

FOOD & DRINK / WINE

MAY 12, 2024

Why It's Time for You to Reconsider Beaujolais

Beaujolais nouveau was a fad that gave a bad name to its more serious cousin.

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Many wine drinkers' lone reference point for Beaujolais is the barely drinkable plonk that arrives on our shores around Thanksgiving every year. Yet there is very little in common between that Beaujolais Nouveau and the more serious, oak-aged versions, especially from the 10 "crus" of Beaujolais. And if you've only experienced the former, we're here to convince you to drink the latter.

Beaujolais wine is made with 100 percent Gamay, a grape native to France—most likely Burgundy—that is a natural cross between Pinot Noir and Gouais Blanc, a white grape that is nearly extinct but has left its mark on the wine world. That's where the similarities between Beaujolais Nouveau and Beaujolais largely end; however, one has been allowed to sully the good name of the other.

Julie Pitoiset, director and winemaker at Château des Jacques, explains that after the Second World War, "Beaujolais produced wines with a fruity style, with new techniques like carbonic maceration," a modern fermentation method using carbon dioxide that's associated with Beaujolais Nouveau. Unlike the barrel-aged wines that Pitoiset makes at Château des Jacques, wine released two months after the grapes have been picked has barely had enough time to ferment let alone settle and become well integrated. Pitoiset prefers to wait at least five years to open a bottle of her estate-grown wine from Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent—two of the region's crus—and she says from a good season they can last in the bottle for 50 years or more.

The negativity around Gamay has deeper roots than the 1980s, reaching as far back as the Middle Ages. In 1395, Philip II, Duke of

Burgundy, banned the cultivation of the variety in the region because its higher yields made it more valuable to wine merchants than fussier Pinot Noir, which was considered a nobler grape. When Gamay vines were ripped out in the Cote d'Or and replaced with Pinot Noir, Gamay found a new home farther south in Beaujolais. If it seems that poor Beaujolais can't catch a break, its time may finally have come as Pinot Noir from its neighbor to the north becomes too expensive for many consumers, especially at restaurant markups, and as younger wine drinkers unfamiliar with its nouveau incarnation may not have an unfavorable impression of it.

While Château des Jacques traces its roots to the 18th century, the eponymous Domaine Jonathan Pey has just released its first bottling, 2022 Morgon "Bellevue." Jonathan Pey, the cofounder of Textbook in Napa Valley, explained to us that he was drawn to Beaujolais's Morgon and Fleurie crus because of their pink-granite and schist soils, steep slopes, altitude, rich winemaking histories, and abundant rainfall. "After witnessing climate changes' devastating effects—

droughts, forest fires, and smoke [in California]—I decided to go for it," he says, while pointing out the value it offers. "Morgon and Fleurie earned their coveted AOC cru status in 1936, the same year as Romanée-Conti and Pauillac. All these wines used to be similarly priced, so the pedigree of the tiny cru districts of Morgon and Fleurie is considerable." Made from dry-farmed vines planted "when Truman was president," this limited-production, hand-crafted wine sells for around \$35 in the United States.



From Napa to Beaujolais
JONATHAN PEY