

Wine Spectator

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bruce sanderson decanted

19 VINTAGES OF LOUIS LATOUR CORTON-CHARLEMAGNE

A vertical tasting shows off 1990 to 2012,
spanning Louis-Fabrice Latour's tenure as head of Maison Latour



With nearly 25 acres of estate vines in Corton-Charlemagne, almost one-third of the appellation, Louis Latour is an important producer. Along with Bonneau du Martray, Latour's Corton-Charlemagne is the version that Americans are most likely to find at restaurants and retail stores.

Louis-Fabrice Latour, president of Beaune-based Louis Latour, was in New York this month to present a vertical of its Corton-Charlemagne from 2012 back to 1990. Not all vintages of the 1990s were represented: There was no 1991, 1994, 1997 or 1998. All the wines came directly from Latour's cellar and were tasted non-blind.

It's a vertical that Louis-Fabrice has done only once before. It encompasses all the harvests he has overseen as head of the company, with the exception of 1989, his first vintage.

Latour was often the last to pick its Chardonnay on the hill of Corton, a stylistic choice made by Louis-Fabrice's father, Louis, and reflected in the opulent profile of the wines. The 1990 and 1992 are examples of this plush, mouthfilling style that, despite reaching 14 percent alcohol, maintained acidity and mineral elements.

This was also the beginning of a streak of warmer vintages. In 2006, the Chardonnay ripened very quickly over a three-day period in September, with acidities falling and the skins showing signs of degradation.

Louis-Fabrice changed the policy slightly with the 2009 harvest, picking earlier to achieve a better balance between acidity and alcohol. In 2010 and 2012, cooler weather resulted in wines that reveal more classic profiles. Combined with the Latour style and the terroir of Corton-Charlemagne, these are balanced, focused, minerally wines that should develop beautifully over time.

My favorite was the 1990 (96 points, non-blind), a great Corton-Charlemagne in its youth (our original rating on release in 1993 was 95 points) that earned the No. 5 spot on Wine Spectator's Top 100 of 1993. Though past its window of peak drinkability, it offers ample honey, ripe yellow fruits, pineapple, spice and mineral flavors. The nose really blossoms after about 30 minutes, and the mineral element intensified, proving there was still life ahead.

"It's one of the best vintages I have ever seen," remarked Latour. "We couldn't sell the wine in the United States, even at \$50, because of the recession." It was also the first vintage Latour introduced green harvesting in Corton-Charlemagne.

The 2002 (95) also showed well, and better than my original review of 92 points. Clean and fresh, it evokes lanolin, green tea, lemon and flint aromas, with a viscous texture. The spice and mineral notes are there, but this is less flamboyant, very intense, long and at its peak now.

One of the biggest surprises was the 1993 (94). It features a terrific bouquet of oyster shell, mineral and smoke, and a savory, saline palate. Though identical in alcohol to the 1990 (13.8 percent) the total acidity was slightly higher and the yield slightly lower. Its taste profile was more linear and taut than the '90.

Latour said the 2005 whites were frustrating because they took so long to open. This one shows its concentration, along with peach and melon flavors, and plenty of chalk and mineral (94). The 2008 (94) still has its flush of youth, showing floral, citrus, peach, apple and spice notes on a juicy frame. The 2012, yet to be released, delivers a pear, peach, apple and citrus core shaded by butterscotch and pastry accents. Though rich, it's bright and focused, with a lingering mineral finish.

"It's early, but the '12 Corton-Charlemagne may be the best since 1990 and 2002," enthused Latour. "It has concentration, acidity, mineral—it has everything. It's like a blend of '08 and '09, the modern Corton-Charlemagne of Latour today."