

Fine Burgundy wine hidden in plain sight

Domaine de la Folie may embody ‘the essence of Burgundy’, but like many of its Côte Chalonnaise companions, it has somewhat fallen under the radar in the region – Simon Field MW explains why the wine estate is now having its deserved time in the sun. 30 JUNE 2022



Where should we go to find top-quality Burgundy? The Côte D’Or, of course. For good-value white Burgundy, most would say the Mâconnais. However, when it comes to good-value reds, many may scratch their heads and mutter something about Bourgogne Rouge. No one seems to mention the Côte Chalonnaise, which is odd given its pivotal geographical location – sandwiched between the Côte de Beaune and the Mâconnais – its impeccable terroir credentials (limestone, and a bit more limestone), and the quality of many of its better wines. So why the lack of recognition?

Domaine de la Folie is one of the most northerly estates in the appellation, so much so that it is located only five kilometres south of the village of Chassagne. I ask the fifth-generation scion, Clémence Dubrulle, why the Chalonnaise falls somewhat under the radar for wine lovers. She shrugs and alludes to a lack of self belief: ‘We have never had any Grand Crus or large influential estates like Clos de Vougeot here,’ she says, ‘And the négociants are all based closer to Dijon’.



Baptiste and Clémence Dubrulle, who took on the Domaine de la Folie estate in 2010 (photo by Roy Cloud)

The politician might add that, because Chalonaise is in *Sône-et-Loire*, a different *département* to Côte d'Or, there has been a long-standing rivalry between the two, which has not favoured the former enclave so well. The anthropologist may also mention that this sub-region, despite its near-ubiquitous tapestry of vines, has historically been industrial by nature, with the large town of Chagny at its centre. When its wool, coal and metal industries fell into decline, so it too came to pass for the vineyards. And yet, it is supremely well placed, in both senses: Chalon is the closest thing the Burgundians have to a port (one must remember that the *Sône* does not actually thread its way through the Côte D'Or, veering further to the east) and has long served as the departure point for the great wines of the region.

So it seems the winemakers of the Chalonaise have been somewhat hiding in plain sight, then, which is a shame given how close the appellation comes to the template of what everyone expects, romantically or otherwise, from great Burgundy. Its contribution of 10 million bottles may only make up five per cent of the total in Burgundy, but the production is focused on small *domaines* rather than co-ops or similar. Domaine de la Folie in the village of Rully certainly fits this image. Dubrulle, who took on the estate with her husband Baptiste in 2010 – and whose great-great-grandfather first brought the estate to life – describes its contiguous 12 hectares (60 per cent made up of white grapes,

predominantly Chardonnay) as ‘an ancestral gem’ and ‘the essence of Burgundy’. She poetically rehearses the ‘contours of diversity’ which segregate her *village* sites from her two Premier Cru vineyards (both planted with white grapes).



It’s fascinating to hear her discussing the work in the vines; she describes ‘moral limits’ in cleaving to the formal rigours imposed by organic accreditation, some of which seem nonsensical. For example, the adherence to the use of copper sulphate, or to treatments which involve the use of so much Co2 that they actually increase the overall carbon footprint. The philosophy of ‘*lutte raisonnée*’ (an approach to viticulture which grapples

with combatting the vicissitudes of nature without having to adhere to a specific regime) is key, then. Over the last few years, modifications in the architecture of pruning, the cultivation of cover crops and the timing of the spray treatments have all been enacted to combat those increasingly present Burgundian threats of frost and mildew. ‘Work in the vineyard is, and always has been, the most important thing’, says Dubrulle.

Of those Premier Cru plots, Clos du Chaigne has a soil dominated by red clay whereas in Clos Saint-Jacques, there is virtually no topsoil on a photogenic limestone terrace: the wines, she maintains, are always easy to tell apart. Clos du Chaigne wines are rich and generous, while those from Clos Saint-Jacques, with its fifty-year-old vines, are more considered, linear and taut. Both sites enjoy an east-facing aspect and an



altitude of over 300 metres, vertiginous in these parts, and increasingly relevant as the world gets warmer. Both are modestly oaked (none of it new, and never more than 25 per cent in total) and, unsurprisingly, maintain a disciplined freshness beyond the pleasing soft fruit and chalk nuances.



People are starting to 'open their eyes' to estates in Côte Chalonnaise, says Dubrulle

Perhaps the fact that the Côte Chalonnaise produces both red and white wines of merit has been another factor in its lack of fame, with drinkers struggling to grasp the sub-region's true identity. Forty per cent of the AOC's production is of red wine – with the villages of Rully and Givry key. At Domaine de la Folie, these percentages are present, too. This subtlety is exactly what one expects in the Côte D'Or – what a joy to find it here, too.

The resulting reds – Clos de Bellecroix and Cuvée Marey – are both destemmed, with the latter enjoying 20 per cent of new oak. The nuance of aspect is all that separates the two wines (both essentially from the same vineyard, but the Bellecroix angled a little more to the north) and yet, again, the differences are appreciable above and beyond the modest oak ageing for the senior wine. This subtlety is exactly what one expects in the Côte D'Or; what a joy to find it here, too.

So are the estates of the Chalonnaise about to have their time in the sun? 'People are starting to open their eyes,' says Dubrulle. 'The wines of the Chalonnaise have great terroir, a great "*rapport qualité-prix*" [value for money] and some very impressive and influential family *domaines*.' She mentions that Aubert de Villaine from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, no less, has now settled here. But, of course, Dubrulle is far too modest to include her own name in this list of influencers. Allow me to do that for her, then.