



BUGEY: THE LITTLE APPELLATION THAT COULD

Rod Phillips travels to one of France's least-known and smallest AOCs and finds a winemaking culture that has retained its nostalgic charm even as it has been given a new lease of life by a dynamic generation of vigneron

Bugey (pronounced *boo-zhay*), the little-known AOC in the hill country west of the French Alps, presents two images. In the first, Bugey's vigneron cultivate a few hectares of vines and make wine in scores of scattered villages and hamlets. They embody the meaning of the vigneron of cultural nostalgia. Their families have been deeply embedded in their communities for generations, they make their wines in small stone cellars and former horse stables, and they sell most of their wine from the cellar door. And "cellar door" here means the door to the cellar, not a modern winery retail store.

If this first image seems static and moribund, the second portrays Bugey as dynamic. There's a lot going on in the region, especially—but far from exclusively—in the hands of the younger generations and newcomers who now work many of the vineyards and cellars. They give close attention to the vines—one third of Bugey's vineyard area is now certified organic—and have replaced or modernized cramped winemaking facilities. Although local sales are still important, many are beginning to sell not only throughout France but in other European markets, as well as in North America and Asia.

Bugey bouge

Bugey, then, is a region in transition, but it is retaining its intimate character and its reputation—if a region so little known to outsiders can have a reputation—of scattered small producers making some very interesting and high-quality wines. Many are from fairly obscure grape varieties: Gamay and Chardonnay together account for three quarters of Bugey's vines, but there are also plantings of Altesse, Molette, Poulsard, Jacquère, and Mondeuse, none of which can be thought of as mainstream.

Geographically, Bugey may best be defined by the appellations that surround it: Jura to the north, Savoie to the east, Beaujolais to the west, and the Rhône Valley to the southwest. It is often thought to be part of the Jura wine region, which itself is still not that well known. Bugey occupies the rugged southeast corner of the *département* of the Ain, and for many years it was a significant producer of bulk wines for nearby markets. In the 1800s and early 1900s, Bugey wines were commonly found in the bistros of Lyon and the restaurants of Geneva, the two closest metropolises.

Like many other French regions environmentally or financially marginal for viticulture, the Ain *département* saw a precipitous decline in wine production. Wineries flourished in the first half of the 19th century, and the vineyard area peaked at nearly 21,000ha (52,000 acres) in the 1860s, when wine made up one quarter of the Ain's agricultural production. But thanks

in part to phylloxera, vine area shrank to 12,000ha (30,000 acres) by the 1920s and then fell steadily through the 20th century to settle at about 2,000ha (5,000 acres) by 2000.

It is less straightforward to trace the trend in AOC Bugey vineyards because the region was delimited only in 1958, when it became a VDQS before gaining AOC status in 2009. At its height in the 1860s, there were an estimated 7,000ha (17,000 acres) of vines in what is now AOC Bugey. There are now only 470ha (1,160 acres) producing AOC Bugey wines, a figure that has not changed during the past ten years. These vines are cultivated by 77 producers, meaning that the average holding is about 6ha (15 acres). There are also growers who sell their grapes to *négociants*, some of whom make AOC Bugey wine.

Combined, the 77 producers make about 3.5 million bottles of wine in an average year, with sparkling wine accounting for two thirds of the total. Two million bottles of sparkling wine might sound a lot but it is nothing compared to, say, the 84 million bottles of France's eight Crémant-labeled sparkling wines. Moreover, while between 20 percent and 50 percent (depending on region) of Crémant wines is exported, less than 8 percent of Bugey's wines is sold outside France. It means that they are seldom found in wine stores or on restaurant wine lists, and it goes some way to explaining why Bugey wines are so little known.

But perhaps Bugey's time is coming. Even though production is unlikely to rise significantly, the region has attributes that appeal to current sensibilities and preferences. Many wine aficionados are keen to "discover" obscure wine regions and have a thirst for wines out of the mainstream. At Domaine Trichon, in the hamlet of Le Poulet, Stéphane Trichon says that his wines, made with grapes such as Mondeuse and Molette, do well at fairs in various parts of Europe where "people are looking for little-known varieties."

Counterintuitively, Bugey might also be attractive because its rugged landscape poses challenges to would-be wine tourists. It's not that they have to hack their way to the vineyards with machetes, but producers are scattered among dozens of tiny communities (generally one producer per community), some of which are unknown to GPS systems; the narrow roads wind up and down hills and through forests, with hairpin bends common; and many villages enforce their low speed limits by means of one-way systems, bone-jarring speed bumps, and chicanes. The result is that an apparently short distance from one producer to the next can become an unexpectedly long journey, and reaching one's destination gives a real sense of accomplishment.

Moreover, infrastructure for visitors is inconsistent. While towns such as Ambérieu-en-Bugey and Culoz offer a range of accommodation, Belley, the main town of Bugey's southern viticultural region, has a population of 10,000 and a single hotel. *Chambres d'hôte, gîtes*, and excellent restaurants are scattered throughout the region, but the best-served area is Cerdon in the north; it is an easy drive from Bourg-en-Bresse, the Ain capital.

It is not surprising, then, that many producers are not well set up for wine tourists even though a few of the bigger wineries have dedicated tasting rooms and retail stores. Perhaps the most elaborate is Caveau Bugiste, whose extensive tasting area and wine store are open every day of the year but two. Located in Vongnes, a village of 70 permanent inhabitants, Caveau Bugiste attracts more than 30,000 visitors a year.

In contrast, the tasting room in many wineries is a counter in a corner of the production facility—and in some, no space at all is dedicated to tasting. Opening hours might (or might not) be posted on the door, but local clients know they can call in whenever they see the vigneron's car outside. A number of tastings for this article were enriched by the arrival of a local inhabitant or two who came to buy a few bottles of wine and were happy to join the tasting. On a Saturday morning at Domaine des Plantaz in Chavillieu, a hamlet of a few dozen inhabitants, one client purchased six bottles of Roussette (as Altesse is known in Bugey), three of Mondeuse, and three of sparkling wine.

Style and variety show

That modest wine order gives only a sense of the range that Bugey offers. With fewer than 500ha (1,235 acres) of vines, the appellation might be very small, but the number of wines represents a sometimes bewildering range of categories, some referring

to varieties, others to geographical locations, and yet others to wine style. Making up half Bugey's total wine production is its signature wine, AOC Bugey Cerdon, a variably sweet but sometimes dry rosé sparkling wine named for the main town in the northern part of Bugey. Made from Gamay and Poulsard (as varietals or blends), it is vinified by a version of the ancestral method. Other sparkling wines contribute about one fifth of total wine production and are made by the traditional method. Sparkling wines from the Montagnieu district, also made by the traditional method, are labeled AOC Bugey Montagnieu Brut. These sparkling wines can be made in white and rosé, and although many of the whites are wholly Chardonnay, varieties such as Altesse, Molette, Pinot Noir, and Jacquère can also be used.

For Bugey's still wines there are three categories. The first, labeled AOC Bugey, is a range of white, rosé, and red—and a rare orange—wines made from varieties such as Chardonnay, Altesse, Gamay, Pinot Noir, and Mondeuse. Altesse, Savoie's signature grape, is known in Bugey as Roussette, and when made as a varietal wine it is labeled AOC Roussette du Bugey, sometimes with district references Montagnieu or Virieu-le-Grand added. Red wines made from Mondeuse in the Montagnieu district are labeled AOC Bugey Montagnieu.

A final, very limited-production category is AOC Bugey Manicle, made from either Chardonnay or Pinot Noir sourced from about 10ha (25 acres) of vineyards in Manicle, in southern Bugey. Situated at between 985ft and 1,150ft (300–350m) above sea level, the vineyards are in a protected position at the base of a high cliff. The permitted yields are lower than elsewhere in Bugey, and Manicle wines make up less than 2 percent of Bugey's total production.



All photography courtesy of the producers

Other delimited wine regions fall within the Ain *département* but outside AOC Bugey. Wines made from grapes grown anywhere in the *département* or made from varieties not permitted in the AOC, can be labeled IGP Coteaux de l'Ain. (A number of subregions, such as Revermont and Pays de Gex, can be added.) Wines made from varieties not permitted in the wider range of varieties permitted in the IGP can be labeled Vin de France. Finally, there are two IGPs for *fine* and *marc* made within AOC Bugey.

Bugey's most important wine, Bugey Cerdon, is made by a version of the ancestral method. Fermentation begins in temperature-controlled tanks and is stopped by reducing the temperature to zero when the wine reaches about 6% ABV. The partly fermented wine is then transferred to bottles, sealed with a crown cap, and stored in cellars just warm enough (about 54°F [12°C]) for the fermentation to restart. The restarted fermentation is slow, and the wine must remain on its lees for at least two months. The wine is then transferred to a tank, lightly filtered, rebottled, and sealed with a cork.

Made from Gamay and Poulsard—the latter associated with nearby Jura—Cerdon can easily be generalized as pink, sweet, fizzy, and made for early drinking. Most fit that description. Residual sugar of 22–80 grams is permitted per liter, and most fall at the higher end, in the range of 50–70g. Even with good acidity, the sweetness is palpable and might be too high for some consumers. But with low alcohol (usually 7% or 8%), these are easy-drinking wines that do not demand a lot of reflection, and there is good demand for them.

Opposite: Daniel Boccard; Fabrice Gros of Domaine des Plantaz; Céline Ronger and her brother Gaël Ronger of Domaine de la Bélière. Below: Élie Renardat-Fâche.



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Producers across a broad spectrum

Although many Cerdon wines have enough acid to reduce perceived sweetness, several producers have lowered residual-sugar levels in order to appeal to a broader market. At Domaine de la Dentelle, Marcel Perinet makes only one Cerdon: a demi-sec that has 30–40g of residual sugar per liter. A blend of 80 percent Poulsard and 20 percent Gamay, its vibrant acidity neutralizes much of the sugar. These are not for cellaring, Perinet warns; drink them early—within a year, two at most.

Perinet became a vigneron after a long career as a sommelier, notably some four decades at the Michelin three-starred restaurant of Georges Blanc in Vonnas, only 30 miles (50km) from his winery. In 2011, he began to cultivate 2ha (5 acres) of neglected vineyards in the village of Gravelles and expanded them to 6ha (15 acres). Bucking the tendency to privilege Gamay in Cerdon, Perinet is committed to Poulsard and plans to plant another 4ha (10 acres). Although he sells widely to French restaurants, he exports two fifths of his 35,000-bottle production, especially to the United States. He's bullish about modern Cerdon. He estimates that in "the bad old days," one in five bottles was "undrinkable." Now, he says, "there is no bad wine" from the district.

Another major Cerdon producer is Domaine Renardat-Fâche, located in the village of Mérimat. There Élie Renardat-Fâche cultivates 12.5ha (31 acres) of Gamay and Poulsard organically and makes Cerdon either solely from Gamay or as blends. Christelle Renardat-Fâche, Élie's wife, says Gamay gives color and fruit to the wine, while Poulsard contributes structure and tannins. Their Cerdon with 70 percent Gamay is well balanced, sweeter, and fruitier, while its sibling wine with 70 percent Poulsard has more complexity, higher acidity, and lower perceived sweetness.

NOTABLE WINES OF BUGEY

AOC Bugey Cerdon

Domaine de la Dentelle Bugey Cerdon Rosé Demi-Sec 2018

Made from Poulsard (80%) and Gamay (20%), this is an aromatic, well-structured, medium-sweet sparkling wine that shows bright red fruit backed by vibrant acidity. The bubbles are fine and the texture is crisp and clean. | 92

Domaine Renardat-Fâche Bugey Cerdon 2019

A blend of Poulsard (70%) and Gamay (30%), this has good complexity and lower perceived sweetness than many Cerdons. The structure is good, and the balance of fruit, sugar, and acid is excellent. | 91

Domaine Alexis Bolliet Bugey Cerdon Rosé 2018

A rare 100% Poulsard Cerdon, this is pale orange-pink in color but more robust in its red berry-dominant flavours. Moderately sweet, it has excellent fruit/acid balance and good structure. | 91

Véronique Antoine Bugey Cerdon 2018

With 90% Gamay and 10% Poulsard, this is a moderately sweet, fruit-driven sparkling wine with a flavor profile dominated by red berries. It's well balanced, with a fine mousse and bubbles. | 90

Domaine de la Bélière La Déserte Bugey Cerdon 2018

A blend of 80% Poulsard and 20% Gamay, this small-production (about 6,500 bottles) Cerdon delivers concentrated fruit with red berries to the fore, moderate sweetness, and a soft mousse with fine bubbles. | 90

Cellier Lingot-Martin Bugey Cerdon Sec 2018

A relatively dry Cerdon in terms of residual sugar, and the perception of sweetness is reduced even more by the bright acidity. Fresh, fruity, and easy-drinking, this is an attractive style of Cerdon. | 90

AOC Bugey Brut

Domaine d'Ici Là Bugey Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs 2018

Made from Chardonnay and aged 12 months on lees, this has had no dosage. It shows attractive and well-defined fruit backed by vibrant acidity and delivers a generous, soft mousse and beads of fine bubbles. | 95

Domaine Trichon Bugey Brut 2015

Mainly Chardonnay, but with 20% Pinot Noir and a little Mondeuse and Aligoté, this had zero dosage and spent 48 months on lees. The fruit is forward and layered, the acidity is well calibrated, and the mousse and bubbles are fine. | 93

Cave Peillot Bugey Brut 2017

An unusual blend of Mondeuse (about 60%), Altesse, and Chardonnay, this delivers quite rich flavors harnessed to vibrant acidity. The mousse is soft, and the bubbles are fine. | 93

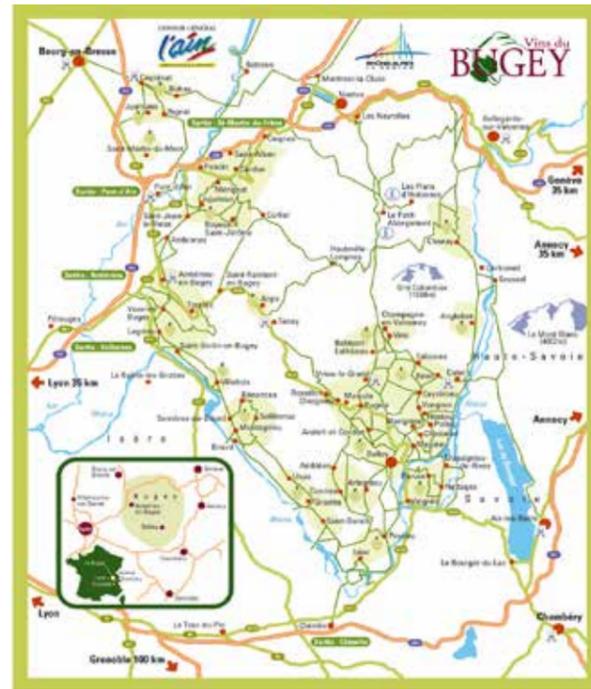
Caveau Boccard Bugey Brut Blanc de Blancs 2017

This 100% Chardonnay is very drinkably dry without crossing the line into astringency. The fruit, complex and well layered, is supported by vibrant acidity that contributes juiciness to the texture. The mousse and bubbles are fine. | 92

AOC Bugey Montagnieu Brut

Maison Froquet Bugey Montagnieu Brut Blanc de Blancs 2017

A blend of Altesse and Chardonnay, this is a bright, high-acid, and quite



charming sparkling wine. The components are very well balanced. Look for a generous, silky mousse and beads of tiny bubbles. | 94

Roussette du Bugey

Caveau Sylvain Bois Roussette du Bugey 2018

Made entirely in stainless steel, this lovely example of Roussette du Bugey delivers quite rich fruit, bright and balanced acidity, and some attractive weight in the texture from six months on fine lees. | 94

Maison Fusillet Roussette du Bugey 2018

This elegant, fruit-forward, and harmonious Roussette du Bugey shows good complexity and structure. The acidity lifts the fruit and adds brightness and juiciness to the texture. | 94

Caveau d'Oncin Roussette de Bugey Montagnieu 2018

This wine has 7g/l RS, but thanks to the high acidity, the result is richness rather than sweetness. An unusual style of Roussette du Bugey, it's very well balanced and very attractive. | 93

Domaine Claude Collomb Roussette du Bugey 2018

A quite elegant style of Roussette du Bugey, this shows bright fruit flavors backed by refreshing and well-tailored acidity that gives the texture some juiciness. | 92

AOC Bugey Manicle

Caveau Bugiste Cuvée des Eboulis Manicle Blanc 2018

Named for the rocks that fall from the cliff behind the Manicle vineyards, this sensitively oaked (30% new barrels) Chardonnay delivers well-defined fruit and clean, vibrant acidity. It's balanced and harmonious and quite elegant. | 93

Caveau Bugiste Cuvée de la Truffière Manicle Rouge 2018

This is a beautiful Pinot Noir, from its perfumed nose, to its long finish.

Map courtesy of the Syndicat des Vins du Bugey

In between are complex flavors, with red and dark fruit to the fore, well-calibrated acidity, very good structure, and excellent balance. | 95

Domaine Monin Manicle Blanc 2018

This is a generous, almost fleshy Chardonnay. It delivers quite concentrated and well-layered flavors, with the fruit supported by brisk, clean acid. | 90

AOC Bugey

Domaine Yves Duport Terre Brune Mondeuse 2018

Made solely from Mondeuse, this is a very well-structured, wine with a complex flavor profile dominated by dark fruit and spiciness. The fruit-acid balance is spot-on, and the tannins are fine and integrated. | 95

Domaine Alexis Bolliet Pinot Noir 2018

This lovely Pinot Noir shows well-defined flavors of red and dark fruit backed by the fresh, clean acidity common to Bugey wines. The fruit/acid balance is excellent, and the tannins are drying but more than manageable. | 94

Domaine Trichon Pinot Noir 2018

This is a really lovely Pinot Noir, with a nose of fresh cherries and a fruit profile dominated by sour cherries. It's very dry, with moderate tannins—a wine you could use as a textbook Pinot. | 94

Domaine Thierry Tissot Mondeuse 2018

A lovely Mondeuse, with generous, well-structured, nicely layered fruit. The balance is excellent; the tannins are integrating well and easily managed. | 93

Domaine Bonnard Pinot Noir 2018

This wine, 20% whole-bunch pressed and vinified in stainless steel, is a textbook Pinot Noir that is expressed in red-fruit and berry flavors, supported by bright acid and a silky texture. The balance is excellent. | 93

Caveau Dufour Chardonnay 2018

A very attractive Chardonnay, with lovely fresh fruit flavors and a spine of well-calibrated, clean acidity. There's a little fatness in the texture that adds to the overall complexity. | 91

Domaine Gérald Dubreuil Chardonnay 2018

A flavorful Chardonnay with well-defined and well-structured fruit, an interesting texture, and fresh, clean acidity. | 90

Cellier de Bel-Air Mondeuse 2017

With flavors dominated by dark fruit, this Mondeuse has a generous and weighty texture and acid that is well calibrated to the fruit. The drying tannins are integrating well. | 90

Domaine Roux & Fils Chardonnay 2018

The attractive and well-layered flavors in this medium-weight wine are balanced by fresh, crisp acidity. There is a real juiciness to the texture that tilts the wine toward food. | 90

Caveau Quinard Mondeuse 2018

This is an attractive style of Mondeuse, which can be somewhat aggressive. This one is well paced, with layered fruit and a spine of acidity that is well balanced. The tannins are relaxed. | 90

Maison Angelot Gamay 2017

This well-made Gamay in a lighter style shows the best characteristics of the variety. Look for attractive red-berry notes in the flavor profile and a spine of clean, fresh acidity. It's perfectly balanced. | 90

Cerdon wines from Renardat-Fâche have 55–70g/l RS. They tried to make one with only 30g/l and no more than 9% ABV. Christelle Renardat-Fâche says, but it proved impossible because climate change is giving them grapes with more sugar and less acid. Since 2016 they have also made (“in the old style”) a limited-production still wine from Gamay. After three years, the first vintage gives off a little smokiness on the nose, shows good acidity, and is still quite taut and closed—not at all like an easy-drinking Cerdon.

Domaine de la Dentelle and Domaine Renardat-Fâche are substantial producers of Cerdon, but Cellier Lingot-Martin takes it to another level. It began in 1970 as a partnership of three families, and in the intervening half-century there have been retirements and additions and at present five families are involved. The partnership is not, they make clear, a cooperative (there is none in Bugey), but it is a powerhouse in the world of Cerdon: Together the partners own 48ha (118 acres) of vines—10 percent of Bugey's total and almost one third of Bugey Cerdon. The vines are certified *haute valeur environnementale*, which requires sustainable practices in the vineyard and winery.

Lingot-Martin makes an astonishing 350,000 bottles of Cerdon in an average year; a figure that represents about one tenth of Bugey's total wine production. Their five cuvées include Cuvée Classique, a 100-percent Gamay that accounts for half the production, and a Cerdon Sec that has the minimum permitted level of residual sugar and a slightly higher alcohol level to achieve it. The partnership sells half its wine directly from the cellar and at wine fairs and shows, one third through French supermarkets, and one tenth in export markets, especially Japan, the United States, and the EU.

At the other end of the spectrum is Véronique Antoine, located in the small community of Rignat, a 20-minute drive from Bourg-en-Bresse. With 2.7ha (6.7 acres) of vines, Antoine makes an attractive AOC Bugey Chardonnay and about 5,000 bottles a year of Cerdon, a blend of 90 percent Gamay and 10 percent Poulsard. It is moderately sweet and shows very good acid-fruit balance, and she recommends it as an apéritif or to go with desserts. Antoine's third wine is an ancestral-method sparkling wine made from the Jacquère variety from Savoie. Named *Sous les Vignes*, it has a label that depicts one of her herd of Ouessant black sheep that she releases into the vineyard after the harvest.

Sparkling and still

Among Cerdon producers, there is a difference of opinion when it comes to the Poulsard variety. It is one of only two varieties permitted, but it is clearly a very junior partner: Gamay occupies 44 percent of Bugey's vineyard area but Poulsard a mere 2.5 percent. At Domaine de la Dentelle, Marcel Perinet, as already mentioned, is a fan of Poulsard and plans to plant more. Alexis Bolliet at Domaine Alexis Bolliet says he loves Poulsard, even though it is difficult to grow; the grapes are very fragile, prone to falling off in strong winds and easily sunburned. Bolliet is a rare producer that makes a Cerdon wine solely from Poulsard, drawn from his 50- to 60-year-old vines.

Others are less bullish about the variety. Jean-Luc Guillon, one of the partners at Cellier Lingot-Martin, pulls no punches. Rather than embrace the variety's fickleness in the vineyard, he declares, “We are not friends with this Poulsard.” He wishes they could make a Cerdon blend of Gamay, Pinot Noir, and Mondeuse.

Cerdon is by far the main sparkling wine from Bugey in terms of volume, but others are made by the traditional method, which seems to have been adopted in Bugey after World War I. When vigneron from Bugey fought in the French armies in the Champagne region, they learned what was then universally known as the Champagne method. Troops were often billeted in the chalk tunnels under Reims and Epernay where wines were stored and riddling took place. Clearly these Bugistes tasted some of the product, liked it, and brought their knowledge of the Champagne method home when they were demobilized. The earliest examples of sparkling wine in the region seem to date from the 1920s, and the method and style became quite well entrenched in Bugey during the following decade.

One substantial producer is Domaine Roux & Fils, located in St-Champ-Chatonod, only a few miles from Belley. The huddle of stone houses looks as if it has not been touched for centuries, and it's a surprise to find, after early morning coffee and pastries with two generations of the Roux family in one of those houses, that the wine-production facility is expansive and modern. François Roux represents the third generation to make wine, and the Roux family now cultivates 13ha (32 acres) organically, more than half Chardonnay and the rest mostly Pinot Noir, Altesse, and Gamay.

Included is a 100-year-old block, interplanted with grape varieties such as Aligoté and Jacquère, that was planted by his grandfather, who served in Champagne during World War I and made his first traditional-method sparkling wine in the 1930s; one of the Roux's current sparkling rosés, made from Gamay, is called Depuis 1934 ("Since 1934"). About four fifths of production at Roux & Fils is now Bugey brut sparkling wine. François Roux ages the base wines in 600-liter oak barrels to give a little extra complexity, and he keeps the wine on lees for 24 months. Total production each year is 40,000–50,000 bottles.

Domaine Trichon is another big producer of Bugey brut, which accounts for 60 percent of their 70,000-bottle annual production. Stéphane and Claire Trichon favor Chardonnay for their sparkling wines, but they also have Gamay and some Pinot Noir and Mondeuse in their organic-certified vineyards. Sparkling wines stay between 24 and 36 months on lees. The Trichons built a gravity-fed production facility in 2000, and the roomy cellars hold a reserve of 150,000 bottles. The bulk of Trichon wines are sold directly from the cellar and a little is marketed elsewhere in France, with small exports to Russia, Japan, northern Europe, and the US.

Sparkling wines are the bulk of Bugey's production, but one third of the wines are still, with whites dominating reds two to one. Chardonnay must contribute at least 50 percent of AOC Bugey white wines, with Altesse, Aligoté, and Jacquère the main blending varieties. Red wines can be made from Gamay, Pinot Noir, and Mondeuse, and no blending is permitted. For rosé wines, the main grapes are Gamay and Pinot Noir.

If these wines have a common feature, it is that they have bright acidity. Grapes for sparkling wines are typically picked earlier to capture acidity, but for still wines they are harvested at maturity. Growing at altitudes between 650ft and 1,800ft (200–550m), the vines in Bugey benefit from cool nights even in the warm growing season, and they develop good natural acidity.

The alcohol levels of the still wines tend to be lower than in many modern wines, and most lie in the 12–13% range.

Although these wines are not made for long-term cellaring, they need not be drunk young. A Domaine des Plantaz Sur Plantaz barrel-fermented Roussette du Bugey 2012 presents a slightly darker color than the 2018 and has a lively texture and complexity, with a hint of truffles. Vigneron Patrice Gros calls Roussette an "amazing variety" to work with, even if it is quite sensitive to temperature fluctuations and has a habit of overproducing if not trained carefully. His Mondeuse du Bugey 2012 has really settled in, with fully integrated tannins and a smooth, silky texture. Wines as old as 2009 (the first year of the AOC) were tasted for this article, and almost all had aged well.

Onward, upward, and outward

What is the future of Bugey wines? It is unlikely that production of AOC Bugey wines will increase measurably over the short and medium terms, which means that the supply for export will remain limited, as much as some producers would like to export more. Rather than expand vineyard area, there is more interest in consolidating strengths and improving quality. A key strength, of course, is Cerdon. Even though ancestral-method sparkling wines are now being made in many places, it is probably easier to sell Cerdon than Bugey brut wines in a world awash with traditional-method sparkling wines. The sparkling wines of Cerdon are Bugey's calling card, and although there is good demand for the sweeter styles, we can expect to see more made in dry styles to broaden the potential market.

It is a promising sign that Bugey's wine community is attracting newcomers. In the early 2000s, when she was in her 30s, Véronique Antoine gave up her job in Belfort and settled in the small community of Rignat to make wine, especially Cerdon. In 2018, Florie Brunet and her partner Adrien Bariol moved to Gros-lée-St-Benoît in the Montagnieu region, leased a winery and some vineyards, and founded Domaine d'Ici Là. Starting with 1ha (2.5 acres), they now lease 5.5ha (14 acres) across 15 parcels where they grow Altesse, Chardonnay, Mondeuse, and Gamay. They make both sparkling and still wines, including Les Oubliés, an orange wine made from Altesse, and wines vinified in terra cotta amphorae. Another newcomer is Nadège Allouch, born in London, educated in France, who worked in New Zealand, Australia, Chile, and several French appellations before coming to Bugey, also in 2018. She now makes wine at Domaine de la Ferme de Jeanne in the tiny commune of Flaxieu and oversees the transition to biodynamic certification.

Bugey also has the potential to develop wine and food tourism. It has a lively food culture, with regional specialties that include cheeses, *escargots*, sausages, truffles, and the famed *poulet de Bresse*. There is an annual truffle fair (which includes a blessing of the truffles), and some wineries host *portes ouvertes* that feature Bugey's wines and artisanal foods. Moreover, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, the celebrated author of *The Physiology of Taste*, was born in Belley in 1755, and the house where he was born is open for visits.

Bugey will always be one of France's less-known wine appellations, not least because it will never produce enough wine to establish a high profile in the world of wine. But its wines are distinctive enough and high enough in quality that it should no longer be a gap in the knowledge of anyone who is serious about wine. ■

Opposite: Marcel Perinet, Domaine de la Dentelle; Sylvain Bois; Stéphane and Claire Trichon; Thierry and Céline Tissot; Clément Metge, Le Caveau Bugiste; Maison Bonnard.



All photography courtesy of the producers