

New life breathed into an old name in Burgundy.

No one could accuse Laurent Delaunay of underinvesting in his relaunch of the Burgundy négociant business founded in 1893 by his great-great-grandfather (second from the right, top row below). As explained towards the end of Bibulous dinners described, in 2017 fifth-generation wine producer Laurent bought back the business from much bigger négociant Boisset, who had owned it since 1992.

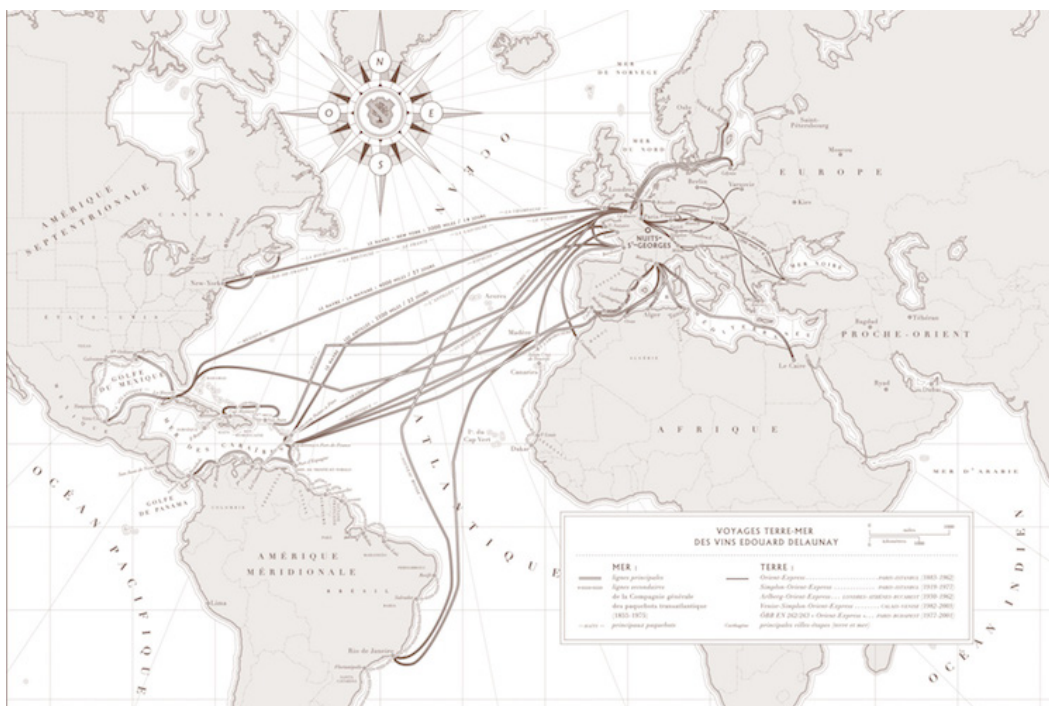
Laurent and his wife Catherine, both graduates of Dijon wine school, joined his father in the family business in 1989 and continued for a while when it was sold to Boisset, but this was at the time of the Gulf War recession. They set out on their own in 1995, co-founding the Languedoc négociant Badet Clément and acquiring several more Languedoc wine producers along the way, including Les Jamelles, and Abbotts (renamed Abbotts & Delaunay) from Nigel Sneyd MW.

In 2003 they had bought a small distribution company in Burgundy, DVP, but the purchase of the name Edouard Delaunay came about after Laurent met Jean-Charles Boisset in a restaurant in 2016. Boisset, not surprisingly, kept the 15 ha (37 acres) of vineyards that had come with the Edouard Delaunay business, including some that are now part of Dom de la Vougeraie, but once the sale was agreed, Laurent Delaunay began to buy wine, three small cuvées in 2016 and 25 in 2017. He has renovated cellars at the rather grand Ch de Charmont property in L'Étang-Vergy in the Hautes-Côtes (pictured below and at the top of this article) that the family had bought in the 1950s. He also put a winemaking team together headed by Christophe Briotet, who has international experience and was apparently chief winemaker at the Lycée Viticole in Beaune. Total capacity at Ch de Charmont, he says, is 10,000 cases.



Now that he is able to (re)launch the company properly, Laurent Delaunay has gone the whole PR hog – in a rather unBurgundian way. Those of us invited to the tasting and lunch at Hide restaurant in London that comprised the UK media launch were treated to a soulful film about the enterprise, extremely lavish booklets backed up by a data stick and a smart website whose slogan is ‘The Most Atypical of the Great Houses of Burgundy’. A tasting of 2017s was supplemented by some choice examples of the 400-bottle family cellar of museum wines, including the odd bottle as old as 1911 and most vintages from 1929 onwards.

Of course there is no direct relationship between the older wines described below and the rather more pedestrian 2017s, but none of us was going to refuse to taste a 1955 Corton-Bressandes because of that.



The distinguishing characteristic of the original négociant business was how ambitiously Laurent's forefathers exported from their base in what was then the thriving wine centre of Dijon. Edouard Delaunay wines were to be found on virtually every continent, and in the mid twentieth century the company was particularly active in supplying airlines and shipping lines, as well as distributing such names as Ramonet and Dugat. At one point the company was the exclusive distributor of Liger-Belair's La Romanée. In the 1970s and 1980s, Laurent told us, Edouard Delaunay wines were represented in the UK by David Peppercorn MW.

This was not the only name dropped. Laurent's sister is married to Vincent Bouzereau of Meursault and he told us that being so well plugged in to the growers of the Côte d'Or has helped him enormously in putting together the new portfolio. They made 60,000 bottles of wine in 2017 and 'much more' in 2018, when he was thrilled to get his hands on some Griottes-Chambertin. The Côte d'Or represents about half of production, wines based on Pinot Noir three-quarters. The focus is on Nuits-St-Georges, an appellation he thinks ripe for improvement in terms of both quality and image.

Despite owning no vineyards, they apparently set the harvest date and do the picking themselves – and Delaunay cited preparation and bottling of the wines as a focus of particular attention. Of course, although he says they work with eight coopers, initially for the 2017 vintage they were short of used barrels – so they shipped some from their enterprises in the Languedoc. The question of the proportion of whole bunch inevitably came up. Nought to 50% depending on wine was the answer.

Knowing their base was in the Hautes-Côtes, and with a bee in my bonnet about the potential for this cooler, higher region in Burgundy's ever-hotter seasons, I asked whether he had any plans to make wine grown there. Apparently the Delaunays used to have 10 ha of vineyard in the Hautes-Côtes de Nuits and, according to Laurent, 'we will definitely move into the Hautes-Côtes. We made a white in 2018, and added two single-vineyard reds in 2019. The soils are similar to Vosne-Romanée and it's 150 m [490 ft] higher.' Sorted then.

The following 24 notes on 23 wines are grouped by colour (there is a pair of notes on the Aux Chaignots Premier Cru Nuits-St-Georges 2017, tasted from different bottles a day apart). Those at the top of each group were tasted by me, in the order shown, but Richard also tasted a range at the end of last year so we have included his tasting notes, too. You can change the order within groups using the menu below.



WHITES

Chardonnay 2017 Bourgogne Côte d'Or: 15.5

Two blocks, one in Auxey and one below Meursault, both AOC Bourgogne. All barrel fermented and aged for 12 months.

Light and creamy with a bit of chew on the end. Mild mannered. Should have some development potential thanks to that astringency.

Drink 2019–2022

St-Romain Le Village 2017: 16.5

Bright gold. Laurent Delaunay is very keen on St-Romain, especially the value (he thinks it has replaced St-Aubin in that respect). Two east-facing vineyards just south of the village including La Périère that the locals really value. Whole bunch for whites if possible. Put aside the free run and reject that last pressing. Spontaneous fermentation. Temperature-controlled winery. 20% new oak.

Quite savoury nose with good race and limpidity. Again quite chewy. Good structure and not unlike a racy modern Meursault.

Drink 2020–2026

Aged for 15 months in oak (20% new).

Melon, green apple, glossy and leesy in texture. Minimal oak influence on the palate with plenty of fruit that has a honeyed tropical tone on the finish. (RH)

Drink 2018–2026

16.5

Chassagne-Montrachet Le Village 2017: 16

Fruit from a lieu-dit very close to Morgeot. Sixteen months in oak, 20% new. Initially as many as 11 barrels but according to Laurent Delaunay they sold off five of them, including just a tiny amount from one or two of them, their winemaker Christophe Briotet arguing this made all the difference to the blend.

Quite spicy and certainly not lacking fruit and juiciness.

Drink 2019–2023

Aged for 15 months in oak (20% new).

Rather flat nose at first, perhaps due to the very cold serving temperature and an unhelpful glass shape. The palate is more tropical, with pineapple and mango fruit. Dry and saline on the finish (unlike their more honeyed St-Romain). Moderately spicy length and quite austere in structure. Very mineral. (RH)

Drink 2019–2023

16.5

Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru 2017: 16.5 ++

Three barrels, of which two were new. Their only grand cru white in 2017. On the Pernand side, quite high. In front of the Charlemagne restaurant. They also get their Corton rouge from there.

Broad nose, but then precise, fresh palate and still quite neutral but clean and well put together. Good energy. More

richness on the finish.

Drink 2024–2036

Bourgogne Aligoté La Vigne de Monsieur Feuillat 2018: 15

Aged in used barrels for five months. Full malolactic conversion.

Light, citric and full of acidic tartness. Some floral notes, and perhaps a nutty element. Sharp creases, but with good refreshment. (RH)

Drink 2019–2020

REDS

Pinot Noir 2017 Bourgogne Côte d'Or: 16.5

Vineyards in Fixin, Chorey and Volnay, vinified separately and blended two months before bottling. A few days at 14 °C and 10% whole bunch. Spontaneous fermentation in tank. Pigeage only during the second half of the fermentation. Some post-fermentation maceration too. 70% aged in barrel with 15% new oak.

Fairly lively, impressive nose. Pretty palate. A little bit of grip on the end but very pretty fruit. Impressive but not cheap!

Drink 2019–2023

€19.90 in France

Light nose. Green, stemmy palate. Very tart and hard. Finishes with peppery spice and sour fruit. Generally underripe. (RH)

Drink 2019–2021

14.5

Santenay Beauregard Premier Cru 2017: 16.5

Laurent Delaunay argues this is the most affordable premier cru.

Fine and fresh-fruited. Already amazingly approachable. Light grainy finish.

Drink 2020–2028

Vougeot Les Petits Vougeots Premier Cru 2017: 17

From a plot just below Les Amoureuses.

Pretty rich. Still with a hint of oak but none of it was new and overall it's really rather sumptuous. Lifted, round and very easy to love. Rich, sweet and perfumed.

Drink 2020–2032

Beaune Les Grèves Premier Cru 2017: 17

From the bottom of the slope.

Bright cherry red. Slightly cheesy nose. Definite grip and precision. A good start for this négociant! Pure finish. Quite long. There is definitely tannin but this wine is very sappy.

Drink 2021–2033

Nuits-St-Georges Le Village Vieilles Vignes 2017: 16.5 +

A very varied AOC so they decided to blend vineyards from Aux Allots in the north, a site just north of the town, and Les Longecourts, south of the town and almost at the southern extremity of the Nuits-St-Georges AOC. Average vine age is more than 45 years. 12–15 months in 30% new oak.

Bright mid crimson. Subtle, layered nose. Fragrant. Juicy but edgy too. Crackling taffeta texture. Dry finish. Very pure. Good stuff.

Drink 2023–2031

Nuits-St-Georges Aux Chaignots Premier Cru 2017: 16.5

Just 591 bottles produced.

Mid crimson with some purple there still. Light, sweet and with a herbal top note and almost imperceptible tannins. Good balance of fruit and acidity. Rather low key with some raspberry fruit. Pretty but arguably a bit soft. Good persistence though. Not dramatic, but in a burgundian context that is probably a good thing.

Drink 2020–2027

Nuits-St-Georges Aux Chaignots Premier Cru 2017: 16.5

Northern site. A little bit south of the slope and the soil is clay-gravel. 14 months and 30% new oak. Just two or three barrels.

Quite rich with remarkably sweet fruit and less pace than would be typical for the next-door appellation of Vosne. Lots to chew on. Very slight bitterness on the end. Much tighter than the bottle tasted at home last night.

Drink 2024–2036

Nuits-St-Georges Les Crots Premier Cru 2017: 17

Southern site, at high elevation. Very shallow soil. Just south of Château Gris. Production will increase because they have found another grower. All destemmed.

Solid and hearty. Lots of grip on the end. Leaner, sinewy and fresh. Fresher than Aux Chaignots, perhaps higher? More limestone?

Drink 2025–2038

Gevrey-Chambertin Le Village Vieilles Vignes 2017: 16

Aged for 15 months in oak (35% new).

Sweet red fruit, which seems particularly plush for Gevrey-Chambertin. There's a bitter, leafy note on the finish. Light spicing with a dry, mostly untannic finish and appetising acidity. (RH)

Drink 2020–2027

Chambolle-Musigny 2017: 16.5

Double decanted 30 minutes before serving. From quite a low vineyard close to the main road. The village where it was most difficult to find grapes. Just two barrels. Les Gamaires on the border with Morey. 'We knew that this was going to be different so all old oak.'

Racy and juicy and perhaps a bit more solid than some but a creditable effort. Solid finish.

Drink 2023–2030

Clos de la Roche Grand Cru 2017: 17

From the part called Mauchon with particularly shallow soils.

Savoury and sleek with remarkable energy and intensity of fruit.

Drink 2023–2036

Charmes- Chambertin Grand Cru 2017: 17.5

Double decanted 30 minutes before serving. One barrel. 80-year-old vines. Very intense – from two blocks, one in Mazoyères. All destemmed. Two-thirds new oak.

This really is very charming. Pure but rich too. Fine tannins. Really very well done.

Drink 2027–2043

Clos de Vougeot Grand Cru 2017: 17+

From the top third of the Clos de Vougeot vineyard. 50% whole-bunch fermented. Aged for 14 months in mostly new oak.

Gorgeously pretty fruit on the nose and palate, plus a ferrous sort of flavour and floral violet scent. Finely balanced tannins with firm acid. Worth waiting for. (RH)

Drink 2023–2033

Griotte Chambertin Grand Cru 1990: 17.5

Was a négoce wine.

Rich and sweet and decadent. And then initially a little dry on the end but this softened. But there is freshness too. Quite lively. Improved in the glass.

Drink 2002–2024

Volnay 1978: 17

Was a négoce wine.

Lustrous ruby. Very sweet and come-hither. Polished tannins. Apparently this wine was pretty tannic in youth but it's now lively and spicy. Animal. Just very slightly simple. Becoming increasingly chewy. Did not improve in the glass.

Drink 1996–2022

Corton Les Bressandes Grand Cru 1955: 19

Was a négoce wine.

Shaded rust colour. Mushrooms, violets, nuanced and delicate. So pure and fresh. Sweet and long. Holds together very well still. A great reminder of what burgundy can do.

Drink 1970–2030