

Selections



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Why Gambal on Burgundy???

Actually, there is no gambling involved when it comes to Burgundy produced by Maison Alex Gambal. This is particularly so when the wines in question comes from the already legendary 2005 vintage. But before we get to his exquisite wine (a joyful experience I assure you), I must tell you about Alex and how we came to represent this world renowned Burgundian micro-négociant in Ontario.

Good friends from Aurora and Toronto told us about Maison Alex Gambal. They have a terrific apartment in downtown Beaune (available from time-to-time for weekly rental – let me know if you would like more information) and I strongly suspect that they literally stumbled upon the winery (only a couple of blocks from their home) after a splendid lunch, perhaps at Ma Cuisine ... escargot with a luscious Meursault, Coq au Vin with a lively Gevrey-Chambertin, - but I digress! They fell in love with the Gambal wines and got to know Alex from their regular sorties to his winery (rumour has it that there is a discernable path worn in the cobblestones between the apartment and winery). While their thirst was well slaked in France, they had a major supply problem on this side of the Atlantic – it was severely limited to what they could mule back on return trips. But there is nothing like deprivation to set the creative juices in motion. Why not get Arthur's Cellar Wine Club to import Alex' wines? And, the rest as they say is history.

As to Alex and Maison Alex Gambal, here is what Decanter Magazine writer Stephen Brook says in the September 2007 edition – 'The Outsiders – They're young, ambitious and they've given up careers around the world to make Burgundy' ...

The car park attendant

Alex Gambal has implanted himself in the heart of Burgundy, with a winery and tasting room on the boulevard circling the ramparts of Beaune. A trim and youthful 50-year-old, Gambal used to run the family business – car parks – near Washington [DC]. He would hang out at local wine shops, though at first was more attracted by Rhône wines than Burgundy. In the early 1990s he decided to bring his young family to France on a kind of sabbatical. A meeting with US wine broker Becky Wasserman, who had installed herself in Burgundy in the late 1960s, led in 1992 to an apprenticeship in her office, where his wife Nancy also helped out as a graphic artist. The Gambals stayed put.



Alex Gambal

By 1996 Alex knew he wanted to be a négociant, specializing in high-quality wines. He started his business after a year's study in Beaune at the Lycée Viticole. Brokers helped him source good grapes, and friends he had made over the years sold him some barrels of finished wine. In 1998 he rented space in Beaune.

‘There was no heating, and a squat toilet. Every dime we made went into the wines. By 2000 I thought we could make a go of the business, so I began to invest more in the winery. I had good wines in the cellar, but the hard part was selling them. I persevered and found markets for our generic Burgundies, which are of good quality and account for about half our production. And I have developed customer loyalty by having an open-door policy. That means we welcome visitors to our tasting room and spend time with them.

For new négociants such as ourselves, it's hard to find premiers and grand crus of high quality. Many growers are poor winemakers and can't sell their wines easily, so we've been persuading some of them to sell their grapes to us and let us handle the harvest. We also started acquiring grapes and then trading them for others if we were after a particular cru.’

Did he experience any hostility from Burgundians? ‘No, because I came with no baggage. In fact being an outsider was an advantage, as I could see the good and bad things about the region. Most of my transactions have been based on personal contacts: getting to know people at tastings, or finding their kids go to the same school as mine. But many growers are becoming négociants themselves, as they can't afford to expand their holdings. That means fewer grapes are on the market. So it's not easy to maintain continuity of supply. I currently have three barrels of Clos Vougeot from the best sector, but I don't know how long the grower will remain loyal.’

Gambal now produces about 50,000 bottles a year, with whites from Chassagne and Meursault consistently good. In 2005 he bought his first vineyards, 1.7ha (hectares) of Bourgogne close to Volnay.



Fabrice and Sophie Laronze in the modern winery

Alex Gambal makes very, very good Burgundy. His wines consistently earn 90+ ratings in the Wine Spectator and rave reviews in many other wine publications around the world. We trotted



out our featured Gambal wines at a recent wine tasting event and the oohs and aahs were deafening (in between the slurping) and not a crachoir (spittoon) was used! While Alex oversees every detail in his winemaking process, including being in the fields to make certain he gets the best grapes, he doesn't do it alone. He is most ably assisted by the husband and wife team of Fabrice and Sophie Laronze. Fabrice is the talented winemaker and Sophie looks after the office and dealing with English speaking blokes when she isn't helping out with all the other chores associated with a very busy winery. You can see her at work here at the sorting table where she and others are hand selecting the grapes

to make certain only the best end up in the final product.

The Wines!

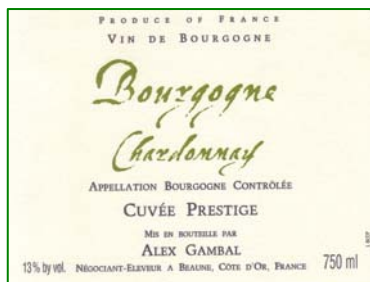
And now to the wines. 2005 was indeed a grand year for Burgundians and their grapes and those who know how (including Alex and Fabrice) made classic, stunning wines. Alex has included detailed notes and insights about the vintage on his website www.alexgambal.com and they are definitely worth reading. You will find them under 'Our Wines' and then 'Vintage Notes'. In fact, the whole website is worth the read. If there is one thing other than the superlatives to take away from Alex' notes (and it was constantly repeated by other vintners during our visit to Burgundy last spring) is that the 2005 wines will benefit from several years in the cellar. I like his line, "If we had any courage we would ship the 06s *before* the 05s." If you lack self restraint like most of us and must try a bottle or two now, please decant the wines (yes, the whites as well) several hours before consuming and please serve several degrees below room temperature (around 16°C).

All of the Maison Alex Gambal wines come twelve bottles to the case. They are very reasonably priced for great Burgundy, but great Burgundy is expensive. To help out, Alex has put together a special mixed case of each of our three featured wines. Find a friend, two or three to share a case, but whatever you do, don't miss out on these stunning wines. We will be placing our order with the LCBO on **Wednesday, November 21**.

I have used Alex' tasting notes to describe the wines.

2005 Bourgogne Chardonnay Cuvée Prestige – (13.0% Alc./Vol.)

\$36.00

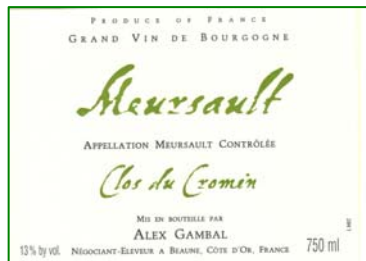


'Our Cuvée Prestige continues to please with its ripeness and richness. We harvest the grapes from the Haute Côte de Beaune which gives it minerality and now we add in barrels from our other parcels which give it richness. As usual it was made with about 20% new oak and we made ~315 cases.'

This is really wonderful Chardonnay and in my opinion is unfair competition for Californian or other new world Chardonnay in the same price range! Go ahead, [treat yourself](#).

2005 Meursault Clos du Cromin – (13.0% Alc./Vol.)

\$ 61.00



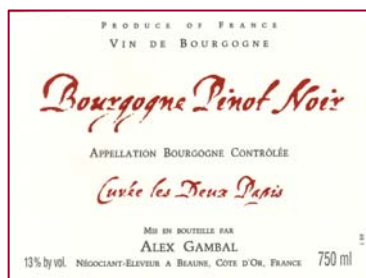
‘Why change the story? "I sound like a broken record but our Cromin comes from magnificent very old +65 years "sélection massale" vines that are not the uniform producing cloned variety but are twisted, beautiful and produce small tiny berries. There are also a few Muscat or "Muscat Chardonnay" plants intermingled that give the wine its exotic nose." This year it was a bit temperamental during its elevage but tasting it now 4 months after its bottling it is hitting its stride with its characteristic richness and wet stone quality. 30% new oak and we

made ~150 cases.’

Two weeks ago, our panel of happy tasters muttered comments like ‘classic Meursault’, ‘marvellous’ and ‘please sir, I want more’! We find this wine to be drinking quite nicely now and can only imagine what it will be like in five or ten years. [Order](#) this classic for your cellar.

2005 Bourgogne Pinot Noir Cuvée les Deux Papis – (13.0% Alc./Vol.)

\$34.00



‘At last we have our own vines and the 2005 confirmed my instincts that the parcels we bought would make a terrific bottle of Pinot Noir. We bought the parcels in the same areas and in two cases from the same vineyards where we had been buying grapes Montpoulain, and Condemaine and picked up some Longbois and a great parcel of Les Petits Prés which was classified as Volnay Village before the AOC. The 2005 is elegant, cool, more on the dark fruit side and with a wonderful texture to the tannins. We used about 10% new oak and

made ~850 cases.’

Once again, this wine is pleasing to drink right now and we can only imagine what it will be like in five or six years. And once again I defy you to find a better Pinot Noir in this price range. [Add this](#) to your collection of special wines!

2005 Alex Gambal Mixed Case Sample – (13.0% Alc./Vol.)

\$43.65

As a special for the Members of Arthur’s Cellar Wine Club, Alex has pulled together a special case of four of each of his wines featured above – the 2005 Bourgogne Chardonnay Cuvée Prestige; the 2005 Meursault Clos du Cromin, and; the 2005 Bourgogne Pinot Noir Cuvée les Deux Papis. What a great way to try these very special wines. Split it with a pal or three – but then you’ll have that much less to enjoy at a later date! [Order](#) Alex’ mixed sample case now.

For the Serious Collector



Maison Alex Gambal has a very limited supply (in fact, some or all of it might be gone by the time we go to press) of the following four wines. If you would like any of this wine, please e-mail me directly at jaswalker@arthursellers.com and I will contact the winery to confirm availability and reserve the wine for our shipment.

2005 Corton Charlemagne – (13.0% Alc./Vol.)

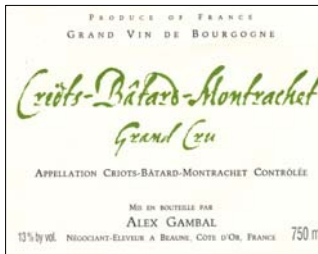
\$143.00



Charlemagne or "Chuck" as we affectionately call him is as handsome and great as he has ever been in 2005. What I am still amazed by is how and why when you taste certain wines the flavor lasts for minutes afterwards. I tasted the 2004 the other day and its tightness and exuberance might even be overshadowed by 2005 because of its added concentration and ripeness. On verra (we will see)... ~100 cases and 50% new oak. A wine to drink in 7-10 years.

2005 Criots Batard Montrachet – (13.0% Alc./Vol.)

\$299.00

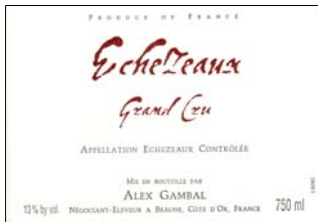


I hate using adjectives to describe how wine tastes. In my view it is not only often presumptuous because it assumes the drinker cannot figure it out for themselves but it often is dead wrong. Here though my sense of how wines from Puligny taste is as clear as it has ever been. Our Criots attacks with a lemon cream wave and then concentrates to a point and the aftertaste goes on and on. It is the opposite of Charlemagne visually; the Charlemagne is a point that expands outwards while the Criots is a wave that paradoxically gains power as it comes to a point in the distance. For

those of you who remember your art classes think vanishing point and you will understand the image. ~50 cases and 50% new oak.

2005 Echezeaux – (13.0% Alc./Vol.)

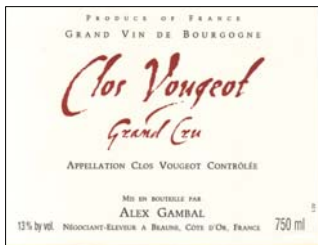
\$135.00



One of my "Masters of the Universe" retired after harvest 2005 so this is the last year of our Echezeaux. How could we do better than to have wine from vines planted in 1945 in the heart of Echezeaux? 2005 is concentrated, with spicy smooth tannins that hide their level that will allow this wine to age for 15-20-25 years. Grand vin. ~75 cases 33% new oak.

2005 Clos Vougeot Grand Cru – (13.0% Alc./Vol.)

\$155.00



Dense with elegance; this is the first impression then there is the length and the layers of flavors. As usual 3 barrels from the top of the hill next to the wall and 2 barrels from the middle center, 4/5 very old vines and 66% new oak. Please put this one away for 7-10 years and you will be wowed and begin to see why we talk about Clos Vougeot and not Pinot Noir. ~125 cases made.

I copied the following down from somewhere, but did not note the author. It says a great deal about Burgundians, including new ones like Alex Gambal:

In general, Burgundians are warm, outward-going, hospitable people who seem glad to be alive and celebrate with good food and wine. But they also have a certain philosophy - they know that one bad hail storm can wipe out an entire village. And so they console themselves with the old adage, "When my glass is full, I empty it; when it is empty, I fill it." We hope you will join us in filling your glasses with the marvellous wines from Maison Alex Gambal.

Soon to Emerge from Arthur's Cellar

Next will be some more Parker rated Châteauneuf-du-Pape (these from Mousset-Barrot) and then some more marvellous Italian Barbera d'Asti, this time from Poderi Rosso Giovanni. After that there will be some delightful Beaujolais from Domaine du Pelois, some delicious whites from Domaine Tara (Côtes de Ventoux) and the terrific, value-priced Côtes-du-Rhône from Château Bosc la Croix along with the return of many of your favourites.

2004 Notturmo, Barbera d'Asti Superiore – Wonderful Response

Response to our 2004 Notturmo, Barbera d'Asti Superiore has been overwhelmingly positive. It is still available at many LCBO VINTAGES stores for only \$19.95 a bottle - product # 026088. If you haven't tried it, we encourage you to do so; if you have and enjoyed it, please let others know.

Member Feedback

Your feedback is greatly appreciated. It helps us improve our club and better respond to your requirements. Many of your suggestions have been implemented and we are working on several others. Thank you and please keep the comments coming (jaswalker@arthursellers.com).

For the wine club to be successful, we need as many wine buying members as possible – please forward this newsletter to likely prospects and keep those referrals coming.

Thank you and cheers!

Hélène and Jim

www.arthursellers.com

jaswalker@arthursellers.com