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Nouveau? It's old hat

The reinvention of beaujolais

No one can blame *The Sunday Times'* Atticus column in 1974 for banging a drum that turned out to be so empty, nor Georges Duboeuf for milking the cash cow for all – no, more than – it was worth. Doubtless beaujolais nouveau washing down a good saucisse Lyonnaise, in situ, was fine – but by the time it reached our shores, filtered to within a micrometre of its life, it was mostly little better than water. Thankfully, nouveau is now water under the bridge.

Today, the renovated windmill of Moulin-à-Vent is a fitting symbol of beaujolais' restored pride. A combination of factors are responsible: low yields, old vines, improvements in vineyard and cellar, and the energy of a new generation now relishing turning a sow's ear, the local gamay grape, into a silk purse, of sorts.

When his son came back from overseas, he told Château Thivin's Claude Geoffroy, "Our gamay may not be the sexiest grape, but it's our grape, and it has drinkability and freshness."

Dominique Piron, who recently served China's President Xi Jinping with his beaujolais, agrees: "Beaujolais is back because it's uncomplicated, not expensive, and goes with so many cuisines."

"It's a wine of freshness and concentration when the grapes are old enough," says fifth-generation vigneron Cédric Chignard. And today's growers are justifiably proud of the aromatic fresh reds whose appetising berry fruitiness, often laced with pepper and spice, speak of their varied climate and soils. Whole bunches of gamay grapes undergo a unique fermentation within the grape itself, which brings cherryish juiciness.

Good vintages in recent years have helped, with 2009 rich and opulent, 2011 concentrated and complex and 2014 full-bodied and food-friendly.

At 38 per cent of exports, the UK is the biggest overseas market for the 10 Beaujolais crus, among them Morgon, Moulin-à-Vent and Fleurie, which cover 6,000 hectares in the north of the region in pretty, undulating hilly country. According to Edouard and Morgan Parinet, "We think the way forward is for each cru is to make the name beaujolais once more pleasant to the ears of the customer." ●

See anthonyrosewine.com for a selection of top beaujolais

THREE TO TRY

NIGHT IN



2013 Les Javelles Viognier, IGP Pays d'Oc
From the Languedoc-Roussillon, this unoaked viognier is floral scented with a clean, dry finish. £6.99, The Co-operative

DINNER PARTY



2013 Casillero del Diablo Maipo Reserva Privada
Fine Chilean red with oak veneer, a touch of Maipo mintiness, and a youthful freshness. £8, down from £9.98, Asda

SPLASH OUT



2014 Coney Pizzicato Pinot Noir, Martinborough
From New Zealand's 'little Burgundy'. Fragrant raspberry maritime freshness. £19.99, buy 2 = £14.99 each, Majestic