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THE SOMM JOURNAL

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HERITAGE COLLECTION PUTS
WINEMAKERS IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT



PHOTO: JENNIFER OLSON

For the Love of
BOURGOGNE ALIGOTÉ

HAVING LONG PLAYED SECOND FIDDLE TO CHARDONNAY, BOURGOGNE'S OTHER WHITE GRAPE IS FINALLY GETTING ITS DUE



by Courtney Schiessl



PHOTOS: BMB/JESSICA WUILLAUME

An Aligoté bunch on the vine in Bouzeron.



TO many, Bourgogne is defined by its Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, but another white variety is notably winning over sommeliers and consumers alike: the lively, versatile Aligoté from the Bourgogne Aligoté appellation.

A true Bourgogne grape, Aligoté was first discovered in the region in the 17th century and shares its origins with Chardonnay (both are crossings of Gouais Blanc and Pinot Noir). But while Aligoté vines produced bigger, more plentiful grapes, they were largely replaced by their nobler sibling when phylloxera struck Bourgogne's vineyards in the late 1800s. Today, the grape comprises 6% of the region's total plantings.

While some villages, namely Bouzeron, have gained prominence for their Bourgogne Aligoté wines, the Bourgogne Aligoté AOC—created in 1937—covers the entire winegrowing region from Chablis to the Mâconnais. As winemakers and growers help realize its potential by giving it more attention and care in the vineyard and cellar, the spectrum of styles available of this incredibly terroir-expressive wine grows wider: Bourgogne Aligoté brims with mouthwatering acidity and salinity as well as a nose driven by green apple, peach, lemon, and white flowers, yielding expressions that can range from light and refreshing to rich and ageworthy.

This versatility and thirst-quenching vibrancy are precisely why wine lovers are embracing Bourgogne Aligoté as a pairing with dishes ranging from oysters to aged cheese and roast chicken. For these reasons—and many more—sommeliers agree that it should be an essential component of any wine list: Read on to see why ten professionals from across the U.S. are featuring Bourgogne Aligoté in their own programs.

Erik Segelbaum

Founder and Principal, SOMLYAY LLC, Washington, D.C.

Erik Segelbaum has included Bourgogne Aligoté in numerous wine lists over the course of his career. "With bright, focused acidity and the ability to magnify terroir, Aligoté Bourgogne has always been an invaluable tool in my white-wine toolbox," he says. "It pairs so well with so many restaurant dishes."

From summer picnics to pasta nights, Segelbaum rarely finds an occasion where Aligoté doesn't fit—but sommeliers aren't the only ones drinking it during their off-hours. "A well-known vigneron once told me that he makes Chardonnay to pay the bills," notes Segelbaum, "and Aligoté to please his palate."



PHOTO COURTESY OF ERIK SEGELBAUM



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREA MORRIS

Andrea Morris

Wine Director, Union Square Cafe, New York, NY

For Andrea Morris, Bourgogne Aligoté strikes that perfect middle ground between accessibility and complexity. "When it's well made, it's one of those wines where you can just enjoy drinking it without thinking too much about it," she says, "but if you pay attention to it, there's actually a lot going on." It also has many of the qualities that Union Square Cafe guests are looking for. "I often introduce them to Aligoté when they want something crisp, lemony, and minerally and are looking for great value," Morris says. "It always delivers!"

PHOTO: KYPO KARAMAS



James Sligh

Sommelier and Education Coordinator, Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels, New York, NY

According to James Sligh, "When treated with respect, Aligoté can express terroir almost more articulately than Chardonnay." Due to the aforementioned variation in styles, he recommends doing a bit of research to know exactly which side of Bourgogne Aligoté you're getting in the bottle, whether it's a lean expression that could substitute for Chablis or a rich cuvée that could offer value to fans of high-end white Bourgogne.

PHOTO: DAVID TURNER



Jennifer Wagoner

Wine Director, Sepia and Proxi, Chicago, IL

At Sepia, "Bourgogne Aligoté is always a staple, as it adds a bit of dimension to the French white section," Jennifer Wagoner says. "It is one of those selections that guests don't realize they love until it is recommended." She finds that many people want to enjoy Bourgogne wines without feeling the need to splurge on the region's top Chardonnays. "Bourgogne Aligoté is a great introduction . . . for guests that are beginning to educate themselves about the region," she adds.

PHOTO COURTESY VANESSA REA-MARCEL



Vanessa Rea-Marcel

Wine Director, Eastern Standard, Boston, MA

"Bourgogne Aligoté is a charming and approachable wine," says Vanessa Rea-Marcel, who offers a variety of expressions from different producers in the cellar at Eastern Standard. She enjoys recommending them to guests who want to drink well without going over budget, and no matter their preferences, it's often a good fit. "There are wines that showcase an array of styles: distinct mineral qualities, precise and focused acidity, [and] warm and round texture," notes Rea-Marcel.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVEN McDONALD



Steven McDonald, MS

Wine Director, Pappas Bros. Steakhouse Houston Galleria, Houston, TX

Anyone who doubts the affection that Steven McDonald, MS, proclaims for Aligoté can refer to his YouTube channel, Space City Somms. In a song titled, naturally, "Aligoté," he summarizes the grape's appeal: "Aligoté is my go-to when I can't splurge on the Grand Cru." McDonald notes that trying Bourgogne Aligoté from famous white Bourgogne producers has become a hobby because "it can offer a window into a [label] that would otherwise be unaffordable. Producers seem to be capturing a younger consumer that can then graduate up through their more premium wines."

PHOTO: ALIZA ELIAZAROV

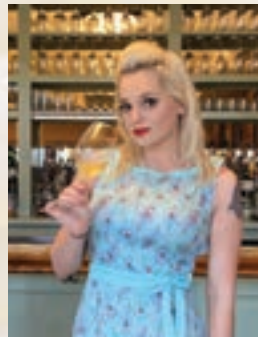


Chris Struck

Sommelier, Crown Shy, New York, NY

Chris Struck is yet another somm who's pleased to have witnessed Bourgogne Aligoté's star rise in the U.S. market in recent years. "I get really excited when I see a good one by the glass somewhere," he says. "It's relatively affordable and totally distinct from Chardonnay." Struck notes that he uses the category to introduce guests to something new without making them stray too far from their comfort zones. "If you see it [available] by the glass in a restaurant, give it a go!" he adds. "Aligoté could be your next favorite grape."

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOBBIE BURGESS



Bobbie Burgess

Wine Director, Eat Local Starkville, Starkville, MS

Bobbie Burgess has found Bourgogne Aligoté to be a valuable asset in a wine list centered around guest education. "Aligoté is a unique variety that a lot of people are unfamiliar with, so, for my restaurant program, it is a great conversational wine," she says. To endear Bourgogne Aligoté to new consumers, Burgess not only regularly shares samples but also includes it in wine flights and tasting menus.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TORI CIAMBRIELLO



Tori Ciambriello

Assistant General Manager, Gage & Tollner, New York, NY

Bourgogne Aligoté is a go-to for Tori Ciambriello both personally and professionally. “From an economic standpoint, Bourgogne Aligotés are typically killer values, and you need bottles like that on your list,” she says. “From a personal standpoint, it’s simply delicious.” Like Segelbaum, she’s found that it’s also a good match for many occasions, from casual, family-style meals to fine-dining tasting menus. “For somms, it can be a secret weapon,” adds Ciambriello.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JACOB BROWN



Jacob Brown

Sommelier, Lazy Bear, San Francisco, CA

“I love top-end Burgundy, but my wallet does not,” jokes Jacob Brown. “Bourgogne Aligoté allows me to drink some of [the region’s] greats without having to check my bank account first.” Like McDonald, he finds it exciting that Bourgogne’s most well-known producers take as much pride in their Bourgogne Aligoté as they do in their top cuvées. But given the category’s appeal, Brown doesn’t believe that it will stay under the radar. “Try it and show it off now,” he says, “because I don’t think it will be around at these price points for much longer.” SJ

SELECTIONS CURATED BY PUBLISHER MERIDITH MAY

Domaine Rollin Père et Fils 2017

Bourgogne Aligoté Half of the vines that produced the fruit for this elegant and nervy wine are 50 years old. The nose is flinty, with fresh, vivid flavors of white flowers and white melon.

ROSENTHAL

Marcel Giraudon 2018 Bourgogne

Aligoté Vibrant ripe fruit, apple tart, and mandarin orange appear on the nose and palate, where they meld with Italian herbs and gardenia. Minerality pops on the finish.

WINE TRADITIONS LTD., FALLS CHURCH, VA

Louis Latour 2017 Bourgogne

Aligoté Average vine age is 30 years. Aromas of almond, quince, and white flowers precede melt-in-your-mouth flavors of lemon drop. Bright acidity and minerality remain in harmony alongside a generous splash of just-ripe pineapple.

Guy Amiot et Fils 2017 Bourgogne

Aligoté From 80-year-old vines planted in clay and limestone soil. Chamomile, lychee, and lanolin perfume the glass. The mouthfeel is luscious and rich yet has a steely core defined by tangerine, key lime, kiwi, and cashew butter.

SUMMIT SELECTIONS, NY

Domaine Chevrot 2018 Bourgogne

Aligoté Cuvée des Quatres Terroirs

The perfume that exudes from this graceful wine ranges from tangerine and lime to golden flower petals. The steely entry bursts with white flowers and linen before giving way to a juicy mid-palate.

Vignerons de Buxy 2018 Bourgogne

Aligoté Cuvée Silex Aromatics of brioche and green apple are enhanced by a clean and lively mouthfeel. Reined in by lemongrass, hazelnut lands on a slightly creamy mid-palate.

REGAL WINES

BOWLER

Domaine Sylvain Langoureau 2018

Bourgogne Aligoté Mineral-driven aromas lead to a chalky yet broad mouthfeel. Honeyed pear and exotic floral tones meet a zingy snap on the finish.

Domaines Albert Bichot 2018

Bourgogne Aligoté A minerally nose melds with sweet toffee and floral scents that carry over to the palate with notes of almond, making for a vivid and edgy white with zing.

ALBERT BICHOT USA LLC, HENRICO, VA

T. EDWARD WINES

Guilhem et Jean-Hugues Goisot

2018 Bourgogne Aligoté Made with fruit grown in soils comprising dense clay and fossilized oyster shells. Following aromas of tarragon and lemon verbena, dried herbs, lime blossom, and jasmine excite the palate. The texture becomes richer midway, expanding to a creamy finish. Jean-Hugues Goisot was among the first Bourgogne producers to practice Biodynamic viticulture.

POLANER SELECTIONS

Domaine Bernard Defaix 2018

Bourgogne Aligoté The flinty, tart nose exudes green citrus and the entry is racy and sleek, with a saltiness surrounding Asian pear and tarragon. Aged on fine lees for eight months.

WINEBOW

Jean-Philippe Fichet 2018 Bour-

gogne Aligoté From a producer known for its Meursault, this wine offers a seductive aroma of creamy orange custard. Flint and stone fruit band together with a dot of ginger root and a salinity that stays sharp on the finish.

THE RARE WINE CO., BRISBANE, CA