



# The International Wine Review

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## Report #58 Beaujolais in Transition

### Introduction



The Windmill in Moulin-à-Vent

Beaujolais is in a state of transition. Its reputation for inexpensive, easy drinking Beaujolais and Beaujolais Nouveau is changing to include a renewed appreciation and recognition for its elegant Crus expressive of their terroir. Innocuous wines produced by many negociants and cooperatives are slowly being replaced by unique estate and vineyard designated ones. Young winemakers with international experience wishing to make wines from special places are able to purchase underpriced vineyards of very old vines and then craft unique, terroir-driven wines. And winemakers are turning to new methods to make distinctive wines, sometimes importing techniques from neighboring Burgundy and other times returning to the traditional methods of Beaujolais.

Changes can be good, but they can be painful, and the benefits are often delayed. Prices of distinctive, wonderful

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Beaujolais wines have remained exceedingly low, while the cost of manually farming old, densely planted goblet vines keeps increasing. As a result, large numbers of farmers have painfully abandoned their old vineyards. On the other hand, new investors, often from Burgundy, and exciting young winemakers, many with international experience, are introducing changes in viticulture and winemaking that promise to revolutionize Beaujolais. But the real winner from all this change is the consumer. Today, even the very best Beaujolais is inexpensive. For US\$30, less than the price of the simplest village wine in Burgundy, one can purchase a superb wine from an outstanding producer in one of the top Crus of Beaujolais.

We traveled to Beaujolais in June of 2016 to learn more about its ongoing transition. We met winemakers and tasted wines from Bas Beaujolais in the south to the great Crus of Haut Beaujolais in the north. We met with multi-

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# Introduction

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generational family wineries, exciting young international winemakers, prominent negociants, and researchers, journalists and other observers of Beaujolais. We tasted wines ranging from the simplest Beaujolais Nouveau to the deepest, most complex Moulin-à-Vent from recent vintages, including the absolutely outstanding 2015 vintage.

In this report, we explore the complicated history of Beaujolais, focusing on the new guard of winemakers and recent noteworthy developments; we relate what soil researchers have recently learned about the terroir of the Crus; we discuss winemaking methods from pure carbonic to semi-carbonic maceration to the Burgundian practices increasingly adopted in Beaujolais. We explore the superb cuisine of the region and its pairing with different Beaujolais wine styles. And we examine the market for Beaujolais and the opportunities and challenges of marketing the Crus in the US. Finally, we provide profiles of many of the top producers and tasting notes on more than 250 wines to guide the trade and consumers wishing to further explore the excellent wines of Beaujolais.

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