

# BOUNTIFUL BURGUNDY

In the latest of his journeys to the world's great wine regions, sponsored by Mercedes-Benz, Nick Tarayan heads off to Burgundy in a CLK 500

# MERCEDES WINE TOUR

There is something about Burgundy that differs from any other wine region I've ever been to: it has an inherent simplicity and a real sense that even the greatest winemakers are farmers at heart. It's a place with a soul and that soul is in the soil.

Strictly speaking, Burgundy is a province made up of several large vineyard areas. The main line of regions stretches southward, pretty much unhindered for 100 miles, from Dijon to around 30 miles north of Lyon. The exception is Chablis, which lies on its own some 90 miles north-west of Dijon and 120 miles south-east of Paris.

My tour took me to the very heart of Burgundy, to what is known as the Côte d'Or. It is the region with the most famous village names and is split into two subsections: the Côte de Nuits and the Côte de Beaune. (While Dijon is this area's commercial capital, the town of Beaune is its vinous, cultural and geographical centre.)

There are only two grape varieties used in the production of Burgundy proper: Chardonnay for white wines and Pinot Noir for reds. There is a fairly straightforward arrangement of vineyards for each grape in that the Côte de Nuits produces mainly – though by no means exclusively – red wines, and the Côte de Beaune is more famous for its whites.

What is not straightforward is the fantastic number of plots of land, each with its own divisions and subdivisions. At the top end of the Côte de Nuits, for example, lies the village of Gevrey-Chambertin. A majority of the vineyards surrounding it produce wine which is allowed to take the name of the village itself: simply Gevrey-Chambertin. Then, within some such vineyards, there are named plots of land, otherwise known as lieu-dits. These are still village wines but come from a specific site, for example Gevrey-Chambertin en Pallud, so the consumer knows more precisely where the grapes were picked. The next category up are the Premier Cru vineyards, such as Gevrey-Chambertin Clos St-Jacques, although, if several Premier Crus are blended together, you may find a wine simply labelled Gevrey-Chambertin Premier Cru. Finally, there are the greatest vineyards of all: the most prized possession in all Burgundy – and some would argue the whole of the wine world – the Grand Crus, such as Chambertin itself.

Unlike the châteaux of Bordeaux, where the vineyards surround a property and all the wine produced is bottled under that property's name, each vineyard in Burgundy may be owned by a number of growers. The vineyard of Clos de

Vougeot, for instance, is split into parcels owned by 80 different growers. Some bottle wine under their own name, while others sell to a négociant. (A négociant is someone who buys grapes or wine from a number of small growers – in some cases to augment wines from their own land – and blends them together to produce marketable quantities of a certain quality of a certain wine.) The subdivision of one, named vineyard into so many parcels happened because of Napoleonic inheritance laws which demanded that property had to be divided equally between heirs. There are therefore precious few whole vineyards remaining in the hands of one grower, company or estate.

One such estate, though, is the fabled Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, otherwise known as DRC, the greatest estate in Burgundy. DRC only produces Grand Cru wines – six of them red and one, Le Montrachet, white. It owns all the vineyards of Romanée-Conti and La Tâche, which are located around the village of

Vosne-Romanée and in total produces around 7,500 cases of wine per year (compare that with around 25,000 cases of Château Mouton-Rothschild). The four-acre vineyard of Romanée-Conti itself was purchased from the monks of the priory of St Vivant over 750 years ago and produces only 450 cases per year. The scarcity of this wine is only beaten by the 250 cases of Le Montrachet produced.

Remarkably, it takes the grapes of three vines which are, on average, 45 years old, to produce just one bottle of DRC wine. No chemicals are allowed on the soil and supplements are limited to compost made from crushed vine roots, grape skins and the residues left over from fermentation. As co-director of DRC, Aubert de Villaine, told me: 'Normally it is a winemaker who makes a wine, but it is the soil that makes a Romanée-Conti. Cultivation and winemaking must be in total obedience to the great terroir.'

I got off to a good start on my tour. It took around eight hours from Calais with a few coffee and sandwich stops to reach my destination. In many ways, the Mercedes-Benz CLK 500 – with its long, sleek lines – was the epitome of great Burgundy all the way: sexy, smooth, supple and powerful. I couldn't help but enjoy what, a few years ago, would have been a long and arduous journey to Beaune. Great motorway all the way and – thank goodness – a speed limiter on the car to stop me doing anything illegal, which would otherwise have been so tempting.

Beaune is a pretty town: 12th century rampparts surround the old quarter, where many of the cobbled streets are semi-pedestrianised. Better still, everything is within short walking distance – excellent restaurants, the main market and plenty of shops.

I stayed at L'Hôtel, a house once owned by top Burgundy producer Maison Louis Jadot, which boasts only seven rooms, all of which are beautifully, simply decorated in an art deco style and have every facility you would expect in a five-star London hotel. Yet more tempting is the fact that the hotel has its own cellar where you can drink or shop for wine to take away. Indeed, if you fancy a bottle of DRC's Romanée-Conti 1990 (one of the greatest vintages of the last century), you'd be able to snap one up for £6,000.

L'Hôtel is one of several places where it's possible to spend a few days on a wine course and get to know the region. Due to its ownership by a top wine trader the L'Hôtel programme includes visits to some of the great producers in Burgundy, such as Ponsot in Morey-St-Denis and Sauzet in Puligny Montrachet.

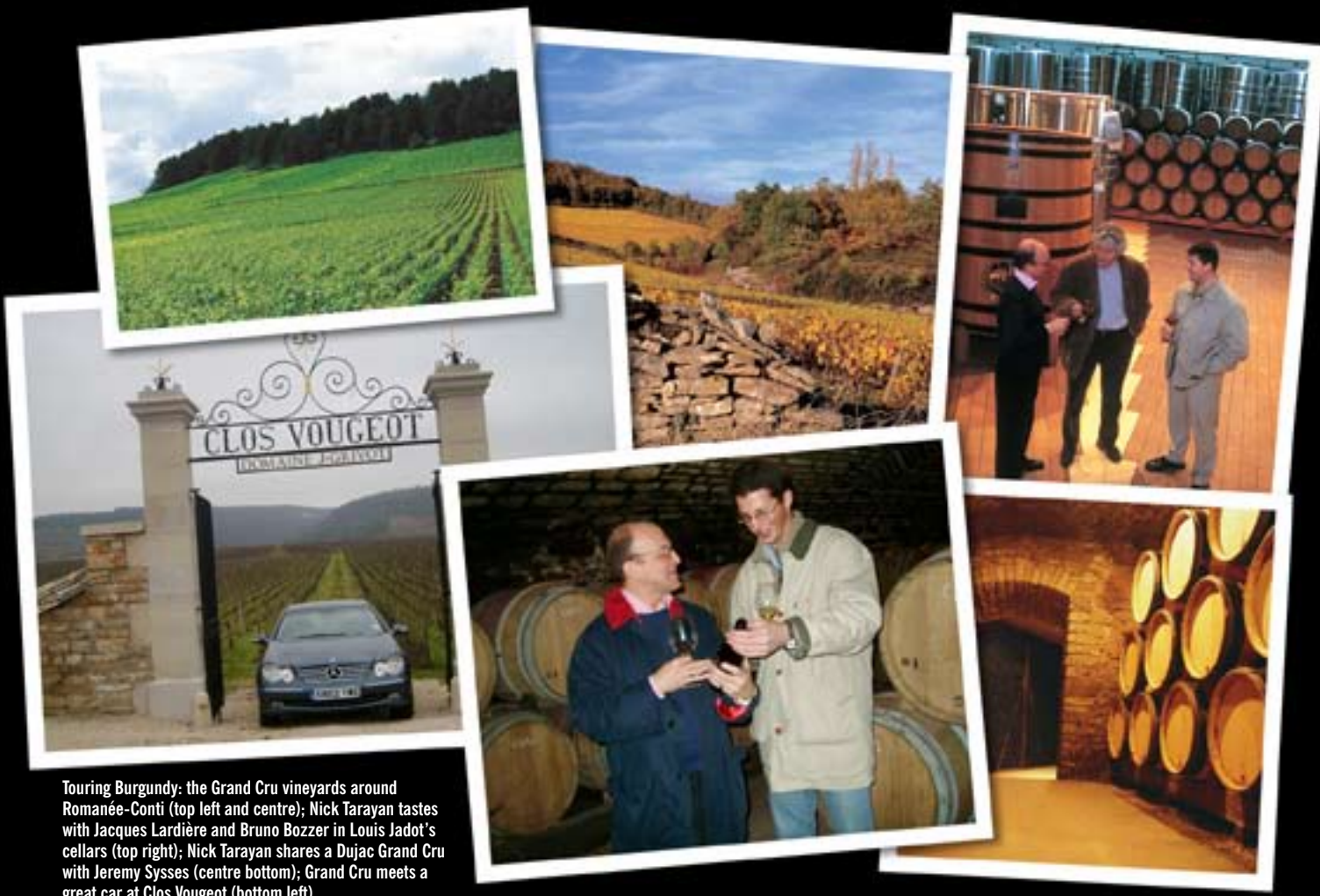
On my journey, my next port of call was to visit two small producers: Domaine Dujac in



**Nick Tarayan's Verdict:** Now I know what an executive sports car is. Long and low with sensual curves, it is remarkable that four adults can enjoy such a long journey in complete comfort. The split rear seats can even be folded down to augment an already capacious boot – how useful is that on a wine trip? What is even more amazing is that such a solid car – getting on for two tonnes of it – can so effortlessly whisk you to 62.5 mph in 6 seconds.

**Top Gear's Andy Wilman's Verdict:** This car is Milk Tray Man – it can ski, swim, fight sharks, jump off helicopters and deliver confectionery without ruffling a hair. The CLK has the streamlined beauty of a coupé, yet inside four proper seats await. It glides like cream down motorways, yet takes a corner with vim and vigour. All the toys are in with the price and it depreciates at a trickle. Mercedes is really on the case with this one. For more details visit [www.mercedes-benz.co.uk](http://www.mercedes-benz.co.uk).

Price:	£43,040
Engine:	5.0 litre V8
BHP:	306
0-62.5 mph:	6.0 seconds
Top speed:	155 mph



Touring Burgundy: the Grand Cru vineyards around Romanée-Conti (top left and centre); Nick Tarayan tastes with Jacques Lardière and Bruno Bozzer in Louis Jadot's cellars (top right); Nick Tarayan shares a Dujac Grand Cru with Jeremy Sysses (centre bottom); Grand Cru meets a great car at Clos Vougeot (bottom left)

Morey-St-Denis and Domaine Edmond Cornu in Ladoix. Dujac was founded by Jacques Seysses in 1968 (one of the worst vintages in Burgundy's history) and started getting a reputation as one of the most extraordinary producers in the area in the early Seventies. The Domaine's home and the base wine is Morey-St-Denis, where it produces village wine which is often far better than many neighbours' Premier Cru. But it is also lucky enough to own land in five Grand Cru vineyards, including Echézeaux and Charmes-Chambertin. I tasted the 2001 vintage from barrels and even in its raw, youthful state – in a cold cellar – the velvet majesty of the Grand Crus shone out.

Moving down the road towards Beaune, I stopped at Ladoix, at the foot of the hill of Corton. Here is where Pierre, the energetic son of Edmond Cornu, produces wines of great elegance. I have been familiar with his fruity, sweet Chorey-les-Beaune Les Bons Ores for many years and his 2000 vintage – a difficult one for red Burgundy – didn't disappoint. Although he also produces a wonderful Grand Cru, Corton Bressandes, the star of our tasting was from his village: Ladoix Premier Cru Les Bois Roussot 2000, hugely floral and meaty but with wonderful poise and finesse.

In among all this tasting, there were also some fabulous sights to be seen. While wine – and thus gastronomy – play a huge part in local attractions, the scenery on its own provides reason to visit

the region and there are plenty of things to see and do other than eating and drinking. Music and theatre concerts, hot air balloon rides, golf, horse-riding and, of course, the all-important French sport of mountain biking are all on offer here.

With my rather nice Mercedes-Benz to drive, I decided against the latter pastime, however, and pressed on with my wine tour. Having seen a top estate and two independent growers, I felt it was now time to see a négociant house. Maison Louis Jadot was founded in 1859 and is a big landowner as well as a négociant: 70 hectares of Premier and Grand Cru vineyards in the Côte d'Or is not to be sniffed at. It has strong, long-term partnerships with many winegrowers so that, in addition to its own grapes, it is able to make wines from virtual-

ly every appellation in Burgundy (a fact confirmed by its catalogue of 150 wines).

Jacques Lardière has been the winemaker at Louis Jadot for over 20 years and is passionate about Burgundy almost to the point of eccentricity. He designed the new cellars on the outskirts of Beaune – creating one of the biggest and most advanced winemaking facilities in Burgundy – with terroir in mind; that is to say that each wine produced by Jadot expresses the land from which it hails. He explains the fact that vines on one side of a dirt path can produce a wine of completely different quality and character to those on the other side and that understanding this difference is where the skill lies in producing so many distinctive wines from only two grape varieties.

Down below in the softly lit cellar, stacked high with oak barrels, the variations become even more apparent. Darting from cask to cask, tasting a lightly coloured, strawberry-scented Beaune Premier Cru one moment and a huge, muscular, gamey Chambertin the next is an incredible experience. But then, that is Burgundy. An area steeped in history, respectful of its heritage, yet with a firm grip on the future.

At the end of my trip, I felt that many of the words that describe the Burgundies I tasted could easily be applied to the CLK 500: finely tuned, sleek, luxurious, elegant, graceful, supple, structured. All in all, a great performance from both the wine and the car. **SM**

## BURGUNDY BY NUMBERS

I Burgundy has 5 per cent of the total Appellation Controlée (AOC) vineyard share in France. (AOC is wine that meets strict qualitative rules and restrictions.)

I It has 99 different AOCs, 25 per cent of France's total.

I There are 33 Grand Crus, 42 village appellations and 22 regional appellations, plus Bourgogne Blanc and Rouge.

I The most expensive case of Burgundy sold at auction: 12 bottles of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti's Romanée-Conti 1978 sold for £49,280 at Christie's, London, June 1995. (This wine can still be bought for £4,500 a bottle at enocollection.com.)



## PLANNING YOUR OWN TOUR OF BURGUNDY

### WHERE TO STAY

(approximate prices are minimum/maximum, low/high season per room)

#### L'Hôtel de Beaune

5 rue Samuel Legay,  
21200 Beaune  
T: 00 33 380 25 94 14 [www.lhoteldebeaune.com](http://www.lhoteldebeaune.com)  
A wonderfully central old townhouse – previously the offices of Louis Jadot – this is *the* boutique hotel in Beaune with only a handful of beautifully appointed rooms. Square Meal readers booking 2 nights or more will receive a complimentary bottle of top white Burgundy and canapés. Room upgrades (where available) will also be offered. Rooms £166-£223.

#### Hostellerie de Levernois

Route de Verdun sur le Doubs,  
21200 Levernois  
T: 00 33 380 24 73 58 [www.levernois.com](http://www.levernois.com)  
A delightful Relais & Châteaux hotel set in marvellous gardens. Gorgeous restaurant too. Rooms £96.50-£183.

#### Lameloise

Place d'Armes,  
71150 Chagny  
T: 00 33 385 87 65 65  
[www.lameloise.fr](http://www.lameloise.fr)  
It's absolute heaven to finish your three-Michelin-star, seven-course dégustation menu (£73) with foie gras, lobster, John Dory and pigeon, washed down with fabulous wines from the Montrachet vineyards next door and simply climb upstairs to bed. Rooms £76-£173.

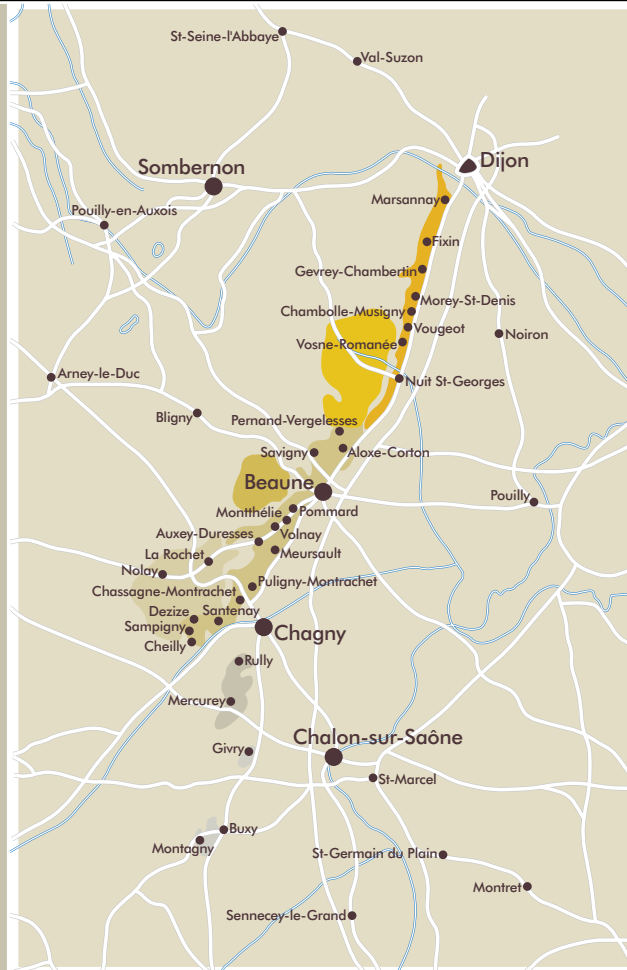
#### Villa Louise

21420 Aloxe-Corton  
T: 00 33 380 26 46 70  
[www.hotel-villa-louise.fr](http://www.hotel-villa-louise.fr)  
No restaurant but only 6km from Beaune and set among the vines overlooking the hill of Corton. Charming, restored grand village house with only 10 rooms. Book room 40 for a romantic weekend. Sensible rates £50-£100.

### WHERE TO EAT

(prices per person for three courses without wine)

**Lameloise** (see above). 16km from Beaune. A real treat. Menus from £50.



#### Bernard Morillon

31, rue Maufoux,  
21200 Beaune  
T: 00 33 380 24 12 06  
A bit fussy and over dressed but charming service and food in the grand tradition. Approx £30+.

#### Caveau des Arches

10 Boulevard Perpreuil,  
21200 Beaune  
T: 00 33 380 221 037  
This is what you call the comfort zone, in a warm underground cellar a moments walk from the centre square. Escargots, great steak au poivre and crème brûlée was all of £12.

#### Les Terrasses de Corton

21550 Ladoix-Serrigny  
T: 00 33 380 26 42 37  
Unbelievably awful decor – Seventies' pink and green – yet great food: a langoustine and mushroom bisque followed by some tasty wild boar for about £16.

#### Montrachet

21190 Puligny-Montrachet  
T: 00 33 380 21 30 06  
[www.le-montrachet.com](http://www.le-montrachet.com)  
With a Michelin star and a great four-course menu at £23 in a charming, beamed restaurant, this is worth the 12km trip from Beaune, especially for a summer lunch on the terrace opposite the village square. If you're having dinner, just stay. Rooms £50-£100.

### WHERE TO FIND THE WINES

(all merchants mentioned have an additional selection of fine Burgundies)

#### Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

Corney & Barrow T: 020 7539 3200  
To understand more about one of the top wine domaines in the world, Corney & Barrow has produced a brochure describing vineyards and viticultural practices. Call for a copy.

#### Domaine Edmond Cornu

McKinley Vintners T: 020 7928 7300  
Family-owned cellars based in Ladoix producing great Choresy-les-Beaune and Corton Grand Cru among others.

#### Domaine Jean Chauvenet

Berry Brothers & Rudd T: 0870 900 4300  
The gamey, structured village Nuits St Georges 1999 is heaven: supple, pure Pinot Noir at £17.75.

#### Domaine Dujac

O W Loeb T: 020 7234 0385  
Loeb was voted the UK's Burgundy Wine Merchant of 2003 by the International Wine Challenge and it's not hard to see why. Apart from the wonderful Dujacs, its portfolio includes Rousseau, Arlaud, Gouges, Sauzet, Ramonet, Niellon and Girardin, as well as many other top-quality small growers.

#### Louis Jadot

Retail: Thresher, Wine Rack, Victoria Wine, or call Hatch Mansfield for stockists 01344 871800  
A huge selection of fine wines from throughout Burgundy.

#### Morris & Verdin

T: 020 7921 5300  
The houses represented by this London merchants are a Who's Who of Burgundy.

### GETTING TO BURGUNDY

#### Eurotunnel

T: 08705 353535 [www.eurotunnel.com](http://www.eurotunnel.com)  
On at Folkestone, off in Calais in 35 minutes and then its motorway all the way. It's eight hours plus stops from London to Beaune and travelling Club Class means that you're guaranteed a hop-on, hop-off trip.

### WINE COURSES

#### L'Ecole des Vins de Bourgogne

T: 00 33 380 26 35 10 [www.vins-bourgogne.fr](http://www.vins-bourgogne.fr)  
A wonderful opportunity to spend a weekend immersed in Burgundy's wines. There are convivial two-day courses and intensive three-day courses in English.

