

# The New York Times

## New Beaujolais, but Not Nouveau

[Wines of The Times](#)

By [ERIC ASIMOV](#) APRIL 6, 2017

**The Beaujolais region of France, long known for mass-produced wines, has proved that it can make complex wines as well.**

Credit Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

The Beaujolais revival has been one of the most inspiring wine stories of the 21st century.

This region, which in the last quarter of the 20th century had largely devoted itself to the mass production of fruity, treacly Beaujolais Nouveau, had been left moribund by a steep decline in demand. By the late '90s, the area was in crisis. Unsold wine was distilled into industrial alcohol, and whole vineyards went unharvested as some farmers cut their losses by letting the fruit rot rather than turn it into wine. Since then, the evolution of Beaujolais has been astounding. A small group of growers, who clung to the notion of making fine wine despite the Nouveau craze, served as a model for others. They demonstrated that by emphasizing quality over quantity, they could sell their wines for higher prices and achieve greater profit margins than could be done with Nouveau. This approach required meticulous farming. Winemakers skipped the manipulations that characterized so much of Beaujolais Nouveau production. It proved that the region, which even in the days before the Nouveau craze was known for simple thirst-quenching wines, could make complex wines as well.

This new Beaujolais earned a devoted following among people who recognized the value in wines that could combine the juicy joy inherent in gamay, the grape of red Beaujolais, with a clear sense of place. As the popularity of top producers has risen, so have prices. My former colleague [Frank J. Prial](#), who covered wine for The Times for more than three decades, cherished good Beaujolais yet was appalled by the notion of a \$20 bottle. I often wonder what he would think now that top cuvées are going for \$50 or more. Almost all the attention paid to the Beaujolais revival has focused on the so-called crus, the 10 appellations in the hilly northern part of the region that are not only regarded as capable of making the best wines, but also offer the most distinctive terroirs. Their names alone — Brouilly, Côte de Brouilly, Chénas, Chiroubles, Fleurie, Juliénas, Morgon, Moulin-à-Vent, Régnié and St.-Amour — inspire mouthwatering thirst.

But the crus account for only a small amount of the region's production. What of the two appellations, Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages, that are considered lower on the region's quality ladder but supply most of its production? Have they been bypassed by the revolution that has lifted the crus? The wine panel decided to find out. We recently tasted 20 bottles of plain Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages from the 2015 vintage. For the tasting, Florence Fabricant and I were joined by Kimberly Prokoshyn, the head sommelier at [Rebelle](#) in NoLiTa, and Michael Madrigale, a former head sommelier at Bar Boulud who is now working as a wine consultant. Although we lumped together Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages, they are in fact quite different. The entire region comprises a narrow, approximate rectangle stretching about 34 miles from northwest of the city of Lyon on its southern end to the Mâconnais in the north.

The flatter southern half of the region, roughly up to the town of Villefranche-sur-Saône and made up largely of sandstone and clay soils with a bit of limestone, is the province of plain Beaujolais. It is also the source of much of the Beaujolais Nouveau still produced. Beaujolais-Villages comes from the granite soils of the north, outside the 10 crus that have been deemed superior. In an effort to distance themselves from any negative associations that remain with the term "Beaujolais," many of the cru producers have chosen to eliminate the word from their labels. But as our tasting demonstrated, Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages can be delightful wines, generally not as refined as the best crus, but delicious and satisfying. Much of the production of both appellations comes from large merchants who buy grapes or even wines and sell it under their own labels. Some, like Louis Jadot, can be quite good. We focused mostly on wines from vigneron, small producers who both grow the grapes and make the wines. Some make a range of cru wines as well, or come from families that do.

The 2015 vintage produced a ripe, fruity, substantial style of wine that will please a lot of people, though many Beaujolais aficionados may prefer more nuanced wines. Still, these were good. “Ripe vintages raise all boats,” Michael said. “Fruit is very consumer-friendly, but these were expressive.” Some of the wines seemed so rich and full that they could be mistaken for southern Rhône. “Juicy and friendly is very accessible,” Kimberly said, “but the vintage is obvious.” Many of the wines were delicious and most were good values, though some crept up into the mid-\$20s, cru Beaujolais territory, largely because of the small production. Our No. 1 bottle was a bright, earthy, lip-smacking, slightly rustic straight Beaujolais from Château Cambon, the kind of wine that you simply don’t want to stop drinking. It seems that much of Cambon’s 2015 production is now sold out, but the importer says the 2016s will be arriving in stores soon. The ’16s will most likely not be as ripe and fruity as the ’15s, but the quality of the producer is almost always more important than the character of the vintage. So even if you cannot find the exact wine that we liked so much, or any of the other ’15s, I would not pass up the 2016s.

Our second choice was the lively, refreshing Beaujolais-Villages La Roche from [Michel et Sylvain Tête](#), whose Domain du Clos du Fief makes excellent Juliéna wines. This bottle, at \$18, was also our best value.

It was followed closely by the spicy, floral Beaujolais Les Bullands from [Justin Dutraive](#), who also works with his father, Jean-Louis Dutraive, making terrific cru Beaujolais from Fleurie and Brouilly. At No. 4 was the savory, spicy Beaujolais La Saoulée from Nathalie Banes, which was also the most expensive bottle in our tasting at \$27. Though dense and somewhat tannic, showing the effects of the ’15 vintage, we liked its bright, peppery flavors. Daily inspiration, delicious recipes, and other updates from Sam Sifton and The New York Times, right to your inbox. Receive occasional updates and special offers for The New York Times's products and services.

The next group included another rich, tannic wine, the floral, mineral Beaujolais-Villages Vieilles Vignes from Château Bel Avenir; the spicy, floral Beaujolais L’Ancien from one of my favorite Beaujolais producers, [Jean-Paul Brun’s Domaine des Terres Dorées](#); and the bright yet funky Beaujolais-Villages from Christophe Pacalet.

The inexpensive end of our spectrum included two very good \$14 bottles, the juicy, earthy Beaujolais Les Grandes Coasses from Paul Durdilly and the zesty, vibrant Beaujolais Beau from Barbet. It was clear from our tasting that the Beaujolais revolution has not been entirely restricted to the crus. These are simpler wines, as would be expected from lesser terroirs. But they are delicious in their own right and ample evidence that Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages have a lot to offer when the wines are made simply and conscientiously from grapes grown with care.

## Tasting Notes

★★★ **CHÂTEAU CAMBON BEAUJOLAIS 2015** \$20 Bright and earthy, with lip-smacking flavors of tart red fruits, herbs and a touch of funk. (Savio Soares Selections, Brooklyn)

### BEST VALUE

★★★ **MICHEL ET SYLVAIN TÊTE DOMAINE DU CLOS DU FIEF BEAUJOLAIS-VILLAGES LA ROCHE 2015** \$18 Lively and refreshing, with savory flavors of crunchy red fruits, minerals and licorice. (Skurnik Wines, New York)

★★★ **JUSTIN DUTRAIVE BEAUJOLAIS LES BULLANDS 2015** \$24 Spicy and lightly funky, with deep, earthy, floral aromas and flavors of tart red fruits. (Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, N.Y.)

★★★ **NATHALIE BANES BEAUJOLAIS LA SAOULÉE 2015** \$27 Savory, spicy and floral, with a tannic, dense texture. (Goatboy Selections, U.S.A. Wine Imports, New York)

★★½ **CHÂTEAU BEL AVENIR BEAUJOLAIS-VILLAGES VIEILLES VIGNES 2015** \$24 Rich and tannic, with flavors of dark fruits, flowers and minerals. (Fruit of the Vines, Long Island City, N.Y.)

★★½ **JEAN-PAUL BRUN DOMAINE DES TERRES DORÉES BEAUJOLAIS L'ANCIEN VIEILLES VIGNES 2015** \$18 Bright, spicy and inviting, with aromas of flowers and tart red fruits. (Louis/Dressner Selections, New York)

★★½ **CHRISTOPHE PACALET BEAUJOLAIS-VILLAGES 2015** \$18 Straightforward and pleasing, with bright, spicy, funky flavors of dark fruit. (Winebow, New York)

★★ **PAUL DURDILLY BEAUJOLAIS LES GRANDES COASSES 2015** \$14 Bright, juicy, earthy and delightful. (Skurnik Wines)

★★ **BARBET BEAUJOLAIS BEAU 2015** \$14 Zesty and vibrant, with rich, bright flavors of dark fruit. (David Bowler Wine, New York)

★★ **DOMAINE ROMY BEAUJOLAIS VIEILLES VIGNES LES PIERRES DORÉES 2015** \$17 Taut yet juicy, with bright, earthy flavors of red fruits. (Massanois, New York)

**What the Stars Mean** Ratings, up to four stars, reflect the panel's reaction to the wines, which were tasted with names and vintages concealed. The wines represent a selection generally available in good retail shops and restaurants and on the internet. Prices are those paid in the New York region. Tasting coordinator: Bernard Kirsch

The everyday Beaujolais wines in our tasting were proof that the gamay grape, under the right winemaker, creates pleasurable, food-friendly wines. The lively acidity and structure in these bottles, as well as whispers of tannin here and there, reinforced the well-trodden point that you can drink Beaujolais with any food. A cool bottle of garnet Beaujolais like the Château Cambon, with its dark fruit and whisper of smoke, makes a fine partner for a salad built around quinoa and mixed with sautéed Swiss chard, meaty little mushrooms and a garnish of goat cheese. Serve it warm or hot alongside grilled meat, seafood or poultry, or let it stand on its own at room temperature as a first course, for lunch or in a picnic basket. Letting it sit a bit improves the texture.

FLORENCE FABRICANT