

ROBERSON WINE FINE WINE TASTINGS

THE WINES OF DOMAINE ROUSSEAU

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ROUSSEAU THE DOMAINE

Rows of barrels in Domaine Rousseau's classic Burgundian wine cellar

Rousseau's iconic line up of labels

When a wine enthusiast begins the long descent into Burgophilia, there are a few domaine names that get the pulse racing and some labels that induce mild hysteria. Rousseau ticks both boxes in a big way - Gevrey's finest domaine is one of the region's most exalted addresses and the labels of their top cuvées are as unique as the wines are beautiful.

The Rousseaus have been involved in the wine business for many years, although it wasn't always in a winemaking capacity. Armand Rousseau was a wine broker, arranging deals between the vigneronns of Gevrey (where he lived) and the negociants from Beaune and Nuits-St-Georges. It was thanks to this unique position that Armand was the first to hear when parcels of prime land were available for sale, so he began the process of building up a domaine in Gevrey-Chambertin which would stand at 6.5ha when he died in a car accident in 1959. By that time, Domaine Rousseau had a well established reputation that came not only from the quality of their wines but also from Armand's decision to be at the forefront of the 'domaine bottling' movement that began in the 30s. Bottling your own wines is all well and good (and revolutionary as it turned out), but selling them is a different matter. Armand was fortunate that he had befriended a chap called Raymond Baudoin, the editor of *Revue des Vins de France* and a consultant to many of France's best restaurants. As Raymond was an admirer of Armand's wines, it wasn't long before Domaine Rousseau was featured on many of France's top wine lists and following an introduction to the influential American importer Frank Schoonmaker, Rousseau was soon being shipped across the Atlantic.

Not long before Armand's tragic passing in '59, he had snapped up a parcel of the prized 1er Cru 'Clos St Jacques' to add to an already stellar lineup of vineyards. The roster was further enlarged by his son Charles throughout the 60s, 70s and 80s, with the addition of numerous parcels of Grand Cru land in Gevrey and some Clos de la Roche in Morey St Denis. Charles Rousseau had begun working alongside his father in 1946 and became one of the most popular men in Burgundy. Although retired, he still spends a lot of time at the domaine, looking on as his son Eric continues the steady improvement of the domaine while remaining true to its traditional ethos. Eric has always placed a great deal of stock on the viticultural side of winemaking and the most significant changes that he has brought in are in the vineyard, where yields have been tightened up - usually close to 30hl/ha nowadays. The pruning regime has become much stricter, as has the selection of grapes in the vineyard, although there is still no sorting table in the winery (unlike many of the other quality focused domaines in the region). The regime is, to all intents and purposes, organic so no chemicals or insecticides are used in the vineyards (all of which are ploughed), although Eric retains the right to use treatments in certain years and therefore wont be applying for accreditation any time soon!

The winemaking remains traditional in approach and has not changed much since the transfer of responsibility from Charles to Eric. All the fruit is destemmed and given 4-5 days cold maceration in steel tanks. During the initial stages of alcoholic fermentation Eric practices pumping over to oxygenate the wine and encourage yeast development, but this shifts to pigeage (punching down the cap) towards the end of fermentation (usually after 18-20 days). Up to this point everything has been vinified in the same way, but following the removal of each cuvée from tank, they receive different élevage. The Chambertin and Clos de Bèze are matured in 100% new oak, the Clos St Jacques is usually around 80% new, but the exact amount is dependent on vintage. The other Grand and 1er Cru wines are aged in 1 year old oak, predominantly from Allier and supplied by Francois Freres.