



## Exploring quality at Maison Albert Bichot plus 17 wines worth seeking out

A trip to Burgundy earlier this year led Andy Howard MW to discover the many facets, and wines, of the historic, family-owned company - one of the largest and most dynamic producers in the region...

In mid-February, I was invited by my Master of Wine colleague Richard Bampffield MW, to join him on a three-day visit he was making with a group of students to Burgundy. The focus was Maison Bichot - one of the most influential producers within Bourgogne.

Although Bichot may not immediately spring to mind as one of the top names in the region, the visit confirmed what I already suspected - Bichot should be seen as one of the region's most dynamic, quality-focussed and sustainability orientated producers, whose wines are well-worth exploring.

The range of wines produced by Bichot is almost mind-boggling. When I last checked, there were 143 wines listed on the company's website, ranging from generic Bourgogne wines to the loftiest Grand Cru.

Geographically, Bichot's reach stretches from Moulin-à-Vent in Beaujolais to Chablis. For 20 years, the company has been the largest buyer at the annual Hospices de Beaune auction, and produces organically at all of its own domaines.

The history of Bichot's can be traced back as far as 1214 but it was in 1350 when the family first settled in Burgundy. In 1831 interests in wine started to develop with the creation of a négociant house in Monthélie by Bernard Bichot. His son, Hippolyte, purchased Bichot's first vines in Volnay, convinced that control in the vineyards was key to quality. Bernard's grandson, Albert, took the business in a new direction with the creation of Maison Albert Bichot which settled in the centre of Beaune in 1912. Bichot became a significant force in the export market, still a key focus today.

Albéric Bichot represents the 6th generation to run the family house, and is regarded by many as a visionary and someone who has taken the quality of Bichot's wines to levels unforeseen just two decades ago.

He is also one of the most endearing, humorous and generous managing directors one might encounter - traits which seem to infuse Bichot's wines. In typically self-effacing style, he compares himself to the 'conductor of an orchestra, proud to bring people and their talents together over a common project'.

Christophe Chauvel has managed Bichot's vineyards since 2000, whilst Alain Serveau is Technical Director/head winemaker. The company owns four separate vinification centres in Chablis and the Côte d'Or, and all Domaine wines are organic.





Bichot owns 107 hectares of vineyards across six estates – Domaine Long-Depaquit in Chablis; Château Gris and Domaine du Clos Frantin (Nuits-Saint-Georges); Domaine du Pavillon (Pommard); Domaine Adélie (Mercurey); and Domaine de Rochegrès (Moulin-à-Vent).

The Bichot vineyards comprise several monopoles – Grand Crus Corton Clos des Maréchaudes and Chablis Moutonne, along with Aloxe-Corton 1er Cru Clos des Maréchaudes. It has the largest holding (1.76ha) within Malconsorts, Vosne's best Premier Cru. Long-Depaquit, with 65ha, is one of the largest domaines in Chablis, over 6ha of which are Grand Cru.

The company also owns vineyards in many leading Côte-de-Nuit Grand Crus – Richebourg, Echézeaux, Grands-Echézeaux, and Chambertin.

Top-wines are competitively priced and offer great value for money – 2015 Malconsorts can be purchased in the UK for £105 per bottle in-bond, compared to Domaine de Montille £285, and Dujac £395.

Wines were tasted blind with many Premier and Grand Cru wines assessed. The Bichot style is focussed on showing terroir characteristics but also emphasising purity and a bright fruit profile. These are wines that can, in most cases, be enjoyed relatively early on.

During one dinner, Bichot wines were paired (blind) with the benchmark producers of specific appellations, from identical vintages. On several occasions the Bichot wines scored more highly than their competitors and, in all cases, showed a deftness of touch with oak which makes the wines subtle and highly appealing.

Domaines Albert Bichot may not yet have quite the same name as luminaries such as Leroy, Cathiard, Rousseau, Roumier, to name but a few. However, this is a source of some wonderfully crafted Bourgogne wines, which combine early appeal with balance, accessibility and good value. They should not be over-looked.

## THE WINES

### Meursault 1er Cru Les Charmes Domaine du Pavillon 2018

From a 1.17ha plot, Bichot's vines are planted on calcareous clay soils in three plots, mainly within the upper Charmes-Dessus. With an average age of 30 years, this is a generous Meursault from the fine 2018 vintage, showing youthful characters of succulent pear fruit, a fine line of zesty lemon/lime acidity, with a concentrated, fresh finish. Needs a couple of years to flesh out.



### Beaune 1er Cru Clos des Mouches Domaine du Pavillon 2016

One of Beaune's top Premier Crus, Clos des Mouches is named after the presence of bees, rather than 'flies'. The Bichot plot is 0.75ha at 300m on marly limestone to the west of the vineyard. The wine reflects the warm vintage with a plush, tropical character on the palate combined with quite showy oak. There is fresh acidity to balance this weight, along with a flinty finish. Ready to drink now.



### Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru Domaine du Pavillon 2017

Often one of Bichot's standout wines. Showing some characteristic smokiness, this is a chiselled Corton-Charlemagne with plenty of concentration and grip for the long-haul. Very precise and pure on the nose and palate this combines finesse, with understated power and some toasty oak.



### Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru Domaine du Pavillon 2015

This lovely Corton-Charlemagne shows an impeccable balance between the ripeness of the 2015 vintage, a pronounced chalky mineral texture and oak driven orange-box characters. Just starting to approach its peak, this will develop for several years.





## Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru Domaine du Pavillon 2014

As expected from the 2014 vintage, this is concentrated, intense and has a very long future ahead. Acidity is still prominent with some lovely nutty characters starting to emerge on the palate. Lemon zest combines with smoky, saline notes and the oak is very well balanced. A very fine Corton-Charlemagne which is highly typical of the appellation.



## Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru Domaine du Pavillon 2012

2012 was a very fine Bourgogne vintage and the extra bottle age is certainly on show. Intense, rich and surprisingly voluptuous, this is a complex amalgam of spices, floral notes, a creamy, buttery texture and a mineral, slaty finish. The oak is fully integrated and subtle. A fine Corton-Charlemagne, à-point now.



## Mercurey 1er Cru Champs Martin Domaine Adélie 2017

Bichot spread to the Cote Chalonnaise in 2005 with the creation of Domaine Adélie, a 4.5ha estate in Mercurey. Les Champs-Martin is a 0.9ha plot on a steeply sloping, southerly facing slope. The southerly location shows with more glycerol in the glass, a nose driven by spices and wood notes, and a palate showing quite firm, slightly rustic tannins and a hint of bitterness to finish.



## Aloxe-Corton 1er Cru Clos des Maréchaudes Domaine du Pavillon 2017

This is a more rustic Pinot Noir, with spicy redcurrant fruit on the palate and a muscular character. Certainly shows some of the typical character of a wine from Aloxe-Corton. Clos des Maréchaudes is a monopole 1er Cru, directly neighbouring the monopole Grand Cru Corton of the same name. Covering 1.4ha, the vines here are between 30-40 years old, planted on brown limestone soils over scree, with a high proportion of clay.



## Volnay 1er Cru Les Santenots Domaine du Pavillon 2016

In typically complicated Burgundian fashion, Volnay Santenots 1er Cru lies within the village of Meursault. From a small parcel of 0.29ha sited in Les Plures, the higher proportion of clay here suits Pinot Noir. Aged 100% in oak barrels, with one-third new, this is a refined, precise Volnay with crisp, focussed acidity, fine tannins and ripe, redberry fruit. Drinking well now.



## Pommard 1er Cru Les Rugiens Domaine du Pavillon 2016

Located in Les Rugiens-Bas, this is a very fine example of Pommard which carries the weight and power expected of the AC but combines this with purity and a high degree of elegance. Dark and brooding in the glass, this is a powerful, earthy Pommard with 60% new oak still needing slightly longer to integrate. Ripe fruit flavours of dark cherry compote, blackcurrant and spice make this a refined Pommard with a good future ahead.



## Fixin 1er Cru Clos de la Perrière 2016

Clos de La Perrière is the best vineyard in Fixin, historically seen as a match for the finest Chambertin. The 5ha Clos is a monopole owned by the Joliet family but Bichot buy grapes and vinify their own wine. A Fixin which is floral and perfumed, quite light and vibrant, although not hugely concentrated. Reminiscent of Chambolle-Musigny, this is a very pretty wine with leafy redcurrant and lavender notes.



## Chambolle-Musigny 1er Cru Les Chabiots 2016

Bright, relatively easy and forward on the palate - a Chambolle which is more about florality and delicacy than power. This doesn't mean there is any lack of concentration but the wine has a lovely lift, fine tannins and succulent, integrated oak. A fine, typical, Chambolle-Musigny. Chabiots is situated just above Amoureuses, sharing similarly shallow soils and proximity to limestone bedrock as its more illustrious neighbour.



## Charmes-Chambertin Grand Cru 2017

Dark and concentrated in the glass, very attractive woody/spicy notes are starting to emerge on the nose, combining with sappy, bright, dark cherry and berry fruit on the palate. Finishes with firm tannins and a long aftertaste - this needs several more years in bottle. Another Grand Cru produced with purchased grapes, the vineyard is sited on calcareous clay soil with silt and, in the upper patches, a gravel scree.



## Clos de Vougeot Grand Cru Domaine du Clos Frantin 2016

Domaine du Clos Frantin owns 0.63ha within the 50ha of Clos du Vougeot. Bichot has two parcels - one in the higher part of the vineyard adding structure, and a larger parcel in the lower part which is more fruit driven. The 2016 is full of bright dark berry fruits with freshness and crisp acidity still very evident. This is a youthful, powerful Grand Cru which needs a bit of time to soften. Will be very classy and long-lived.



## Clos de Vougeot Grand Cru Domaine du Clos Frantin 2015

A fine example from the 2015 vintage, with the density and concentration to age for many years. Still youthful in colour and with a powerful tannic framework. There is plenty of sweet dark cherry and plum fruit on the palate, notes of underbrush and lavender, and very well integrated oak (60% new). Ripe fruit flavours are interwoven with freshening mineral/slaty characters on the finish - this has the potential to improve over 3-5 years.



## Latricières-Chambertin Grand Cru 2012

Produced from purchased grapes on long-term contract, this Latricières-Chambertin is showing its age - but in a positive manner. Medium-plus in colour, intense aromas of spices combine beautifully with red berry and currant fruits, all kept fresh by crunchy acidity and smooth, ripe, tannins. Elegant, rather than a blockbuster in style - this will age happily for another five years.

