

BROUILLY AND CÔTE-DE-BROUILLY, BEAUJOLAIS' FRATERNAL TWINS

BY CAMILLE BERNARD
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Twins and yet different in so many ways, the Brouilly and Côte-de-Brouilly appellations fully illustrate the breadth and depth of the Beaujolais Crus proposition. Their location and their name make them neighbours, and yet they offer unique defining features that translate the subtlety of their respective vineyard sites and can be identified with every sip.

CHÂTEAU DU BLUIZARD



BEAUJOLAIS APPELLATIONS



THE VINEYARDS AT DOMAINE DU PÈRE BENOIT

Beaujolais, the land of Gamay, is home to some real treasures, particularly its lovely growths or 'crus' with their distinctive personas. This vinous treasure trove features the Brouilly and Côte-de-Brouilly appellations, which form the most southerly growths.

Covering a sweeping 1,200 hectares, Brouilly is also the most extensive. At its heart nestles Côte-de-Brouilly, sitting like a mounted gemstone over its smaller 310 hectares. The two areas are so close, but their differing vineyard sites reveal very different characters.

Perched across the slopes of Mount Brouilly, Côte-de-Brouilly is famous for its blue stones which lend the wines specific minerality, and an almost ethereal touch. By contrast, Brouilly, which rings the mountain, offers pink granite-dominant soils which impart texture, depth and roundness to the wines, making them irresistibly moreish.

So where Brouilly's attraction lies in its finesse and fruit, Côte-de-Brouilly generally delivers more complex, structured wines combining a crisp mouthfeel with more tightly-wound tannins.

This duality, which stems from unique soils, is also mirrored in the appellations' respective markets. Whilst Brouilly tends to draw an audience looking for a gentle introduction to the world of Beaujolais, and has long featured on wine lists in many Parisian restaurants, Côte-de-Brouilly is a more boutique offering, mainly attracting imbibers looking for more racy, structured wines.

We head off to discover these two Beaujolais neighbours which, far from being rivals, are actually harmoniously complementary.



LA MAISON COQUARD AND ITS OWNER CHRISTOPHE COQUARD



CHRISTOPHE COQUARD, OWNER OF MAISON COQUARD

MAISON COQUARD: “CRUS THAT ARE SIMILAR AND YET SO DIFFERENT”

With a long-standing tradition of winegrowing, Maison Coquard boasts a unique heritage perpetuated by generations of passionate winegrowers. In 2005, a decisive turning point in its history occurred when Christophe Coquard returned to embrace his vocation as an artisan winegrower. He strove to steer the vineyards away from their bulk-only trading activity, successfully securing a place for Maison Coquard among Beaujolais’ must-try wineries which produces all 12 appellations and 10 Crus.

“The Beaujolais wine market is thriving”, he explains. “Especially because with climate change the wines offer an enhanced flavour experience. Even though the region only represents a diminutive 3% of France’s area under vine, the wines are enjoying dynamic sales that are offering promise”.

Brouilly and Côte-de-Brouilly “Crus are similar yet different”, stresses Coquard. They are similar because “both appellations share unique granite soils which lend their wines hallmark minerality”, but different because “Brouilly is soft and fruity and has always featured on wine lists in Parisian restaurants whereas Côte-de-Brouilly appeals to a clientele that is already familiar with Brouilly and wants to discover something else”.

Whilst pointing out that “the extensive footprint of Brouilly provides the appellation with noteworthy presence in the marketplace”, he stresses that “Côte-de-Brouilly enjoys a similar reputation, mainly due to the attraction of Mount Brouilly which acts as a beacon for tourists among the Beaujolais growths”.

“So, Brouilly is widely accessible, but Côte-de-Brouilly has found its niche in wine merchants’ and export markets, making a name for itself in markets such as Ireland, Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom”.

CHÂTEAU DU BLUIZARD: “TWO COMPLEMENTARY CRUS”

“Château du Bluizard is a very old estate that dates back to the Middle Ages”, explains its owner David Ratignier.

After studying in Montpellier, Beaujolais-born Ratignier returned to the region and spent 15 years distributing agricultural products. Call it coincidence or maybe fate, “the company was based in the same village as Château du Bluizard and its owner was a client of mine”. Ratignier was already interested in taking over the estate, if the opportunity arose, and he seized that opportunity in 2008. Overnight, he found himself at the helm of a 30-hectare vineyard.

The task may have deterred some, but as a young winegrower, Ratignier saw in it an opportunity to learn and innovate. He gradually developed a group of young winegrowers, one of whom would become his business partner.

Over the years, he gradually honed his technical skills and produced wines that encapsulate the uniqueness of the Brouilly and Côte-de-Brouilly vineyard sites. “Brouilly’s granite soils yield silky wines, whereas the more clayey soils of our Côte-de-Brouilly, located on the valley floor, produce velvety, rich and tannic wines”.

Ratignier certainly does not view the two Crus as rivals but rather as complementary growths.

“Côte-de-Brouilly has the advantage of offering wines that are structured but not at all drying on the palate, whereas Brouilly produces very fruity and more accessible wines”.

In terms of respective markets for the twin growths, Ratignier comments that “Brouilly is highly prized in Paris and export markets, particularly Canada, whereas Côte-de-Brouilly sells well direct-to-consumers and is gaining ground

BEAUJOLAIS APPELLATIONS

DAVID RATIGNIER, THE WINEGROWER AT CHÂTEAU DU BLUIZARD



THE BARREL CELLAR AT CHÂTEAU DU BLUIZARD



BEAUJOLAIS
APPELLATIONS

FIFTH-GENERATION NICOLAS MUTIN JOINED THE FAMILY ESTATE IN 2014



PASCAL AND LAURENCE MUTIN



in multiple retail". These are markets where the winegrower has his finger on the pulse, producing wines that can be drunk when young for multiple retail outlets whilst also extending maturation for other pours that he sells to his private customers.

**DOMAINE DU PÈRE BENOIT:
"BROUILLY AND CÔTE-DE-
BROUILLY ARE INCREASINGLY
ATTRACTING INTEREST"**

Domaine du Père Benoit has a long-standing family history. Fourth-generation incumbent Pascal Mutin is the proud standard-bearer of this tradition. "The name Père Benoit echoes our surname", he explains.

In 1991, he and his wife Laurence took over the reins of what at the time was a 12.5-hectare vineyard, and extended it to 17 hectares. Joined by their son Nicolas in 2014, their ethos is based on treating the land with respect and they adapt their vineyard management techniques to suit each block. "For young vines, we choose tillage, whereas for our century-old vines, our approach is different", explains Pascal Mutin. This attention to detail is mirrored in the winery's HVE certification, where the environment is given priority treatment.

Brouilly and Côte-de-Brouilly (Ed. 40% of the winery's production) are increasingly attracting interest. "Our winemaking methods have changed. We have perfected our techniques and this is noticeable in the quality of our wines", explains Mutin. Although most of the winery's output is bought in France, particularly by Parisian customers, the past two years have seen increased international popularity.

But the winery's owner is particularly keen to highlight the defining features of the two appellations: "Because it is more extensive, there is greater geological diversity in Brouilly than in Côte-de-Brouilly. In the glass, Brouilly wines are fruity and light, whereas Côte-de-Brouilly is more robust and powerful, reflecting more concentrated soils".



THE VINEYARDS AT MAISON COQUARD



PIERRE-MARIE CHERMETTE SURROUNDED BY HIS SON JEAN-ETIENNE AND HIS WIFE MARTINE



DOMAINE DE BALUCE IS LOCATED ON A SOUTH-FACING HILLSIDE IN BEAUJOLAIS



PIERRE-MARIE CHERMETTE AND GUY LASSAUSAIE, THE MICHELIN-STARRED CHEF OF THE NAMESAKE RESTAURANT WHO IS A CUSTOMER OF DOMAINES CHERMETTE



DOMAINES CHERMETTE

DOMAINES CHERMETTE: “BROUILLY IS ONE OF BEAUJOLAIS’ MOST ICONIC GROWTHS”

Domaines Chermette has a legacy of winegrowing that dates back a century and it reflects the history of a family with strong ties to the vineyards of Beaujolais. Genealogical research has shown that the Chermette family moved to the region in the 17th century, settling in Vissoux, a locality whose name actually stems from the surname of Pierre-Marie Chermette’s ancestors. As the owner of the family-run winery, he describes its history with undeniable passion: “In the past, mixed farming took pride of place, but for the last three decades, the farm has specialised in winegrowing. Our estate now covers around 30 hectares certified HVE3”.

The vineyards, which produce 4 of the 10 Beaujolais Crus, calls for manual care, shunning all types of mechanisation, which underscores the family’s unwavering commitment to its outstanding vineyard sites.

But of the 4 Crus that start life at Domaines Chermette, the winery’s owner claims that “Brouilly is one of Beaujolais’s most iconic growths”.

What makes the family’s wine bearing the prestigious appellation unique is that “it comes from a vineyard block located at the foot of Mount Brouilly, where the soils are formed of granite scree of Carboniferous origin that are more akin to the soils in Côte-de-Brouilly”. In fact, this unique geological feature has lent its name to the block – stony – “which has sentimental value to us because it is where my wife’s paternal grandmother was born”.

But in addition to the vineyard sites, the magic occurs in the glass: “Although our wines are similar in style to Côte-de-Brouilly, they offer the kind of lightness and softness that is typical of our southern location”. The wines are carefully vinted with semi-carbonic maceration chosen for the Gamay, as per true Beaujolais tradition, with delicate maturation in large old casks.

This precision craftsmanship secures a place for the wines in restaurants, both in France and Quebec, where their popularity has not waned since the 1990s.



JEAN-YVES SONNERY, THE OWNER OF DOMAINE DE BALUCE



THE BARREL CELLAR AT DOMAINE DE BALUCE

DOMAINE DE BALUCE: BROUILLY VERSUS CÔTE-DE-BROUILLY, IN SEARCH OF BALANCE

Nestled in the heart of the Pierres Dorées area of Beaujolais, on vineyard sites shaped by schist and volcanic rocks, Domaine de Baluce is a story of love, for vineyards and between one couple.

Jean-Yves Sonnery and his wife Laurence launched their wine venture in 1999, naming their winery after the combination of their children’s first names, Baptiste and Lucie.

“In the beginning, our vineyards covered no more than 2.5 hectares and were leased. Now, we have 15 hectares, 11 of which we own ourselves”, explains Sonnery. From its humble beginnings, ranging from cows and cereal crops to grapes sent to the co-operative, the property has now become a full-fledged winery that focuses on quality and has a close bond with its customers.

Since 2019, Domaine de Baluce has sold half of its wines direct-to-consumers and values the direct rapport it has established with private customers, wine merchants and restaurateurs.

The artisan approach is tangible at every stage of production. “We do everything by hand, from training the vines to harvesting”, stresses Sonnery.

The unique location of their vineyard blocks in AOC Brouilly, bordering those of Côte-de-Brouilly, lends the wines distinctive structure. In fact, Sonnery makes no secret of his ambition of extending into the neighbouring growth, such is his love of its qualities.

For now though, with the invaluable help of his staff – Maurice and Adeline – and his partner, he is aiming to “produce the finest possible wines whose character reflects the authenticity of the terroir they stem from”.

Echoing his belief in the fact that Brouilly deserves patience and attention, Sonnery shuns techniques widely used by some growers in Beaujolais: “We believe in age-worthy wines. Brouilly needs time”. Although he has yet to produce any Côte-de-Brouilly, he shows deference to a growth that he considers to be of higher quality. In fact, he admits that he makes his Brouilly by drawing on winemaking techniques used in the neighbouring growth.

BEAUJOLAIS APPELLATIONS

MAISON JEAN LORON: “COMPARING APPLES AND ORANGES”

Maison Jean Loron is an undisputed figurehead South of Burgundy. “Its origins date back to 1711”, points out managing director Philippe Bardet. The company boasts 220 hectares of vines in Beaujolais and the Mâcon region, where it has a firm rooting in its winegrowing traditions. It has a foothold in many growths, mainly Brouilly, “an historic Beaujolais growth”.

At the core of this history, Château de la Terrière and Château de la Pierre (owned by Maison Jean Loron), produce three different Brouilly labels that illustrate the unique soil types within their respective sites. “Château de la Terrière has pink granite soils combining sand and stones with pockets of clay deep down. Conversely, Château de la Pierre has distinctive blue stones, more typical of Côte-de-Brouilly”.

But what really sets Brouilly wines by Maison Jean Loron apart is their ripeness. “We wait until the Gamay is properly ripe to ensure they reach their full phenolic ripeness. This produces fleshy wines with rounded tannins recalling the structure of Côte-de-Brouilly wines”.

FRÉDÉRIC MAIGNET, THE WINEMAKER AT MAISON JEAN LORON
AND PHILIPPE BARDET, ITS MANAGING DIRECTOR



CHÂTEAU DE LA PIERRE, OWNED BY MAISON JEAN LORON

The present-day Maison Jean Loron is proud of its Brouilly range which has enjoyed resounding success in France and in export markets alike. Nationwide, a significant chunk of production is marketed in the on-trade and the wines are a noticeable feature in wine merchants.

Philippe Bardet is fully aware of the fact that if Maison Jean Loron produced Côte-de-Brouilly, it could not supply the same volumes: “The large number of companies in Côte-de-Brouilly means that the range of wines is equivalent to that produced in Brouilly”. He adds, “It’s like comparing apples and oranges because ultimately both growths offer wines with differing qualities”.

NO REAL RIVALRY

Exploring the Brouilly and Côte-de-Brouilly Crus demonstrates that there is no simplistic opposition between the two appellations such is their extensive range of flavours, histories and techniques, all of which add layers to the Beaujolais wine region. Their differences offer opportunities for wine enthusiasts to discover and rediscover the two growths from a different perspective. Their complementary vineyard sites, passionate winegrowers and constant changes in winemaking methods are all illustrations of the vitality and richness of these vineyard-clad lands. Brouilly and Côte-de-Brouilly do not share the same name or identity but what they do share is a quest for excellence. One thing’s for sure – neither could replace the other. Each one lends its own unique tone to the extensive orchestra that is Beaujolais.