



The Château de Chambolle is not particularly impressive. It's not really a château at all but a comfortable manor house near the woods at the far end of the village. And yet, from this building, some of the most compelling wines of the Côte d'Or are produced—reinforcing, if further proof is necessary, that the pinor noir grape finds its zenith in this humble little village.

The château is owned by the Mugnier family and Frédéric and his wife, Jocelyne, are the current tenants. To the right of the 19th-century manor is a new hangar, which houses Mugnier's cellar; its functional look recalls his career as an engineer constructing oil platforms before he returned to take over the family domain in 1985. His family's estate includes enviable parcels of Amoureuses and Musigny (second only in size to those of Comte Georges de Vogüé). His wines, with their characteristic minerality and purity, have helped to make Chambolle one of the best-loved villages in the Côte d'Or.

Frédéric Mugnier is a careful man. Tall, distinguished and balding, he seems about to embark upon a history or philosophy lecture rather than a wine tasting. He and Jocelyne have patiently developed the estate over the last 20 years, first working with the vines, making small adjustments to the calendar of vineyard work, keeping yields consistent and low. They gradually upgraded equipment, used better hygiene in the cellar and introduced a percentage of new oak. It took about a decade for the results to show in the wines.

Even today, in the cellar, there are few clues



as to what makes Mugnier's wines so compelling. His winemaking process is simple—he likes short macerations, not more than three weeks, at warm temperatures in 65-hectoliter oak vats. He ages his wines for 18 months using no more than 25 percent new oak, with long lees contact and very few rackings. "I'm wary of enology," he says, when pressed for more details, explaining that his goal is to preserve the inherent quality of the grapes and not fiddle with them too much. He believes, for example, that the principle character of Les Amoureuses is its delicacy, and that his role is to orient the wine toward intensity and persistence. The result feels balanced between light-

ness and depth. "Light and fluid are now pejorative terms," he says. "They are not fashionable at the moment. The wine world has been looking for power recently when it should be looking for finesse." For those who love Chambolle for its delicacy, it is easy to see why Frédéric Mugnier has become the quintessential producer. His wines beautifully showcase the differences of the Chambolle crus.

Mugnier owns one of the best parcels in Fuées, the 9.8-acre premier cru sandwiched between Les Cras and Bonnes-Mares to the north of the village. As we taste his 2005, still fizzing its way through its second fermentation this past June, he comments on the wine's

consistency and its forward beauty. This vintage has a lovely soft perfume with great sweetness in the finish. The 2004 Fuées had the same gorgeous damson flavor with a fresh, fruity ripeness and lots of charm.

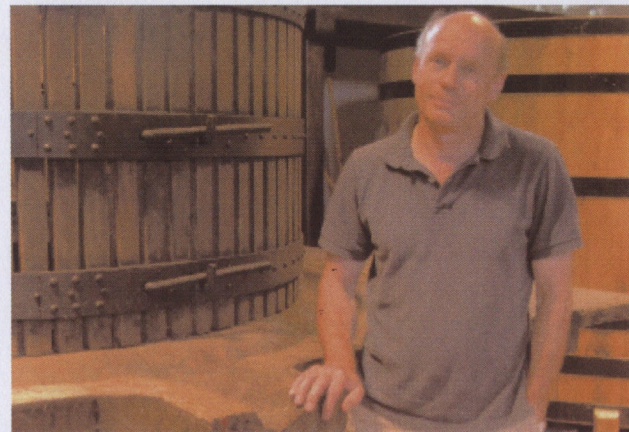
Like many Chambolle producers, Mugnier is pleased with the 2005 harvest—"There is something perfect about it but also something bothersome—perfection almost doesn't have much character—it needs aging to give it more character." It's likely that the 2005 Mugnier Chambolles will cause a sensation when they are released. But for Mugnier, 2004 is more intriguing; he finds the essence of Chambolle in the best wines.

Mugnier believes that the 2004 vintage did not allow for errors, as it was riddled with traps such as risk of rot, disease and the temptation of excessively high yields. Where successful, these wines are complete and vibrant, as Mugnier's Les Amoureuses demonstrates. It has both lush sweetness and finesse; there is a cherry stone flavor and aromas of peonies and roses. While the graceful structure seems to

reflect its pretty name, Mugnier eschews any romantic references saying that as is often the case in Burgundy, the vineyard name comes from the soil. In Touraine, he says, a soil is regarded as being *amoureux* ("loving") when it sticks to your boot; there tends to be more clay in the soils of Les Amoureuses than in most of the Musigny vineyard. In any case, with its sweet fruit character and lovely name, Les Amoureuses is one of the most popular of the Chambolle crus, and will cost you around \$270 a bottle—\$200 more than Les Fuées. Mugnier regards both wines with a paternal air: "What I really want to do is respect the terroirs—I don't mind which wine you prefer but don't mix them up—don't try to make a Fuées into an Amoureuses."

Leaving price aside, if you can afford to drink Musigny, this magnificent grand cru will give you an inkling of the genius of pinot noir. Mugnier's 2004 has great length and reverberation. The fruit is more concentrated, more intense, but somehow the wine still seems quite understated, a vein of mineral concentration just

beginning to show through the deep layers of fruit. As Mugnier puts it, "These are wines that we feel good about and that make us feel good."



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