

With its fresh acidity, energy and a sense of minerality, does Meursault-Blagny have the winning combination to combat global warming?

On a fine day in February 2019 I met with Louis-Fabrice Latour and his winemaker Jean-Charles Thomas at the elegant family HQ in Beaune to taste a vertical of Meursault, Blagny 1er Cru.

I have recorded their impressions within my tasting notes.

Blagny is a particular favourite of mine. I cycle from Auxey-Duresss most evenings in the early summer after tastings. The peaceful medieval hamlet is surrounded by beautiful vineyards, perhaps most entrancing at sunset is the sweeping premier cru La Piece Sous le Bois which blends into La Jeunelotte beside the hamlet. Under this lies the delightfully named Sous le dos d'Ana. These are classified as Meursault-Blagny, Premier Cru and can be declared separately along with the climats Sous Blagny & Les Ravelles or blended into a single premier cru.



On the south side of the road that winds upwards from Champ Canets the appellation becomes Puligny with the 1er crus Hameau de Blagny, La Garenne and Sous les Puits if planted in Chardonnay. In Blagny you feel a world apart from the grand vineyards of Puligny and Meursault lower on the slope... on the Puligny side a copse creates a physical and sensory divide.. as well as providing a special microclimate. In the middle ages this land belonged to the Cistercian monks and there is still a small chapel here.

We will be considering a white wine, but this can be red territory. As a red wine it becomes Blagny premier cru. These days however there are few vines of Pinot Noir, as white is far more profitable and pinot has been grubbed up.

Maison Louis Latour's Meursault, 1er Cru Blagny is a blend of the first three Meursault climats mentioned above. They have been buying here for a very long time. Prior to the mid Seventies they often disappeared into a 1er Cru Meursault blend. "Really at that time only Perrières and Genevrières were made separately. People were not that interested in other 1er cru," remarks Louis-Fabrice. It's a large and important cuvée for the company. A whole crop is 3000-3500 cases of 12 so around 140 barrels."

A large part of the vineyard has belonged for the past 200 years to Montlivault, an old aristocratic family distantly related to Louis Latour. The owners are now farming their property themselves – in the process of taking back the land from different vintners. They follow sustainable farming with a lutte raisonnée approach.

What about the terroir? Thinnish top soil over Bathonian limestone and as Louis-Fabrice remarks, "It's well positioned to give higher acidity."

Here we are at an altitude of 300 up to 360m. The orientation is East with a slight turn to the south in parts. Although it's high, it catches the sunshine as the Meursault vineyards lie in a sort of shallow amphitheatre.

The altitude is of particular interest with global warming. There is a freshness to the site and the wine from here. This has traditionally be considered quite marginal territory for 1er cru at the top of the slope making quite a high wired, nervous lively wine... a style I particularly like, but without the richness and depth in the mid plate of grander 1er cru.



"In the 1980s we typically had 11% alcohol and TA of 8 in Blagny," recalls Louis-Fabrice. Clearly viticultural practice has improved and today one expects better ripeness and lower acidity with a much improved balance. Never-the-less the potential of this area for fresh acidity is interesting. With recent warm summers 2015, 2017 and 2018 a natural lively acidity is sort after. (...)

Jean-Charles: "The biggest surprise is the 2003. The effect of a cold vineyard in a hot vintage."

I agree. 2003 is an extreme example of the advantages of a cooler situation in a hot year, but 2005, 2015 and the current 2018 vintage also demonstrate just how advantageous this site can be as the summers seem more often to be warm and harvests are more often early than late. The low pH and high acidity of 2007 has preserved this vintage from oxidation surprisingly well. However even in a high and cooler location it is still necessary to pick in good time. 2006 was picked a little too late. But the 89, a hot vintage, was still very attractive with just a hint of oxidation on the finish. It was not tired and this is a wine from a hot vintage 30 years ago. Now that's impressive!

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MEURSAULT PREMIER CRU "CHATEAU DE BLAGNY"
VERTICAL 2018-1989
TASTED FEBRUARY 2019



2018 This has a rich citrus palate, but firm acidity; ripe with a good cut of minerality. It is powerful. 13.2 alcohol, but not a heavy, feel the warmth vintage. It's very contained. It is quite leesy with marked new oak, but this is not unusual at this point. It transpired the sample was from new oak and given this, it did not overwhelm. You sense the power and richness of the vintage, but it has a really good cut of dry minerality and freshness. Fair to say that in this hot vintage the situation seems to really assist the balance... be it from the acidity or minerality or both.

SCORE 17.85

2017 November bottling. Fruity and expressive aroma. This is lively and juicy. Quite a slim texture. A joyful wine. Still quite a lot of oak showing, but this should mellow. Overt. Just nicely fresh, but sweeter acidity. Softer than many a vintage in this line up, but nicely balanced. It is very fruity on the finish too. A forward vintage for more immediate drinking. From 2020/21

SCORE 17.5

2016 Elegant notes of white flowers. Concentrated. Glassy. Good depth to the palate. Compact energy and dry salty minerality. Savoury and well edged. Excellent example of Blagny. Needs time. From 2023. Top notch.

SCORE 18

2015 Fruiter than 2016 and also floral, but with slightly exotic flowers. This has an elegant freshness in this warm vintage. Not at all heavy. It has a smooth citrus finish with a hint of minerality at the end... fresh lift after a round middle. An elegant 2015 indeed. On par or a touch better than 2017. From 2020, but not hurry at all...this will age nicely, but does not demand it.

SCORE 17.7

2013 Light note of toast on the nose and a herbal leafy aroma. It is light bodied and fresh with a slight bitterness at the end – a pithy note. There is good acidity. Better than 2011 for sure. Actually I liked this more than I expected. It is drinking very well now.

SCORE 17

2012 Very distinctive candied lemon aroma. Rich and dense. Much thicker texture. Developing very nicely. Polar opposite to the

2013. Here the acidity cuts well though the oily texture of the palate. This has the body too. Lovely now, but I am not sure how beneficially it will age further...not for 10 years, maybe for up to five.

SCORE 17.7

2011 Last good crop before 2017. This is light and thin. It is fresh and pithy and has a salty note at the end. Maybe a little higher in the crop. The 2013 is better than this 2011 and so is the 2007. Not a lot of benefit in waiting.

SCORE 15.5

2010 Marzipan aroma both expressive and concentrated with an edge of roasted hazelnuts. This is delicious now. It is energetic. It has edge. Vital wine. Well defined. You can still wait. Still evolving. Excellent. I would wait another 3-5 years. This is a keeper.

SCORE 18.25

2007 Actually this has an inciting fresh citrus nose with a touch of freshly mown hay. This is silkier in texture than I expected. It is fresh elegant and delicate and pure. Lovely now. This a real surprise. It thought it would appear older and leaner. It's better than expected. Very yellow still as well.

SCORE 17

2006 There is an caramelized orange note on the nose. The palate is a bit better. It is rich in yeast notes. Lacks a bit of acidity even for a Blagny. It's weighty and lacks energy. The second bottle has more of a honeyed note. It is a bit fresher maybe. Still rather toffee-like fruit, but it has more zip. It shows better on the finish... a bit sappy at the end... You can still find enjoyment in this wine with a meal, bearing in mind the vintage conditions, but it will not delight.

SCORE 16

2005 This has marked freshness on the nose. Lime notes. It is compact and tense and rich. You taste the salty finish. Power and richness and salty. depth of the palate. Excellent. This is drinking well now. But it will continue to age. Revisit in another 5 years

SCORE 18.25

2003 This has an undertone of toffee and creme brûlée and yet is much more interesting and fresher than you might expect. So fresh. It has stuffing, but is not too fat either (at 14 degrees!) They have become more focused with age and it has become a less 'hot' vintage. I think the 'minerality' is helping here.

SCORE 16.75

2002 This has a lime freshness and a note of honey. It is elegant with savoury, stoney, sappy character. It has a light austerity. I like it. Perhaps the finish is not the longest. Modest finish. Still fresh. No hurry, but perhaps will not benefit from further evolution. It has a certain grip.

SCORE 17.65

2001 Wet cold and cloudy year. This is more oxidative... and savoury. Rather flat on the palate. It does lack energy. There is a notable salty savoury note, but lacks flesh and acidity.

SCORE 15

2000 This has a ripe aroma. It is 'sweet' juicy and rounded and charming. It is lighter and it has minerality through the palate. This is a good reflection of the terroir. Floral and fruity. A good surprise. Better than expected and therefore ... maybe more interesting than the 99 in a way. A bit more concentration.

SCORE 17

1999 This has a good intensity of bouquet, there is some tension. It has a lime, lemon quality. It does have surprisingly good energy. Big harvest, so not a great deal of concentration, but so attractive... so very pretty.

SCORE 17

1996 Somewhat deeper in hue than the '99, but still relatively pale. Not a hint of oxidation. It is rich and nutty. Full and satisfying on the palate and showing fresh and balancing acidity. It is a mature, but fresh wine. Marmite and almost burnt toast and a touch of honey... an edge of bitterness. Gosh I like it a lot.

SCORE 17.65

1990 Honey on the nose. It is powerful and intense. It is compact and has edge and freshness and at the end a puff of chalk. Large crop... but doesn't show it. How impressive. I really enjoyed this wine.

SCORE 17.75

1989 The is richer, but less intense on the nose than 90. Full, rich and generous on the palate. Fuller than the 90 but also much less energetic and just a touch oxidative on the finish. Given it was a hot year, the wine it still attractive. You would expect it to be tired at this point for a warm vintage, but it is holding up. Drink and enjoy.

SCORE 16.5