

## One of the best-kept secrets in the wine world?



Jean-François Bourdy

Château-Chalon is a 50-hectare hillside in Jura, one of the appellations allowed for Vin Jaune. Jean Bourdy owns half a hectare in the appellation, out of the family's total vineyard holdings of ten hectares. It didn't surprise me that I had never heard of this producer from Jura, but after tasting 30 of the family's wines, including reds back to 1926, whites (chardonnay) back to 1911 and Château-Chalon back to 1865, I was confused. How had I spent more than 25 years in this business and never tasted a wine from Château-Chalon before? Were they all as great as these wines from Bourdy?

Jon Rimmerman, the man behind [garagistewine.com](http://garagistewine.com) and the organizer of this tasting, had used some urgent language to draw collectors to the event. A "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity to taste "original cellar material from the 1800s" from "one of the most important estates in Europe...virtually unknown in the U.S..." I convinced a friend to give up a Saturday night for work detail, thinking, at least, we'd get to taste some old wine—and maybe learn something new. So we drove up to [Blue Hill at Stone Barns](#) in Tarrytown, New York. As it turned out, Rimmerman's words were not hype. These were fascinating, complex wines that had somehow existed in a parallel universe, never touching on my own. Two Bourdys run this estate; they can trace their history on the property back 14 generations to 1475. Jean-François Bourdy, who had brought all these wines from the family's cellar, explained that Château-Chalon is "one hundred percent savagnin from a specific plot, a hillside of rocks, produced in the same fashion for one thousand years. Savagnin you can find only in Jura; if you tried to vinify this in another country, it would not give this result. Château-Chalon is an A.O.C and a village. There are fifteen producers of this appellation, considered the grand cru of the Vin Jaune." He explained some of the regulations: One week prior to picking, a commission determines whether or not a harvest can be considered for Château-Chalon. ("In the 20th century, we lost about twenty percent of the vintages.") The vines yield a scant 20 hectoliters per hectare, the wine ages in small, 200 to 300 liter casks for seven years before bottling. "It is strictly forbidden to refill the casks," he says. "A moisture grows on the surface of the liquid. A film. It changes the taste of the wine." Much of the wine evaporates; the Bourdy's select what's left and bottle it in the traditional clavelin, a short, squat, 620 ml bottle unique to the appellation.

The patience required for these wines is perhaps one reason they remain an unknown commodity. Bourdy's 1934 Cotes du Jura Blanc is a chardonnay that can stand with the greatest Montrachets, while a completely different expression of the variety. And his 1895 Château-Chalon is nothing less than astonishing. It was the last vintage the family made before phylloxera required them to replant on American rootstock. The bottle was in impeccable condition. The wine had more flesh than any of its younger relations, and more freshness than most of them as well. It was all about lushness—honey, brioche and richness equivalent to the ultimate white chocolate dessert (though completely dry). Following that, the 1865 was even more compelling. My only notes for that Civil War vintage: "It's a liquid beyond description."

My friend commented, "It's totally invigorating to taste these wines." And it was. I often judge a meal by how I feel afterwards—buoyed or weighed down. I had sipped carefully through the night, determined not to become intoxicated; there were many wines but the pours were slight. The buzz those wines left behind was one of the gentlest and most pleasurable I can remember. More than any taste, that made me confident to recommend them. Particularly the 2000 Château-Chalon, the new release, at eight years old still tasting like a newborn, of butterbeans and lemon cream and honshimeji mushrooms. I'm convinced of its future, even if it will never mature to the bliss of the 19th century wines in my lifetime. —Joshua Greene



Jon Rimmerman