



**August, 2018
Volume XVI**

It is hard to imagine in this day, but estate grown and bottled wines are a relatively modern advancement Europe. Many chateaus in Bordeaux did not begin bottling their own wines until well into the 1950s. In Burgundy, many growers sold their grapes to negociants into the 1980s because they lacked the money and knowledge to produce their own wines. Even Montalcino, home, to no less than 200 estate grown Brunellos today, had less than two dozen in 1980. The features for this quarter are all from properties from historic regions, who themselves have less than a quarter century of winemaking history. You will see that thanks to modern farming techniques, and state-of-the-art winemaking equipment, they reflect much more experience in the finished product.

My first selection is **2016 Quentin Jeannot Maranges 1er Cru Fussiere (\$49)**, a French Red Burgundy that may be one of my favorite discoveries of this new year. You will see why when you taste the quality of this wine, and note it's amazing value. There are not many Premier Cru Burgundies out there for less than \$50, or \$100 for that matter.

The Maranges AOP (Appellation d'Origin Protege) encompasses three villages, Cheilly-lès-Maranges, Dezize-lès-Maranges and Sampigny-lès-Maranges, which all lie in a valley southwest of Santenay. It is the southernmost AOP of Burgundy in the Cote d'Or, before the beginning of the Cote Chalonnaise. It is a small appellation, covering roughly 422 acres, but with a high percentage of vineyards designated as Premier Cru due to the steep slopes and southern exposures. For years this region has been overlooked, and the wines often blended by negociants into basic Bourgogne bottlings. As prices for Burgundy began to rapidly escalate in the 1990s, negociants began to bottle the wines under the more expensive, Maranges AOP. Growers began to recognize the value of their vines and more domaines began popping up by the early 2000s. Quentin Jeannot's parents began making wine in 1999, but it was not until 2013 that importers gave this property a second look. Now with a few vintages under his belt, Quentin is a name to watch.

At the heart of this domaine are the old Pinot Noir vines. Their basic Maranges bottling is made from vines that are 80 years old. For their Premier Cru Fussiere, the vines are closer to 60. It is a curious phenomenon in many Burgundy vineyards that the oldest vines are in the less expensive areas. One of the great advancements in wine in the past thirty years is to recognize the superiority of grapes harvested from healthy, old vines. This is because prices have risen enough during this time to compensate growers for the lower yield of fruit that is harvested from older vines. To growers, it costs about the same amount to farm an acre of land planted to young vines or old vines, but newer plantings yield more grapes. This is why it was common practice after WWII for growers to replant a vineyard every twenty years, as that is the age where a vine begins to produce less grapes. In a world where wines sold for \$2 or \$3 a bottle, they could not afford to lose the yield. Then in the 1980's, winemakers started to prize the intensity of flavor of wines made with grapes from old vines.

Quentin's approach to winemaking is basically to not botch up the beautiful quality of grapes he receives from his old vines. All of the grapes are destemmed, cold soaked, then fermented in open top fermentors. Once dry the wine is racked to small barrels, with 20% being new and 60% have been used one time. I do not know if this wine is filtered, but given the gorgeous dimension and intensity, I doubt it.

When you are ready to open this wine, decant it for a half-hour before serving. The nose is a complex combination of fresh muddled blackberries, cut black plums, Tellicherry black peppercorns and pinwheel jasmine. On the palate this wine shows incredible power for Maranges, with a dense core of fruit, a surprising sense of tannins and good length. Drink this wine from 2018-2025.

When I came to love Barolo, with the release of the 1990 vintage, it was a turbulent era for the region. At that time a theological war was being waged between producers who followed a traditional process, and those looking to modernize. Introducing the modernists to the US was a young Italian/American importer, named Marc de Grazia. His stable of producers included Elio Altare, Luciano Sandrone, Paolo Scavino and the late Dominico Clerico, all names that would very quickly rocket to the top of the Barolo elite. Their methods in the cellar were heresy by the standards of the old guard; using roto-fermentors for extraction and fermentation and worse, small French barriques for aging instead of the old Slovenian botti. Critics complained they did not taste "typical", but to neophytes like myself, at least they were not the stale wines of the old guard. Over the ensuing two decades the modernists and many of the traditionalists have moved more to the middle, and today the Barolo region enjoys incredible success. What was less known then, was the revolution the modernists led in the vineyards, and that was where the real value to the Barolo region is now seen.

When you drink the selection for this quarter, the **2013 Luigi Pira Barolo "Margheria" (\$65)** you have a wine that represents the best of both the modernists and the traditionalists. In fact, Luigi Pira is what I call a "second generation" producer of the modernist camp, standing on the shoulders of aforementioned men. Luigi established his

winery in 1993, after his family had sold grapes to the negotiants of the region since the 1950s. Being part of the Marc de Grazia camp, he brings a modern interpretation of Barolo to consumers, built on vineyard management that harkens back to their real contribution.

While the modernist camp was criticized by some consumers for their approaches in the cellar, they also received backlash from their own families for the work in the vineyard. They introduced techniques such as green harvest and cover crops between vine rows, in an attempt to limit the productivity of the vines. To the post-WWII generation, who concerned themselves only with quantity, not quality, it was sacrilege not to use every grape. Feelings were so strong that the father of Elio Altare even disowned him, after he cut grape clusters off the vines, in an attempt to increase quality during the disastrous 1979 growing season. To his father it was nonsense to drop grapes on the ground, even though it meant that virtually nothing would completely ripen that year. After his father's death, Altare spent almost a decade buying his vineyards back from sister. What his father did not know, is that due to their high quality, twenty years later his family wines would sell for upwards of \$150 a bottle, when at the time they fetched less than \$30.

The wines from Luigi Pira are a family affair. Luigi, along with his brother Romolo, tend to their 32 acres of vines. All of the farming is done with sustainability in mind. They never use man-made pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers, and grow a cover crop between the rows. All of their vineyards lie within the Serralunga d'Alba sub-zone of Barolo, including ownership in the villages three best Cru sites. They own roughly two and a half acres of the Cru Margheria, which lies in limestone rich clay soils. The vines for this parcel were planted in 1959, but they did not bottle a wine exclusively from this site until 1993.

Winemaking is handled by Luigi's son, Gianpaolo, in their modern facility. Grapes are destemmed and then placed inside of a stainless steel, roto-fermentor. This is a modern piece of equipment that allows producers to extract color and flavor from the skins, without pulling bitterness from the seeds. After fifteen to twenty days of skin contact, the wine is racked to Slovenian oak casks for twelve months.

When you are ready to drink this wine, you will want to decant it for a good hour before serving. The nose then delivers a knockout combination of new car leather, black truffles, charred orange peels, tart cherries, hibiscus syrup and violets. On the palate this wine delivers a deep and concentrated wave of fruit, constantly held in check by smooth, integrated tannins and moderate acidity. They only produced 400 cases of this wine in 2013 and you can enjoy it anytime from 2020 to 2030.