

BEAUJOLAIS 2009

Forget all you know about Beaujolais Nouveau. In this stellar vintage, **CHRISTELLE GUIBERT** finds the crus wines are worth serious attention

Rolling hills, winding country lanes, medieval villages and the snowcapped Alps on the horizon... Why is the picturesque region of Beaujolais so overlooked? And its wine so underrated? Beaujolais Nouveau may have a bit to do with it – this unfashionable marketing spectacle has damaged the region's image. But Beaujolais has much more to offer in its 10 crus, which reflect the heart and soul of its terroir.

In a great vintage, crus Beaujolais are a real bargain – and 2009 was such a year, blessed with ideal weather: moderate heat, sufficient rain and cool intervals, resulting in a uniform harvest, healthy grapes and perfect maturation. The wines are exceptional; producers haven't seen a vintage like this in decades.

Isabelle Legeron MW and I tasted our way through 144 wines over several days

in the region, and we were overwhelmed by the purity of fruit, structure, richness and freshness of the wines.

We found two distinct forms of winemaking: the traditional Burgundian style; and the classic carbonic maceration method where whole, uncrushed Gamay grapes are fermented in a sealed tank filled with carbon dioxide. This latter technique results in wines tasting of bubblegum and banana, which masks the grape's character and terroir identity.

But when made like Burgundy, Gamay can age and taste like a fine Pinot Noir, with wild red fruit, truffle and gamey characters. I was lucky enough to share a 1962 Morgon with the producer Jean-Marc Burgaud. The wine was very much alive and still had amazing freshness.

Below: the crus Beaujolais of 2009 are as spectacular as the region's scenery

The winemaking techniques back in the 1960s were very different, so time will tell if these 2009s will age as well, but the top wines will definitely improve. Don't rush to drink them – keep a few bottles in your cellar to age gracefully. With luck, in 10 or 20 years' time, they will develop into something remarkable. Cru Beaujolais is at its best cool, but not cold. Here's our pick of the best wines of 2009, cru by cru...

Brouilly

The 10 Beaujolais crus are located in the north of the region and Brouilly is the furthest south – and also the largest. With a high proportion of granite in the soil, the wines typically express buckets of red juicy fruit, and have a soft structure. Brouilly wines have traditionally been the most popular Beaujolais served in Parisian bistros.

