



The Next Big Thing in Beaujolais

*A small revolution is taking place in an area called **Les Pierres Dorées**, and it might not be long before you start seeing Pinot Noir from southern Beaujolais on shelves. Here's what we know so far.*

For some 700 years, the Gamay grape has become synonymous with the French hillside towns of Beaujolais, the southernmost region of Burgundy, which produces beautiful dark-berried Cru Beaujolais, and spicy village-level wines, as well as the fresh and fruity Beaujolais Nouveau reds. But after centuries of going unchallenged in the region, Gamay might soon see some competition.

Some producers are indeed beginning to replace Gamay vines in Les Pierres Dorées with Pinot Noir and even Syrah.

One Burgundy négociant, **Maison Louis Latour**, began exploring the region in 2010 as a potential for new Pinot Noir vineyards. By 2012, fifth-generation owner Louis Fabrice Latour and Boris Champy, Latour's director of winemaking, had planted some **44 acres of Pinot Noir** on sites situated between 900-1,200 feet in elevation, where the grapes can ripen and retain that critical, natural acidity.

While Maison Latour is not the first to plant Pinot Noir in the steeper hills of Les Pierres Dorées, **they are the first to do so on such a large scale.** *"We want to create a new category—Pinot Noir from southern Beaujolais"* Louis Fabrice Latour told me.

As of this writing, bottles are hard to find. I was only able to taste the first two vintages of Latour's wines: The 2015 and 2016 Maison Louis Latour "Les Pierres Dorées" Pinot Noir, which will retail in the U.S. for around \$20.

Though Latour is in the early stages of exploring different clonal plantings of Pinot Noir, as well as various methods of aging, I found the wines quite enjoyable. The 2015 was soft and juicy, bolstered by spicy and grippy tannins—a sink-your-teeth in Pinot with power and generosity, finishing with vanilla and cinnamon notes. The 2016 is a departure, with less time aged in oak, and more in stainless steel

The result is a fresher Pinot, with great texture, rich and robust, calling to mind Cru Beaujolais with deeper berry flavors, and finishes with sweet spice and even hints at cocoa notes.

Even to the discerning eye, however, it won't be easy to identify these bottles when they hit shelves in greater numbers. While the words "Pinot Noir" and "Les Pierres Dorées" are prominent features of the front labels, the back labels list "Coteaux Bourguignons" as the appellation—a designation that denotes an area from "Auxerrois (about as far north as Épineuil, north-east of Chablis) down to and Only time will tell if Latour's presence helps establish Pierres Dorées as a new frontier for French Pinot Noir. For now, they're so hard to come by that I had to ask Bernard Retornaz, President of Louis Latour Inc., for help in identifying other producers following his lead. He pointed to four: two big producers smack in Les Pierres Dorées

making Pinot Noir bottled under the Bourgogne AOC appellation—Jean-Paul Brun and Château Lachassagne. At present, you won't find their wine stateside.



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Louis Fabrice Latour