



"Jean-Phi," 34, and "Jean-Gui," 32, took over La Soufrandière, their family's small *domaine* in the village of Vinzelles, nine years ago. A cluster of white-shuttered, 19th-century buildings hidden in trees is surrounded by vines. "We lived in Paris but spent our summers here," Jean-Philippe says the day after the tasting. "It was the dream of our childhood to make wine from the estate grapes. Our father and grandfather sold them to the local co-ops."

Most of the district's 9,000 growers still do. That's changing slowly as a younger generation decides the challenge of making and bottling its own wine is worth the effort.

What's given many confidence is the mini-invasion of superstars from the Côte d'Or such as Anne-Claude Leflaive and Dominique Lafon, whose *premiers crus* Puligny-Montrachets and Meursaults, respectively, sell for \$125 and up. Lafon has been buying up acres of vines for a decade. "Vineyards in Mâcon are far cheaper and easier to find than in Meursault," he says.

The co-ops mix grapes from all over the Mâconnais to churn out low-personality plonk. The idealistic Bret brothers, like the area's 25 or so other top vintners, look to old-fashioned, artisanal methods to achieve quality. They eliminated herbicides and pesticides and handpick grapes at peak ripeness.

The Brets, whose Web site features a rock music-backed video of their antics at harvest time, are hardly stuck in the past. They worked separately in California at estates such as Newton and Ridge Lytton Springs. Jean-Phi did a stint with Lafon, who follows biodynamic methods the brothers adopted at La Soufrandière. And both worked for flamboyant Belgian theater producer Jean-Marie Guffens, a trailblazer for quality wine here two decades ago.

Like Guffens, the Brets also make wines from purchased grapes, which they sell under their Bret Brothers *négociant* label. "We try to select the best *climat* of old vines in each village," says Jean-Phi, referring to microparcelles of land. The task is made easier by longtime family friendships.

As we taste more bottles over a swordfish dinner in New York a couple of weeks later, Jean-Phi whips out a map. "This Pouilly-Fuissé La Roche comes from stony *terroir* in Vergisson, with the famous Roche de Vergisson looming above it," he says as he points at a dot with his table knife. "The wine's minerality comes from the limestone."

Unlike the Côte d'Or, the Mâconnais has no official hierarchy of vineyards, with *premier* and *grand cru* designations, and there's no agreement on which are the sweetest spots. That means wine-makers can't charge more based on reputation, but it frees ambitious ones to create buzz for their own discoveries.

Traditionally, the best Mâcons are Pouilly-Fuissés, Pouilly-Lochéés and Pouilly-Vinzelles from the far south. It's no surprise then that 8 of the Brets' 15 wines are from those appellations. The rest come from Saint-Véran, Viré-Clessé and standout villages such as Cruzille and Uchizy.

What's next? "We're going south, to Beaujolais," Jean-Phi says with a smile. "Now that's a region that needs rescuing."

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DRINKS

## Sibling Winery

Vintners such as the Bret brothers are ensuring the Mâconnais is known for more than mediocre chardonnay.

By ELIN MCCOY Photographs by MICHEL JOLY



IN A VAST, ECHOING HALL in Burgundy, 136 winemakers from the region's Mâcon district are pouring samples of their chardonnays. I scan the room and spot a crowd gathered around a smiling vintner with a soul patch and floppy hair who's filling glasses as fast as he can.

are made from the same grape, one tastes ripely fruity; another, fresh and mineral; and still another, succulent and powerful.

The Mâconnais in southern Burgundy is a wide valley of charming villages and gentle hills planted with almost three times the acreage of chardonnay as the famous Côte d'Or farther north. The top wines in the Mâconnais don't achieve the rich complexity of the finest Bâtard-Montrachets, Meursaults and Puligny-Montrachets in the Côte d'Or, but at one-third the price (or less), they're great buys.

I rush over and discover the rich, savory whites of the talented Bret brothers: Jean-Philippe, bottle in hand, and his younger, slightly taller sibling, Jean-Guillaume. They're part of the new wave of winemakers quietly revitalizing this pastoral area once known only for bargain-basement chardonnays.

The wines Jean-Philippe is offering are anything but. Though all

Jean-Phi, top left, and Jean-Gui Bret, top right; above, the brothers' 2006 Pouilly-Fuissé En Carentranant

BLOOMBERG PICKS

## Marvelous Mâcons

2006 Bret Brothers Pouilly-Fuissé

En Carentranant | Elegant, round and flinty

2006 La Soufrandière Pouilly-Vinzelles

Les Quarts | Savory, succulent, ripe and complex. Biodynamic