
ROBERSON WINE PRESENTS:

40 YEARS OF
ECHEZEUX

THURSDAY OCTOBER 15th 2009

ÉCHÉZEUX

At just over 36 hectares, Échézeaux is one of Burgundy's largest Grand Cru vineyards (third in fact, after Corton and Clos Vougeot). With over eighty owners and ten different *lieu-dits* it is also one of the most variable in terms of quality, with wines ranging from sublime to downright pedestrian. From top producers in good vintages, the wines marry silky and supple tannins with a charming rusticity that flowers into earthy complexity as the wine ages.

For all intents and purposes, the wines of Échézeaux (and its next door neighbour Grands-Échézeaux) are considered as wines of the famous village of Vosne-Romanée, whereas in actual fact the vines are located in the adjacent village of Flagey-Échézeaux. In the 12th century the village of Flagey fell under the control of Thanks to many centuries of being ruled by the Abbey of St-Vivant, they have become part of Vosne's spectacular rollcall of vineyards, like the 1er cru sites that are also within Flagey's boundaries.

The first mention of Échézeaux has been dated as far back as 1287, when the vineyard was referred to as 'd'Echésau'. The name is a derivative of the Latin for 'buildings' and relates to the fact that there used to be Gallo-Roman ruins on the site. As would be expected from a *climat* that adjoins the Clos Vougeot, monks from the Abbey of Citeaux have played a significant role in the history of Échézeaux, with records showing that they first purchased vines there in 1353 when they acquired 14 *ouvrées* in exchange for 17 *ouvrées* of vines in Chambolle-Musigny and the princely sum of £3.

Over the years the monks increased their share of the vineyard, but by the time the French revolution arrived they had sold most of their holdings and therefore it was never seized and sold off to the highest bidder - a fate which befell many of Échézeaux's illustrious neighbours.

The variety of *lieu-dits* that make up the vineyard of Échézeaux are all quite different and the variety of terroir manifests itself in wines with distinct personalities. Of course, some producers are lucky enough to own more than one plot of Échézeaux vines and by blending them together the wine will become the sum of its parts rather than a reflection of a specific part of the *climat*.

In some parts the vineyard has a steep incline (of around 13°) which results in the site ranging from around 250m upslope to over 300m at its highest point. These higher slopes (to the left of the diagram) have very shallow topsoil to the extent that the rocky layer below is often visible, while the lower slopes (particularly 'Les Quartiers' the bottom of 'Les Treux' and 'Clos St Denis') have much deeper soils that are often home to more vigorous vines - a problem when the vigneron is looking for low yields.

The highest performing sections of Échézeaux are considered to be the lower parts of 'Poulailleres' and 'du Dessus' (towards the border with Grands-Échézeaux), the lower parts of 'Loachausses' and 'Les Cruots' and the upper sections of 'Les Treux' and 'Clos St Denis'.

Flight One:

2004 is a year that has come in for plenty of recent criticism (not least from Bill Nanson on his Burgundy Report website) thanks to a strange soily/crushed-beetle taste that seems to have beset some of the wines. At Roberson we have had to send some cases back to the supplier in extreme cases of '*la Coccinelle*' as it has been dubbed. For those wines that are not affected it is a classically styled vintage that while not particularly generous in the way that 2005 was, has yielded some elegant wines that will age well in the medium-term.

Much more successful was 2002, which has proven (thus far) to be one of the best vintages in recent memory. The fruit achieved excellent ripeness but managed to maintain good acidity levels thanks to a cool July. The result is wines that have and will continue to age superbly, with the best examples sure to give drinking pleasure for many years to come.

Flight Two:

While the 2000 vintage didn't receive much in the way of plaudits at the time (especially following on from the excellent 1999 vintage), almost a decade later many of the Grand and 1er Cru wines are showing beautifully and providing charming drinking while we wait for their siblings from '99 to reach maturity. It was initially thought to be a better vintage for whites than reds, however while many of the Chardonnays have lost what zip and freshness they had early on, the best reds are still well defined and continuing to improve.

Flight Three:

1997 proved to be the most difficult of the vintages in the second half of the '90s, with uneven weather conditions resulting in widespread rot and disease that forced strict fruit selection and low yields (at least for Pinot Noir). The acidity levels were also very low and this has led to questions being asked about the longevity of the wines, although some of the top reds are still performing well from the domaines where only the best fruit made the cut.

Flight Four:

Vintages often suffer at the hands of comparison with neighbouring years, and after the benchmarks set by '78 it was always going to be difficult for 1979 to improve on the previous harvest. In actual fact it was a solid enough year that was initially considered to be stronger in white than red, but after some bottle age many of the best Pinots have proven to be a moderate success.

Hail damage in Vosne during July reduced the size of the yields in Échézeaux and the best producers released wines that, while of admirable concentration, have peaked long before their predecessors from '78.

While the Bordelais were shaking their fists at mother nature for her malevolence, the Burgundians were more than happy with the 1969 vintage. It has proved to be a highly successful vintage, with the very best examples only reaching full maturing in the last decade.

An excellent harvest for both colours, the early part of the year was nothing special but prolonged good weather from late June meant a late harvest of fruit that was ripe but maintained excellent acidity.

FLIGHT ONE

1: 2004 Échézeaux; Domaine Confuron-Cotetidot
13.5% ABV

Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
-	£54.95	n/a

Yves Confuron is not only in charge at his family domaine in Vosne-Romanée, but is also the *régisseur* at Domaine Courcel in Pommard. The young vigneron works alongside his brother Jean-Pierre (who, in turn, also works at Chanson) and crafts wines of masculine elegance that have undoubtedly improved since they took the reins from their father Jacky. Interestingly, they choose to retain all the stems during vinification (à la DRC).

The 0.45ha of Confuron Échézeaux vines are well placed in the 'Les Treux' part of the vineyard, up in the corner where Clos Vougeot adjoins Grands-Échézeaux.

2: 2002 Échézeaux; Domaine Robert Arnoux
13.5% ABV

Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
-	£125	n/a

When Robert Arnoux died in 1995 he passed the domaine on to his son-in-law Pascal Lachaux, who has gone on to establish himself as one of the rising stars of Burgundy. A decade of stellar performances on both the domaine wines and those of his negociant operation (Maison Pascal Lachaux) reflect his perfectionist philosophy - an outlook that focuses on low yields, no stems and absolutely no fining or filtration.

The domaine's Échézeaux holding totals 0.95ha of vines, all located in the 'Rouge du Bas' *lieu-dit*.

3: 2002 Échézeaux; Domaine René Engel
13.5% ABV

Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
-	£99.95	n/a

In May 2005 tragedy befell Domaine René Engel when Phillipe Engel died from a heart attack. Phillipe had turned the domaine from being very good in to one of the most respected in all of Burgundy and his untimely passing (the '05 fruit had to be sold off in bulk) was mourned by many.

Phillipe had assumed control from his father Pierre in 1981 and shifted the emphasis from selling in bulk to estate bottling. By the early 90's he had established a reputation that was fitting for a domaine that was founded by one of Burgundy's great characters. René (pictured left) was a winemaker, wine merchant and Professor of Enology at Dijon University - the story goes that he agreed to cover a few lectures following the untimely death of the resident Professor and ended up staying for the rest of his career!

The Engel plot of vines in Échézeaux is 0.55ha and located in the En Orveaux *climat*.

FLIGHT TWO

	Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
4: 2000 Échézeaux; Faiveley 13% ABV	1	£105	£94.50

Despite being known as a negociant, Maison Faiveley is actually one of the largest landholders on the Cote d'Or with holdings stretching to almost 120ha. This includes vines in 9 Grand Crus and 13 1er Crus, allowing Erwan (pictured left) and his father Francois to maintain tight control over the quality of fruit that goes into their wines.

Since 1825 Faiveley have built a reputation as one of Burgundy's most quality conscious negociants and slowly but surely they continue to expand their holdings.

The Échézeaux vines of Faiveley are in the northernmost *climat* of 'En Orveaux'.

	Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
5: 2000 Échézeaux; Domaine Francois Lamarche 13.9% ABV	-	£84.95	n/a

Domaine Lamarche has a star studded line up of Grands and 1er Cru vines and since 1992 (when 'La Grande Rue' was finally promoted) they have been the proud owners of that rare pearl - a monopole Grand Cru. Since taking over from his father in the '80s, Francois Lamarche has overseen a dramatic rise in quality at the domaine and now his daughter Nicole (pictured left) has taken a leading role in the winemaking the quality has reached new highs in the last couple of vintages.

The 1.32ha of Échézeaux vines in the Lamarche portfolio are in three different parcels - one each in the lieu-dits of 'Les Rouges du Bas', 'Les Cruots' and 'Clos St Denis'.

	Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
6: 2000 Échézeaux; Domaine Jean Grivot 13.5% ABV	1	£140	£126

Now run by Etienne Grivot (pictured left), this long established Vosne-Romanée stalwart has been estate bottling its wines since before WWII. Since they dispensed with Guy Accad's (discredited) vinification advice in the early '90s, this domaine has become one of the most respected in the Cote de Nuits and the wines continue to get better year on year.

The Grivot Échézeaux vines are in two parcels, although one was added recently and the 2000 vintage was made solely from vines in the 'Les Cruots' lieu-dit. This parcel was actually inherited from Etienne's aunt Jacqueline Jayer (cousin of Henri) and for many years he would label her wines separately to his own despite making both cuvées.

FLIGHT THREE

Henri Mayer & Emmanuel Rouget

It could be said that Henri Mayer is the quintessential Burgundy vigneron. A man of the soil, over time he developed his own philosophy that has inspired a generation of winemakers and will continue to be used as a benchmark for years to come. He single-handedly cleared the rocks and overgrown scrub that littered Cros Parentoux - a vineyard that bears his legacy more than any other and would be first in the queue were any 1er Cru sites due for reclassification.

Emmanuel Rouget is Henri's nephew and after many years of working alongside his uncle, he took over the domaine in 1996 following Henri's retirement. Henri remained on hand for many years to pass on his wealth of experience until his death in 2006 - a passing that was mourned across the world.

The riddle of the Mayer family is one of Burgundy's most complex and hotly discussed talking points. Here is my attempt to make some sense of it, at least in terms of their ownership of Échézeaux vines and the various labels it was released under:

The following points are valid through to (and including) the 1995 vintage:

* Henri had two brothers - Georges and Lucien.

* Between them they owned four parcels of Échézeaux. One for each of the brothers and the fourth split between Georges and Henri.

* Henri's plot was the best (located in 'Cruots') followed by George's (adjacent to Henri's). Lucien's and the fourth, split plot were in the 'Les Treux' *lieu-dit* and were considered by Henri to be inferior.

* Henri took care of all of the plots on a share-cropping basis and was therefore entitled to half of the crop from each in addition to all of the crop from his own parcel.

* All of the wine was made by Henri, assisted by Emmanuel Rouget. The wines were vinified separately by parcel but identical in terms of *élevage*.

* At this point (pre '95) the labelling was as follows for each plot:

Lucien's plot: Lucien Mayer (but blended into Rouget's after '91)

Henri's plot: Henri Mayer

Georges plot: Georges & Henri Mayer (with Henri's name prominent on the label)

George & Henri's plot: Emmanuel Rouget

* The halves of each plot that Henri received through the share-cropping agreements were rarely blended into Henri's label.

Henri had officially retired in 1988, but according to reliable sources was still very much in control of the winemaking until the end of the '95 vintage. At this point, prior to '96, Rouget took control and Mayer remained in an advisory role until his death in 2006.

Apparently, post '88, Mayer would change around some of the labelling if needs be in order not to violate French pension law.

Since Henri's death, all of the Mayer Échézeaux plots are under the control of Rouget and go into his wine.

	Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
4: 1997 Échézeaux; Domaine Emmanuel Rouget 13.5% ABV	n/a	£275	n/a
5: 2000 Échézeaux; Domaine (Georges et) Henri Mayer 13% ABV	1	£675	£607.50

FLIGHT FOUR

Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

While some great Burgundy wine names come and go (Henri Jayer is a case in point) there are a couple that remain at the top of the tree - perhaps the most renowned of them all is that of the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. A list of their landholdings reads like a rollcall of the world's greatest vineyards - Échézeaux, Grands-Échézeaux, Romanée St-Vivant, Richebourg, La Tâche, Montrachet and of course Romanée-Conti; but it is thanks in large part (Montrachet excepted) to the wines of DRC that these sites have achieved such acclaim in modern times.

Unusually for a top Burgundy domaine, DRC is a *société civile* of which there are shareholders and a manager (or *régisseur*). Today the man in charge is Aubert de Villaine, who has guided DRC through (relatively) tough times in the '70s and '80s to their current position as the region's (if not the world's) most respected producer of red wines.

The domaine's Échézeaux vines are located in the 'Poulailleres' lieu-dit and run up to the border with Grands-Échézeaux.

	Available	Retail price	Tasting special bottle price
4: 1979 Échézeaux; Domaine de la Romanée-Conti n/a ABV	n/a	£425	n/a
5: 1969 Échézeaux; Domaine de la Romanée-Conti n/a ABV	10	£825	£742.50