

Louis Latour: Pinot beyond Burgundy

In this Zoom tasting, I joined Florian Migeon from Maison Louis Latour in a session titled 'Pinot Noir beyond Burgundy'. Though still firmly focused on their Burgundy homeland as they have been for 220 years, Louis Latour has been growing and bottling Pinot Noir outside the Côte-d'Or since the 1980s. I visited their Beaujolais and Auxois sites in [an extensive report](#) published in 2015.

This tasting would focus on Latour's two newest Pinots: Bellevue Pinot Noir from Domaine de Valmoissine in Provence, half an hour north of Aix, and Les Pierres Dorées Pinot Noir from Beaujolais.

Florian explains that the move into these areas was partly driven by the ever-rising price of Burgundy. Their first move to the Ardeche in the early 1980s was specifically to produce quality Chardonnay that would be affordable, with prices more stable than Burgundy.

In Beaujolais, most soils producing Gamay are planted on granite soils, so finding an area of clay and limestone was perfect for Pinot Noir. At the time, Pinot Noir was not a permitted grape in the region, but the law changed in 2011 and so vineyards were planted (though in fact, some 50-year-old Pinot was discovered that had been misidentified as Gamay). Today Latour owns around 20 hectares in Beaujolais, plus it buys some fruit from contract growers.

There is talk at the moment of Beaujolais, which has contiguous vineyards that adjoin the Mâconnaise, being officially classified as Burgundy under a catch-all heading of 'Grand Burgundy'. Florian says they have their systems in place to cope with that if it happens, but it won't change the wine, style or price.

2017 is the first release of the Bellevue cuvée from the Var in the north of Provence. Again, this is a very specific spot, 500 metres in altitude to maintain cooler conditions. Florian says that in many ways this is the 'Grand Vin' to the Pinots already produced under the Domaine de Valmoissine label, also from Provence. Here all work is by hand, the fruit sorted and destemmed, with a longer fermentation to give a little more extraction – the yield here being even lower than in Burgundy.

The Wines

Louis Latour, Les Pierres Dorées Pinot Noir 2018

90

Beaujolais, France, 13.0% abv

From the Coteaux Bourguignons appellation in Beaujolais (though vinified at Latour's HQ in Beaune), this grows on clay and limestone soils, which also have some 'terra rossa' iron-oxide influence. After fermentation in open vats it spends 10 to 12 months ageing in a combination of stainless steel tanks and oak barrels. Lovely cherry bright and briary nose, floral and lightly herbal characters adding freshness and light to the aromas. The fruit is deliciously sweet as it strikes the palate; pert and pretty, it is firmly in the red fruit spectrum of cherry and a touch of raspberry. Spicy, dry tannins and very good, juicy acidity adds length and balance. Deliciously drinkable.

Louis Latour, Domaine de Valmoissine Pinot Noir Bellevue 2017

91

Provence, France, 13.0% abv

From 30-year-old vines in Provence, 17,000 bottles were produced in this first commercial vintage. Much more suave and smoothly solid aromatically than the Pierres Dorées, deep scents of plum and cherry, spices and tobacco, a little chestnut earthiness. Very different indeed from the wine from Beaujolais. In the mouth there is much more structure here, firm grip from the tannins, good lively acidity, but the fruit does retain that little bit of crunch that keeps it fresh. A more substantial wine, spicy and savoury, a counterpoint to the Pierres Dorées elegant charms.

