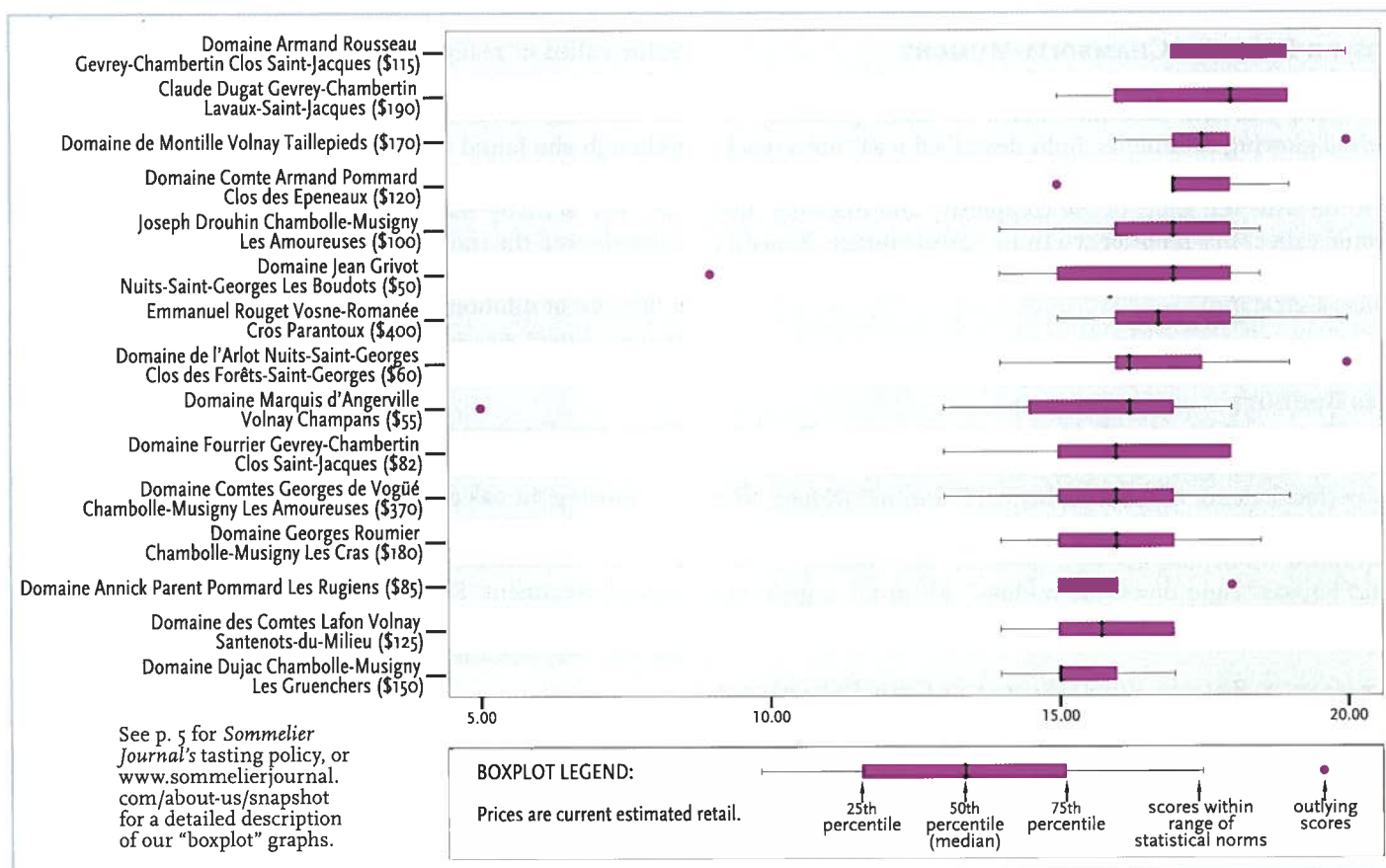
the '90s, 1999 was noteworthy for a large harvest of lush, ripe fruit. A few problems were identified by early reviewers: excessive yields that occasionally produced weak or thin wines; higher-than-normal alcohol levels; and wines lacking Burgundy's signature acidity. In this tasting, at least, such issues were limited.

"I think '99 is one of the best vintages in the past 20 years," said Johnnes. "Overall, the underlying characteristics of the vintage are great considering the density of the fruit and the freshness. It's pretty remarkable given the size of the crop." Johnnes believed 1999 to be more consistent than other outstanding vintages of the '90s, and Bohr agreed: "There is no risk of serving the '99s in comparison with '93 or '96, which are more uneven and challenging to some less-knowledgeable guests." Slover called it "an incredibly reliable vintage."

Sohm said that he had high expectations for the wines, but felt that "it's all about the oak—how it is integrated, how it has matured. How does the fruit present itself, how are the alcohol levels, and how are they integrated? How eager was the producer in terms of the extraction of the wine?" Sohm thought these wines had great potential for further aging. Kopec described them as "generous, flattering, and easy for people to like," adding that there were "more noticeable, forward tannins." Canterbury agreed that the selection was marked by "grippy tannins and generous alcohol levels."

# TASTING PANEL

## SNAPSHOT



Gordon believed the best wines probably came from winemakers who were able to control their yields, noting that "some of the wines were a little dilute and not as concentrated as they could have been. The best producers also controlled the levels of oak." Oak was a sensitive issue in general: some panelists felt the wines were masked by oak flavors and aromatics, while others thought those oak characteristics would integrate as the wines aged.

Overall, the panelists found most of the wines drinkable and, more important, well made. Lynch summarized 1999 as "a very complete vintage; there are a lot of enjoyable wines that have all of the elements."

Following are panelists' comments on each wine in order of their ranking in the accompanying "boxplot."

### DOMAINE ARMAND ROUSSEAU GEVREY-CHAMBERTIN CLOS SAINT-JACQUES

Although this was the next-to-last wine tasted, it turned out to be the most congenial of the day. Descriptions were rather sparse as the alcohol was absorbed and hunger began to sink in. Lynch called the Rousseau "a solid wine," and Johnnes described it as "a classic Burgundy." Kopec thought it had "grand cru quality."

### CLAUDE DUGAT GEVREY-CHAMBERTIN LAVAUX-SAINTE-JACQUES

Texture, texture, texture—it was something every panelist was looking for, and this wine, another Gevrey, delivered. Most tasters highlighted it as their first or second favorite wine of the first flight. Lynch called it a "sweet and savory mix of cherries and mulch," and Johnnes enjoyed the "sweet, ripe fruit" and "the good texture and fresh acidity." Bohr thought the balance was superb and that the wine possessed "supple, firm, well-integrated tannins." "This was the first wine that conjured up a grand cru feeling," said Kopec.

### DOMAINE DE MONTILLE VOLNAY TAILLEPIEDS

The panel agreed that the Montille, the highest scoring Côte de Beaune in the tasting, was consistent with their image of a classic 1999 red Burgundy: balanced, lush fruit with great texture. As Bohr put it, "Excellent!"

### DOMAINE COMTE ARMAND POMMARD CLOS DES EPENEAUX

Panelists were generally on the fence about this Pommard premier cru, neither loving it nor disliking it. Slover and Sohm both commented positively on the wine's sweet

fruit, while Canterbury said it had “intensity, high acid, and grippy tannins.”

**JOSEPH DROUHIN CHAMBOLE-MUSIGNY  
LES AMOUREUSES**

This pleasant, medium-bodied Drouhin generally received glowing comments. Bohr described it as “not a blockbuster 1999, but very agreeable.” Although a few tasters felt the wine fell short of the complexity and intensity they would expect in a premier cru from a great vintage, Benedict summed up the prevailing sentiment: “Great nose, great balance, a great ’99!”

**DOMAINE JEAN GRIVOT NUITS-SAINT-GEORGES  
LES BOUDOTS**

The panel was also divided on the Grivot Les Boudots, with half finding it “balanced and in harmony” (Bohr) and “a perfect balance of fruit, acidity, and tannins” (Kopec), the other half calling it “extremely austere, herbal” (Gordon) and “wrapped up in tannins with no direction” (Lynch). Slover said he was “right down the middle.” All in all, a great example of Burgundy’s mystery.

**EMMANUEL ROUGET VOSNE-ROMANÉE CROS PARANTOUX**

The panelists agreed that this Vosne-Romanée had considerable oak, but disagreed on whether the oak would eventually integrate or the wine would remain more Californian in style. “It’s going to be a great wine,” said Bohr, and Couvreur agreed that “it has a lot of potential.” Benedict also noted that the wine needed time to develop, but Sohm, Kopec, and Canterbury felt the oak was overpowering. “The oak drives this wine and gives it lift,” countered Johnnes. “Don’t apologize for liking it because it has a lot of oak,” Gordon interjected; “it was a style consumers like, and sommeliers serve the consumer.” “It wasn’t my style,” Slover concurred, “but it was impressive in a lot of ways.”

**DOMAINE DE L’ARLOT NUITS-SAINT-GEORGES  
CLOS DES FORÊTS-SAINT-GEORGES**

“Easy-drinking” was the key descriptor for the Domaine de l’ArLOT. That was certainly not a disparaging comment, but the tasters felt that for its price, the wine fell a little short of expectations. Bohr dubbed it “bright, clean, and succulent, but not very 1999.” Higher praise came from Kopec, who called it “aromatic and attractive, refreshing and balanced.” Many panelists also noted an earthy quality.

**DOMAINE MARQUIS D’ANGERVILLE VOLNAY CHAMPANS**

The Marquis d’Angerville Volnay Champans also received a split verdict, with several panelists noting a high level of volatile acidity. Couvreur called it “classic red Burgundy,” and Benedict said it had “good balance and length.” Gordon and Johnnes both commented on the wine’s “beautiful balance.” “It had great texture, body, and a nice spice on the finish,” Gordon added.

**DOMAINE FOURRIER GEVREY-CHAMBERTIN  
CLOS SAINT-JACQUES**

Everyone seemed to enjoy the aromatics of this wine—Sohm called it “really pretty and mineral-driven”—but some didn’t think it followed through on the palate. Canterbury felt the wine was youthful, with “noticeable evidence of oak,” although she found the wood acceptable. Slover agreed that it needed more time. Gordon and Johnnes thought the Fourrier was actually mature, and Sohm pointed out that the color showed the most age of all the wines in the first flight. Johnnes “loved the nose, but thought it was an example of a little bit of dilution” on the palate, calling it “a little short, coarse.” Kopec was supported by Slover in declaring the wine to be “balanced and elegant, providing lots of pleasure.”

**DOMAINE COMTES GEORGES DE VOGÜÉ  
CHAMBOLE-MUSIGNY LES AMOUREUSES**

Raising the oak debate once again, the Vogüé was praised by those who didn’t mind a hefty dose of new wood, but disparaged as one-dimensional by those who opposed such heavy-handed treatment. Sohm believed that unlike other heavily oaked wines in the tasting, this one would probably not integrate. “Full-throttle, sexy, voluptuous,” Lynch summarized.

**DOMAINE GEORGES ROUMIER CHAMBOLE-MUSIGNY  
LES CRAS**

*Brettanomyces* was noted in this Chambolle-Musigny, but the barnyard element was acceptable to most. The general consensus was that the wine was tight and closed, but well made.

**DOMAINE ANNICK PARENT POMMARD LES RUGIENS**

The panel agreed that the Annick Parent Pommard was a little out of balance and marked by overbearing tannins. “This wine was muted and lacked a little personality,” said Bohr.

**DOMAINE DES COMTES LAFON VOLNAY  
SANTENOTS-DU-MILIEU**

Conversation centered on whether this wine’s bold, rich style was traditional or modern. Gordon described it as “lusher, richer, riper, and bigger, with black fruits; dense and modern, with a little oak.” Canterbury thought it was just average and that “the tannins were really firm.” “Meaty, gritty,” Benedict added. Johnnes felt the wine had pleasant “deep fruit with a smokiness from the oak—big style, but delicious.” “A modern style when you look at extraction,” noted Sohm. Although everyone found positives, Sohm, Kopec, and Bohr maintained that the wine lacked balance, citing high tannins, high alcohol, and deficient acidity.

**DOMAINE DUJAC CHAMBOLE-MUSIGNY LES GRUENCHERS**

The Dujac wasn’t obviously flawed, but its overall health was questioned, as reflected in the scores. The panelists agreed that another bottle on another day might have fared much better. “There are no such things as great wines, only great bottles,” Johnnes concluded. ♡