



Chablis Premier Cru Butteaux



A morning's work tasting 10 fantastic wines.

Chablis Adds Class to the Dinner Table

AFTER THE LUNCHEON AND WINES at Drouin-Laroze, we had a brief walking tour of Dijon and then motored north to Chablis and checked into the Hostellerie des Clos for our three nights. We dined all three nights in the main dining room of the hotel. The food was excellent, and we focused most of our attention on matching fish and seafood with what is surely one of the best Chablis winelists anywhere. Almost all producers of Chablis were represented. We did in-depth tastings of the two greatest producers, Vincent Dauvissat and François Raveneau. While quite expensive relative to others, it provided a rare opportunity to taste so many vintages and appellations of both.

Each night we started with examples of younger Premier Crus of each producer and ended with Grand Crus of each. Except for one corked bottle of Dauvissat's Les Clos, all were excellent to exceptional. Most of the Premier Crus were from the 2013 and 2014 vintages while the Grand Crus were from 2009 and 2010 or within the generally suggested time window of drinkability. Although

we drank high-quality red burgundies with one meat course, the focus on Chablis, especially the Premier Crus with crustaceans and Grand Crus with fish and or fowl with rich sauces was quite memorable. Although the Dauvissat wines were great, all of us preferred Raveneau's offerings. Due to the extreme prices of these two wines and particularly Raveneau, this was a very rare opportunity to experience.

The next morning will long be remembered. We visited Maison Regnard founded in 1860 for quite an "out of this world" experience. We each were served 10 different Chablis ranging from one Petit Chablis, two Chablis, four Premier Crus, and three Grand Crus. The Petit Chablis 2017 was a very quaffable wine while the Chablis showed more minerality. The Premier Crus (Fourchaume, Montée de Tonnerre, Vaillons, and Mont de Milieu) were all from 2014 and showed great balance and Chablis typicity from one of the best vintages ever. We finished with Les Clos (2015), Grenouilles (2014), and Valmur (2010). All were exceptional and reinforced why Chablis is one of

my favorite wines in the world. Bravo Regnard for this informative experience.

After this tasting we had a very nice lunch at Le Bistro des Grands Crus. We had amouse bouches with two Chablis, smoked salmon tartare, tomatoes with vinegar with three Premier Cru Chablis, and Chablisienne Ham Bone with four Grand Cru Chablis, all from different producers. We finished with pears in syrup, cassis, and vanilla ice cream (no wine).

We boarded the bus and headed to a new find for me. Chateau Bérú is located a few kilometers out of town and is a magical place. Owned by the Bérú family for 400 years, Madame Laurence (owner) and daughter Athénaïs (winemaker) since 2004 make a formidable team. The Chateau de Bérú is from the XIIIth Century and is very impressive. Guests rooms of this 5-star bed and breakfast are very charming. Laurence led us on an extensive tour of the chateau which is replete with period furniture and great paintings.

We finished the tour with appetizers and the 2016 Clos du Bérú which was outstanding and comparable to the Grand Cru Chablis from many other producers. Due to the low production of recent vintages, we were not able to compare vintages as the 2016 was the only one available.

One of my favorite Chablis producers is William Fevre. Since being purchased in 2002 by



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Jim Bryant with Madame Laurence, owner, and daughter Athénais, winemaker of Chateau de Béru.

Henriot, this domaine has soared in quality. In my opinion, this producer is in the top five and maybe even higher. Of particular note are Grand Crus Valmur, Vaudesir, and Les Clos. Unfortunately, we were not able to visit this winery and we were too late for our visit to La Chablisienne one of the two greatest wine cooperatives in the world. The wines from here are among the greatest values of any in Chablis.

Our last lunch was the gastronomic and vinous highlight of our Chablis adventure. We ate at Au Fin du Zinc in the town center and had an unforgettable experience. We started with two appetizers—scallops and shrimp. The accompanying wines were domaine Christian Moreau, Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos, Clos des Hospices 2016, and Francois Raveneau's Chablis Grand Crus Valmur 2013, and Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos 2011. All three of these wines were close to perfect and so very rare.

The transition wine to red was one of the three greatest white wines I've ever had. The owner said it was the last known existing bottle on earth of the François Raveneau, Chablis—Premier Cru Butteaux 1986. It was magical and devine. Words do not do justice. It was rich beyond belief and cast a spell over the audience. The main course, loin of venison, was extraordinary and the premier cru and village wines from Jacques Frederic Mugnier were well-matched also.

Our last winery visit was to Domaine des Malandes. Some of us had met the owner, Lynn Marchive, in Chicago at the Blackbird restaurant for dinner in 2015. Lynn has since retired and her daughter, Amandine, is now in charge of sales, marketing, and communications. Her son, Richard, became the managing director. We had an excellent tasting of several Premier Cru and Grand Cru Chablis. This was a nice finale to a short, but memorable visit to one of my favorite wine regions. A vôtre santé! 🍷

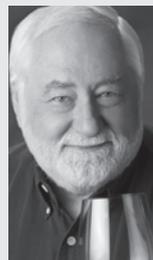


PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.