Everyday Wine Drinker's Guide to Burgundy



burgundywine.com

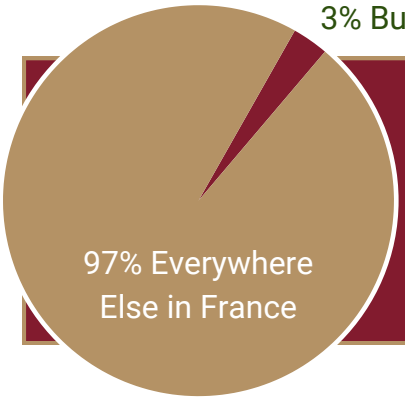
Intro to Burgundy Wines

Even wine drinkers with a fairly basic knowledge of international wines have probably heard of the famed **Burgundy** wine region. For such a tiny area of France, it packs a ton of wine history and prestige. Casual wine drinkers and devoted collectors alike share an enthusiasm for the uniquely delicious wines of this region. For a region that almost exclusively grows only two grapes (Chardonnay and Pinot Noir), it's remarkable how different one wine might taste from another depending on the specific plot of land the grapes came from.



All the hype surrounding some of Burgundy's biggest stars can make the region's wines seem intimidating and out of reach for the average wine buyer. Fear not! With a little bit of knowledge and inside scoop from industry experts, everyone is able to access remarkable wines from Burgundy. This guide is designed to demystify and better explain the region and it's incredible wines.

You Learn Something New Everyday:
Fun Facts About Burgundy



For a region that's so well known, Burgundy produces a tiny amount of wine: about 3% of France's overall wine production.

Burgundy has been producing wine since the Roman Empire in 52 B.C., making it one of France's oldest wine regions.





Burgundy is famous for its cuisine, which includes coq au vin, beef bourguignon, fondue bourguignonne, escargots de Bourgogne, and gougères.

The Cistercian monks arrived in the region in the 12th century and played a significant role in shaping Burgundy's winemaking. They meticulously documented the best vineyard sites, which laid the foundation for Burgundy's renowned terroirs.



Quick Glossary of Burgundy Terms

Whether trying to decode a Burgundy wine label, decipher an award-winning wine list at that popular restaurant, or keep up with the wine blogs and articles, it helps to have a basic understanding of some key French wine terms.

A.O.C.

Appellation d'origine contrôlée is a system used to certify French wines to guarantee the characteristics of the wine including the specific terroir where the grapes are grown and the way it is made (with some very strict steps and restrictions). To earn the AOC stamp on the label, the wine is rigorously checked at each step of the process from the vineyards to the finished wine in the bottle.

Bourgogne

French for Burgundy, also used on regional appellation wine labels

Climat

A particular parcel of land or vineyard with certain attributes

Clos

A plot of vines traditionally surrounded by stone walls

Côte

Translates to slope or hill and is used all over France to describe some noteworthy hillsides where vineyards tend to thrive. One famous example is the Côte d'Or, the "Golden Slope".



Quick Glossary of Burgundy Terms

Cru

Translates to “growth” and is used throughout France to denotes quality (with different parameters depending on the wine region)

Domaine

Can be defined as both an estate or an “area of control”, often denoting a parcel of land under a winemaker’s control.



Mise en bouteilles

“Bottled at…” Typically seen on the label to indicate if a wine was bottled at a single estate, or perhaps at a third party, négociant (see next page).

Monopole

A plot of land with a single owner - a rare feat in Burgundy where Napoleonic inheritance laws have often caused vineyards to be divided among inheritors, sometimes down to a single row of vines

Quick Glossary of Burgundy Terms

Négociant

A wine merchant or wholesaler who buys grapes or wine from other producers and sells the finished product under their own name. The négociant system is common in Burgundy and was established as a way to help smaller vineyard owners focus on growing grapes and making wine, while négociants took on tasks like marketing and selling the wines.



Terroir

The quintessential French wine term which simply put defines a “sense of place.” A wine’s terroir encompasses the geology, soil, climate, aspect, elevation and topography as well as the human influence on the land

Village

Yes, it means the same in English, a village is a small town but in Burgundy it’s also used in the classification of a wine’s quality

Get to Know the Wine Regions of Burgundy



It's difficult to really understand Burgundy without knowing a bit about the major wine regions. Stretching from Dijon to Lyon, there are 225 miles and six distinct regions.

Get to Know the Wine Regions of Burgundy

Chablis

Set apart from the otherwise contiguous stretch of the rest of Burgundy's wine regions, Chablis offers unique elements that foster some of the world's most notable Chardonnay. Its cool climate and distinct kimmeridgian clay (soil containing fossilized marine life from 150 million years ago) are key to producing the lean, dry Chardonnays that pair so beautifully with seafood. Chablis actually has its own classification system apart from the rest of Burgundy (learn more on page ?)



Côte de Nuits

Beginning just south of the city of Dijon, the Côte de Nuits makes up the northern half of the Côte d'Or, a name you might recognize from wine lists. This tiny region can be traversed in under an hour but is home to some of the most famous red wines in the world. Vineyards and wineries nestled among limestone quarries carry famous names like Gevrey-Chambertin, Clos de la Roche, Clos St. Denis, Les Musigny, and probably the most prestigious Pinot Noir made in the world, Romanée-Conti. While there are a few white wines produced here, Pinot Noir is the star with styles ranging from muscular and robust to refined and elegant.

Get to Know the Wine Regions of Burgundy

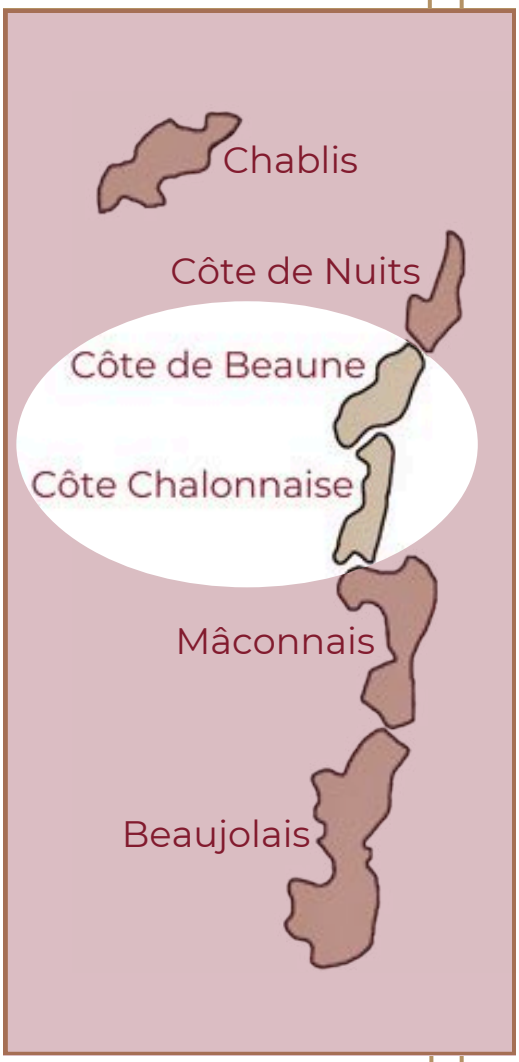
Côte de Beaune

The southern half of the Côte d'Or takes its name from the medieval city of Beaune, also Burgundy's capitol. Well known for both red and white wines, the long skinny stretch of vineyards is dotted with world-renown vineyards. Pinot Noir is planted around the town of Beaune, with famous producers like Volnay and Pommard with elegant wines featuring aromas of blackcurrant and cherry and an earthy minerality. Chardonnay can be found around Corton and Meursault and is often round and supple with bright acidity, citrus notes and a golden color.

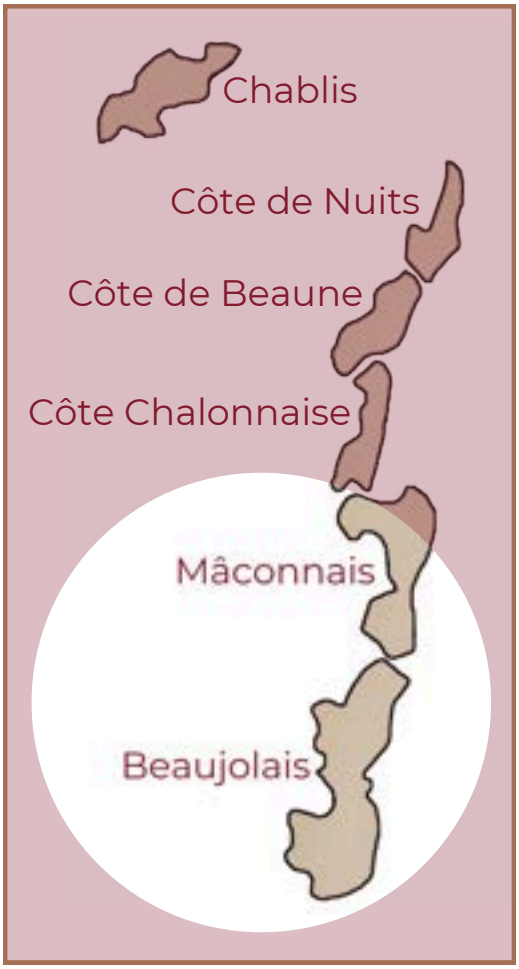


Côte Chalonnaise

Overshadowed for centuries by neighboring Côte d'Or, the wines of this region aren't as well known but due to the rising popularity of Burgundy, can be a great place to find hidden gems. Most vineyards are clustered around five villages and produce a mix of red and white wines, including Burgundy's second white grape, Aligoté - an unoaked, light wine with a fruity bouquet of citrus, white peach and hazelnut. Pinot Noir produced near the villages Mercurey and Givry tend to be early drinking, fruit-forward wines.



Get to Know the Wine Regions of Burgundy



Mâconnais

A beautiful region nestled between two valleys and centered on the town of Mâcon. There has been a lot of interest and investment in the area recently leading to an overall increase in quality but is still considered a great place to find affordable wines. Nearly 80% of the region planted to Chardonnay and its best known examples come from Pouilly-Fuissé. It has a rather complicated classification system because most every village wanted their name on the label. So there are a lot of labels that display 'Macon + village name'. A little bit of red is produced with Gamay and Pinot Noir. A fantastic region to seek out reasonably priced wines.

Beaujolais

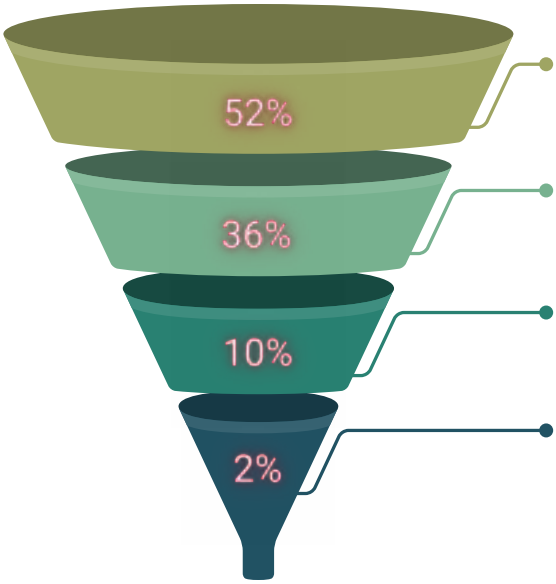
While still technically in Burgundy, Beaujolais is often considered its own unique wine region due to the the completely different climate and soils, the primary grape grown and the style of wine made there. The Gamay grape is nearly the only grape grown here and produces a bright, juicy red wine which is grown in mostly granite soil. There are four categories for red Beaujolais: Beaujolais Cru, Beaujolais Superior, Beaujolais Village and Beaujolais Nouveau. Those last two categories are produced using a method called carbonic maceration which results in a light, fruity, slightly effervescent wine.

Burgundy Wine Classification System:

4 levels of AOC in Burgundy

Unless you're studying to become a Sommelier, there's no need to learn all the specific AOCs (Appellation d'origine contrôlée) of Burgundy.

It helps to understand the four different classification levels and the location of the wine, which should give you a pretty good idea of quality and the specific grape inside the bottle.



Regional Appellation

Village Appellation

Première Cru

Grand Cru



Burgundy Wine Classification System

Grand Cru



Makes up only 2% of the total wines produced in Burgundy, including both red and white wines.



There are 33 world-renowned Grand Crus all located in the Côte d'Or region, each one a unique example of Burgundian excellence.



If you can find one of these bottles, expect to pay an arm and a leg for it!

Village Appellations



Account for about a third of Burgundy's wines, including red, white and a little bit of rosé.



44 villages take their names from the commune where the grapes are grown, like "Mercurey," "Pommard," and "Nuits-Saint-Georges."



With a few pricey outliers, there are a lot of affordable options in this level that allow the wine drinker to really experience the terroir of a specific village reflected in the glass.

Première (1er) Cru



Wines produced from a single plot within a Village appellation. These plots are also referred to as *Climats*.



The name of the commune will come first on the label, "Chablis Première Cru."



There are over 600 unique 'climats' accounting for just over 10% of the total wines produced in Burgundy.

Regional Appellations



An excellent entry point to Burgundy's wines including red, white and a small amount of rosé.



There are 23 AOCs making up about half of Burgundy's wine production.



Makes for the perfect everyday wine to share with friends.

Chablis Wine Classification System

A region completely devoted to one grape, Chablis is planted to 100% Chardonnay. They have their own classification system to help distinguish the different quality levels found here.

Grand Cru Chablis

Only 7 plots (known as climats) produce Grand Cru Chablis and all are located on the same slope of land located on Serein river across from the town of Chablis. These Grand Cru vineyards have perfect sun exposure for ideal ripening and a hefty vein of kimmeridgian clay soil. The more intense flavors and aromas as well as varied winemaking techniques result in no two Grand Cru Chablis wines tasting the same.

Première (1er) Cru Chablis

Accounting for only 15% of vineyards in Chablis, these plots have superior soils and excellent exposure to the sun. There are about 40 premier cru categories in Chablis.

Chablis

This is the 'village' level appellation and accounts for the majority of the wine produced in the region. Chardonnays from here tend to have citrus, pear and more exaggerated mineral notes.



Petit Chablis

The 'regional appellation' Chablis, tends to be grown on the outer edges of the region with more variable landscape and soil with little, if any of the famed kimmeridgian clay soil. The wines are bright, refreshing, with more citrus and less mineral notes. Can be a great value.

A Burgundy For Every Budget

While there are numerous examples of ridiculously expensive and rare Burgundy wines, savvy wine buyers know that there is a wide range of price points available from this legendary and prestigious region. You've just got to know what to look for!

There are generally two main factors determining the price:

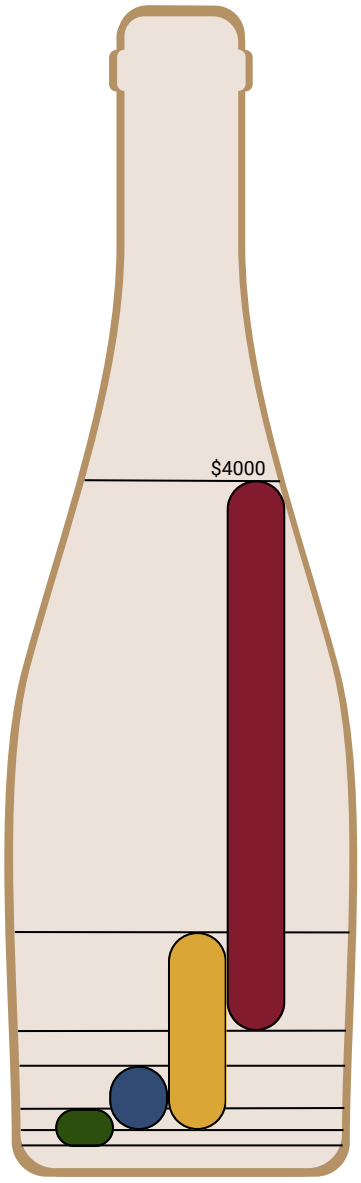
1. The quality level of the wine
2. Where the grapes are grown (ranging from the entire region down to a specific vineyard in a certain town on an unique patch of dirt).

$20-$50/bottle

Regional level wines are considered Burgundy's entry level wines and are typically going to be the most affordable, coming from anywhere in Burgundy.

$40-$100/bottle

Village level wines come from a specific village or commune, some of the more prestigious villages will demand a higher price.



$40-$1000+/bottle

The Premiere Cru level wines coming from specific vineyards (climats) can vary in price quite a bit depending on the producer.

$200-$4000+/bottle

The 33 Grand Cru level wines denote the highest quality from the most unique and sought after vineyards. Often demanding top dollar, many are only available through auctions and private brokers.

What About those Rare and Expensive Burgundy Wines?

A number of factors contribute to the rarity and expense of some Burgundy wines.

Scarcity

Burgundy's small production scale, limited vine acreage, and growing global demand mean there's not enough wine to meet the demand.

Climate

Unpredictable weather like drought, extreme heat waves, frost, and hail can all negatively impacted production further limiting the available wines in the market.

Labor

Making Burgundy wine is labor intensive due to the small vines with grape bunches close to the ground requiring workers to hunch over to prune and harvest the grapes.

Reputation

Burgundy wine has always enjoyed a well-respected reputation around the world and it is only growing with the introduction to social media and a more pronounced online presence for the region.

Vintage

Some vintages are more expensive than others, especially older wines available at auction. For example, in 2018, a 1945 Romanée Conti sold for $558,000 at Sotheby's, making it the world's eighth most expensive wine at the time.

How to Read A Burgundy Wine Label

Why can't it be easier to read? Ever been stumped by a French wine label and have no idea what you're going to find once you pull the cork? You are not alone.



The most noticeable element missing from a French wine label is the name of the grape. In France, the region where the wine comes from will give you an idea of the grape or blend inside the bottle. In Burgundy that means you're primarily looking at two grapes.

White wines are almost always Chardonnay and reds are overwhelmingly Pinot Noir. The rest of the information can tell you specifically where it was grown, the year the grapes were harvested, the quality level and who produced the wine.

1. Wine from Burgundy
2. Vintage
3. Name of vineyard
4. Regional wine level
5. "AOC" designation
6. Winemaker
7. Location

How to Find Burgundy's Hidden Gems

Burgundy may be a very well-known wine region but remember that it's incredibly small, accounting for only 3% of the total wines produced in France. The region is also comprised of many very small producers, making it a challenge to find those great quality and value wines. Here are a few tips to unearthing those hidden gems for yourself.

Get to know your local independent retailer

Rather than the big box stores that tend to purchase larger allotments to spread out among their stores, the independent retailer can sometimes get their hands on those smaller producers you just won't find anywhere else.



Wine Magazines

Whether physical or digital, many of the more popular wine magazines will have articles or even entire issues dedicated to Burgundy. Offering wine reviews and often where to purchase.

How to Find Burgundy's Hidden Gems

Online retailers specializing in Burgundy

More and more states are allowing customers to receive wine delivered right to their door. Big online retailers like Wine.com or Total wine carry wines from all over the world including this region. Specialist burgundy wine online retailers like burgundywine.com have strong relationships directly with 'hidden gem' winemakers. They include a lot of information about the wines and producers they're bringing onto their site.

> Look for wine clubs or membership opportunities from these online sites. Some include exclusive opportunities to purchase from tiny producers or even to get access to some of those elusive and rare Premièr Cru and Grand Cru wines.



Best Burgundy
Wine & Food Pairings

Whether channeling your inner Julia Child for the classic, traditional French dishes, or opting for more international fare, Burgundy wines are excellent paired with lots of foods.

Wine	Traditional French Cuisine	International Options
Beaujolais A juicy and bright fruit-forward wine made from Gamay grapes.	Salade Lyonnaise Poached Salmon Vegetable Ragoût with Garlic & Crispy Ham	Baba Ganoush & Pita Bread Veggie Stir Fry with Oyster Sauce Butternut Squash Ravioli
Bourgogne Red Light bodied Pinot Noir, with bright red and black fruit flavors. Pairs with light, simple fare.	Chévere & Brie Cheeses (not too stinky) Duck breast, citrus, fennel & hazelnut salad Cantal Cheese and Tomato Tart	Seared Ahi Tuna with Sesame Crust Mushroom and Spring Pea Risotto BBQ Ribs
Top Tier Reds Pinot Noirs with berry flavors and some earthier notes like mushroom. Pairs with heavier, more complex dishes.	Pan-Seared Wild French Squab Duck Breast with a Quince Paste Sauce Boeuf Bourguignon	Braised Pork Belly Roasted Rack of Lamb Peking Duck with Orange Sauce

Best Burgundy
Wine & Food Pairings

Wine	Traditional French Cuisine	International Options
Chablis Chardonnay with floral and distinct chalky mineral notes. Perfect with seafood.	Gougère (Cheese Puffs) Steamed Mussels & Pomme Frites Snails with a Parsley Puree and Tomato Coulis	Cheese Dosa (crepe-like Indian dish) Cod Fish and Chips Pork Gyro Bowl with Quinoa
Pouilly-Fuissé Fruit forward Chardonnay with excellent acidity pairs well with rich, buttery foods.	Délice de Bourgogne Cheese Foie Gras with Cassis and Dill Slow Roasted Bresse Chicken	Goat Cheese and Beet Salad Creamy Chicken Alfredo Sushi & Sashimi
Bourgogne Whites Most likely Chardonnay with light citrus and apple flavors. Easy drinking and affordable, a great summer sipper.	Crab Salad with Chili Mint Vinaigrette Warm Fava Beans and Peas with Goat Cheese Roast chicken with Lemon	Scallops with Nori and Ginger-Soy Beurre Blanc Grilled Pizza with Lemon and Arugula Orange Olive Oil Cake
Top Tier Whites From prestigious regions like Côte de Beaune, Chardonnays with oak aging, notes of hazelnut, vanilla and ripe yellow apple.	Smoked Trout Croissants Poulet Au Comté Coq Au Vin Blanc	Beef Ho Fan Baked Stuffed Crab Shell Wild Mushroom Risotto

Hosting A Burgundy Tasting Party

What better way to learn more about Burgundy wines than discovering and sharing with friends!

Start with Good Glasses

Believe it or not, the type and quality of glass can make a big impact on the wines you're drinking. There are a couple easy rules to follow

- Opt for crystal rather than glass. Crystal has a more porous surface (not smooth like glass) and causes the wine to cling to the side of the glass, greatly improving the aromatics
- Ensure the glasses are clean and free of any detergent or sanitizer that could taint the wine

Make it a Group Effort

There are a few ways to relieve some of the hosting challenges like assigning each guest to pick up a certain bottle to bring, asking guests to contribute to the costs, or request that guests bring different dishes that will pair well with the wines.





Hosting A Burgundy Tasting Party

Select 5-6 Different Wines to Compare

Rather than just picking all Burgundy wines, try selecting a theme for the wines, like:

- Different type of white Burgundies (i.e. a couple different Chablis, Pouilly-Fuisse, Aligote, Bourgogne Blanc, etc.)
- All red Burgundy Village wines from different parts of Burgundy to compare how different Pinot Noir can taste depending on where its grown
- Price points, a couple under $40, some mid-range, and one or two over $100. Let everyone try them without knowing the costs and see how folks rank them from least to most expensive - the results might surprise you!



Don't Forget to Feed Them

You'll want to make sure nobody's tasting multiple wines on an empty stomach. Plan for foods that include carbs and protein (cheese, meats, seafood) which will fill them up but also allow the group to see how pairings can enhance or alter the wines.

Hosting A Burgundy Tasting Party

Educate by Telling Stories

It can be very difficult to keep folks focused for too long. Plan to spend just a few minutes talking about each wine as it's being poured for everyone. A quick story or anecdote about the wine, winemaker, or region can be a lot easier for guests to digest than a formal presentation on soils and French wine laws. It will require a little research using burgundy themed blogs or Google searches. Better yet, reach out to your trusted and knowledgeable Burgundy wine retailer.



A Great Ambiance Leads to a Memorable Party

Plan for some background music that still allows everyone to hear about each wine as its being poured. Candlelight is great, but you will want to make sure they are unscented (to avoid interfering with the wine's aromas) and that the room is bright enough to actually see the wines.

Santé!
(Cheers!)