



DOMAINE PIERRE VINCENT: HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING

After a successful stint at Domaine Leflaive, during which he was instrumental in restoring its reputation at the top of the Burgundy pecking order, Pierre Vincent is now pursuing his ambition to make wine under his own name. Raymond Blake meets a man who has found his *métier*



Christmas Eve 2024, 8:25am. After three murky days when the cloud sat heavy on the Côte d'Or, obscuring vineyard and village alike, a dazzling sun brightened the slope, making it easy to find Domaine Pierre Vincent on the outskirts of Auxey-Duresses. Leaving Meursault behind, it is a sharp left off the D973, just before the village, down a rutted track that is subject to waterlogging no matter the season. It's an unprepossessing approach—all the attraction here is in the vines. But first, some context.

Rolling the clock back 20 years, I first met Pierre Vincent on October 12, 2004, early in his career, when he was working at Maison Jaffelin in Beaune, part of the Boisset group. As a schoolboy, he had harbored no winemaking ambitions, though he had an interest in agriculture, given that his father

bred Charolais cattle in the Saône-et-Loire département. "I was fascinated by nature—the technique and the analytical side of what my father did—though I did not want to join him in his profession." After school, he studied viticulture and enology in Dijon, and following brief spells at Antonin Guyon Marchand in Beaune and Jaffelin, he succeeded Pascal Marchand at Domaine de la Vougeraie in 2006. At the time, yet to establish a solid name for itself, I still remember mentioning Vougeraie wines only to be asked if I meant Vougeot, even by Burgundians.

The domaine was founded by siblings Jean-Charles and Nathalie Boisset in 1999 and laid claim to a magnificent decade he was in charge. Vincent solidified both his name and the domaine's reputation. Without making radical changes, he steered the Vougeraie style toward greater finesse, with less immediate impact on the palate.

In some respects, Domaine Leflaive's white-wine equivalent of Domaine de la Vougeraie, the Côte de Nuits, and it would be exalted status at the turn of the century, the world for wines of peerless beauty. Under the guidance of Anne-Claude Leflaive, Vincent converted the domaine to biodynamic, took a severe battering in the early 2000s, and despite her biodynamic practices, the wines' magnificence in youth—far from corrupted by premature oxidation—showed little inclination to address.

There was much to be done, and there was a degree of urgency. The domaine's name was to be restored, and the most obvious change was the switch to stainless-steel tanks, and many adjustments to winemaking were applied in the background. Together, Vincent steadied the ship, and it seems that Vincent would work out his duties in Puligny; he had reached the top of the

A white range bookended by This was, of course, to reckon without red wine again. To this line of inquiry, a smile and a gesture. His opportunity came in 2010, when he was invited by investors Hervé Kratochvíl and Bernard de Maubert to acquire Domaine des Terres de la Vougeraie. Thereafter, and until the end of 2020, he spent mornings at his new domaine and afternoons at Domaine de la Vougeraie. The 7ha (17-acre) domaine, though an impressive roster of vineyard holdings

Opposite: A happy Pierre Vincent at the door of Domaine des Terres de la Vougeraie, acquired with

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feature veraison Domaine Pierre Vincent

five white and two red, and spread across 20 appellations. Many of the cuvées amount to no more than a handful of barrels, a circumstance in which Vincent reveals, mentioning that for him his eight barrels of Puligny-Montrachet in a regular vintage constitutes a large cuvée. The winery is located beside the River Volle—hence the waterlogged approach track—meaning that the cellar is unusually humid, reducing the need to top up the barrels.

Vincent's winemaking is relatively simple. After being picked into 26lb (12kg) boxes, the white grapes are sorted and go straight to the press without crushing, followed by a short settling in stainless-steel tank before transfer to barrel for fermentation. He is happy for plenty of solids to make it to barrel. "I like turbidity," he says. "I am a partisan for a high level of lees." *Bâtonnage* is employed between alcoholic and malolactic fermentation, and a year in barrel is followed by six months back in tank before bottling. Dogma plays little part in Vincent's approach, but he is adamant that the period in tank is essential for pure, clean flavors and harmony on the palate. Earlier harvesting than under the previous regimen will also play a part in keeping the house style fresh, rich, opulent textures are to be avoided. "Meursault *faïe gras* is not my style."

The white range is bookended by brilliance—from humble Aligoté, to patrician Corton-Charlemagne. The former comes

from two vineyards within Auxey-Duresses and displays a bracing citrus character, fresh and perky, with a saline, mineral snap on the finish. It is lean and precise, though not soaring, with a dry bite that is almost tannic. *Elevage* is in a 60/40 combination of oak (10% new) and amphora, and the wine is an exemplar for a style of white Burgundy that is gaining greater recognition and approval. The days of curling the lip and reaching for the cassis at the mention of Aligoté are gone.

The Corton-Charlemagne is a stunning wine, a real rival to the Montrachets farther south that garner the lion's share of attention when the world's best-Chardonnay plaudits are being handed out. It is an understandable situation, for the broad sweep of vineyard that wraps around the Hill of Corton encompasses great variety, most especially aspect, which swings from due east in Ladoix-Serrigny to due west, and more, in Pernand-Vergelesses. Holdings are scattered, too, as with Pierre Vincent's two plots that total half-a-hectare (1.2 acres). One, planted in 1966, lies on the southwestern slope in Aloxe-Corton; the other, "around the corner" in Pernand-Vergelesses, where in summer it can be 11am before the morning sun touches the vines, planted in 1949. As a result, Vincent harvests the Aloxe plot five days ahead of the northwest-facing thin strip of vineyard in Pernand. Each is vinified separately and only assembled into the final blend after



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Ez Blanches (50% whole-bunch, 1959) takes this character a step further with greater complexity and depth of flavor. Ez Blanches lies above Clos des Chânes, rising to 1,500ft (457m) by little more than half a mile (1km) as the cross lies from a clear difference in style. From his 0.2ha (0.4-acre) plot, Vincent produces about four barrels of a notably perky wine with a mild tannic grip. Finally, the Volage, Premier Cru Le Boncret, downslope neighbor of Champans, marries a sterner beat, courtesy of dense fruit, firm structure and impressive depth.

Experience, expertise, and maturity

It is too early to cast definitive judgment on Domaine Leflaive, but it is not casting a hostage to fortune to say Vincent and his partners have hit the ground running. It is three significant factors. First, the good standing of Domaine des Terres de la Vougeraie before they bought it. Though it is a sound reputation, as Jasper Morris MW comments in his book *Inside Burgundy*: "These are smart wines in both offering a good range of bottles at affordable prices."

judging by samples of the 2023 vintage from barrel in July again in December 2024, smart is about to get smarter. In they did not buy a pig in a poke. Second, the impressive quality of the vines. As mentioned, for several of the vines above it unusual for them to be made from vines that have reached half-century, with the near-centenarians bringing the average up to nearly 60. Such a wealth of maturity can be of as a vinous trust fund, a deep reservoir of potential to be tapped by a dexterous hand. Third, that hand can be the shape of Pierre Vincent, whose 20 years' experience acknowledged talent as a winemaker make him the perfect custodian for such riches.

Though he evinces no world-conquering ambition, takes only a few minutes in Vincent's company to note the resolve beneath the smiling, youthful features. He is adamant for example, that he wants to remain solely as a domain manager, though I only decide at the sorting table [...]. They bring flavors of spice and dried flowers, as well as greater firmness on the palate [...]. I like to play with whole bunches. I vat is filled alternately with whole bunches and destemmed grapes, after which the temperature is held at 54-57°F (12-14°C) for a few days of maceration before it is allowed to rise naturally for fermentation to begin, though he never lets it exceed 82°F (28°C). He relies principally on *remontage* for extraction, with *elevage* is in standard 228-liter *pieces* from Chassin, Tonnelierie de Mercurey, and Berthomieu, with a modest proportion of new barrels, perhaps 15%.

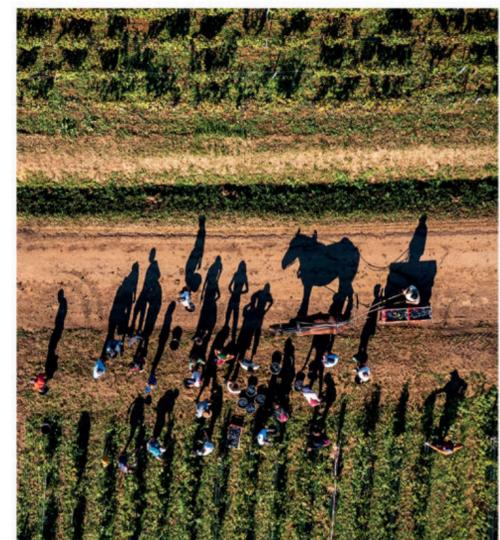
The resulting wines display an abundance of ripe fruit, intense rather than concentrated, with a lovely waft of sweet Duresses running through them like a family DNA. The Auxey-Duresses Les Closaux—made with 40% whole bunches from 1955 vines—is shot through with gentle spice, while the Volage

Opposite: Vincent among his barrels, only 10% new, which he fills with "plenty of solids," stirred between alcoholic and malolactic fermentations.

Notes
1. At the time of writing, it was too early to taste the 2024 vintage. It has already gone down in infamy as one of the most difficult on that said, it was quantity more than quality that was badly hit. Vincent's production was about half that of 2023, but he is quick to point out that despite the significant reduction, he is, in a far more fortunate way, than his colleagues in the Côte de Nuits, who suffered much greater losses. "It is low, but it is not a disaster," and the wines have fabulous density of fruit and flavor."

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Flashnews

“Une gamme de blancs encadrée par l’excellence. Cela, bien sûr, c’était sans compter sur son désir de produire du vin en son propre nom. Son opportunité s’est présentée grâce aux investisseurs Hervé Kratiroff et Éric Versini, et ensemble, ils ont acquis le Domaine des Terres de Velle en juillet 2023. Par la suite, et jusqu’à la fin de l’année 2024, Vincent a mené une double vie, passant ses matinées dans son tout nouveau domaine éponyme et ses après-midis au Domaine Leflaive.

Le domaine s’étend sur 7 hectares (17 acres) – une superficie modeste mais dotée d’un impressionnant portefeuille de parcelles viticoles. Beaucoup de cuvées ne représentent que quelques fûts à peine, une situation dans laquelle Vincent s’épanouit. Le chai est situé à côté de la rivière Velle – d’où le chemin d’accès souvent détrempe.

Le dogme a peu de place dans l’approche de Vincent, mais il est catégorique sur l’importance de la période passée en cuve, essentielle selon lui pour obtenir des arômes purs, nets, et une belle harmonie en bouche. Les vendanges ont désormais lieu plus tôt qu’auparavant.

La gamme de blancs est encadrée par l’excellence – de l’humble Aligoté au noble Corton-Charlemagne.



L’Aligoté provient de deux parcelles situées à Auxey-Duresses et affiche un caractère d’agrume vif, frais et tonique, avec une finale saline et minérale. Il est tendu et précis, sans être agressif, avec une amertume sèche presque tannique. L’élevage se fait dans une combinaison de 60 % fût de chêne (dont 10 % de neuf) et d’amphores, et ce vin est un parfait exemple d’un style de Bourgogne blanc qui gagne en reconnaissance et en appréciation. L’époque où l’on grimaçait et attrapait la bouteille de cassis à la simple mention de l’Aligoté est révolue.

Le Corton-Charlemagne est un vin éblouissant, un véritable rival des Montrachets. Les parcelles sont elles aussi dispersées, comme celles de Pierre Vincent qui totalisent un demi-hectare (1,2 acre). L’une, plantée en 1966, se situe sur le versant sud-ouest à Aloxe-Corton ; l’autre est « juste de l’autre côté », à Pernand-Vergelesses, où en été, le soleil du matin ne touche les vignes qu’à 11 heures. Vincent vendange la parcelle d’Aloxe cinq jours avant celle de Pernand, orientée au nord-ouest, une bande de vigne étroite.

Entre ces deux pôles d’excellence, on trouve une douzaine d’autres blancs, certains issus de vignes approchant le siècle d’existence, comme le Meursault Les Grands Charrons (planté en 1929), le Meursault Premier Cru Les Charmes (1936), et le Puligny-Montrachet Premier Cru Les Referts, un « jeune » relativement parlant, planté en 1949. En parlant de ce patrimoine de vieilles vignes, Vincent déclare :

« Elles sont ma force, mais aussi ma responsabilité [...]. Il faut comprendre les vieilles vignes [...]. Les préserver, c’est le défi de ma vie. »





Quant aux vins, le Grands Charrons est souple et gourmand, le Charmes est plus puissant mais conserve une belle légèreté, et le Referts se distingue par son équilibre et son élégance. Il y a une grande énergie dans chacun de ces vins, mais une énergie harmonieuse, pleine de finesse — rien ne dépasse.

Là où l'élégance est la marque de fabrique des blancs de Vincent, les rouges expriment un profil aromatique plus vigoureux. Il est adepte de la fermentation en grappes entières, généralement entre 30 et 70 %.

« J'utilise toujours une partie de grappes entières, mais je ne décide qu'à la table de tri [...]. Elles apportent des arômes d'épices et de fleurs séchées, ainsi qu'une plus grande fraîcheur en bouche [...]. J'aime jouer avec les grappes entières. Je les superpose, comme un millefeuille. »

Cela signifie que la cuve en inox est remplie en alternant grappes entières et raisins égrappés.

L'Auxey-Duresses Les Closeaux — élaboré avec 40 % de grappes entières issues de vignes plantées en 1955 — est traversé par une épice douce. Le Volnay Ez Blanches (50 % grappes entières, vignes de 1959) pousse ce caractère plus loin, avec une complexité et une profondeur aromatique accrues. Ez Blanches est situé au-dessus du Clos des Chênes, à 350 mètres d'altitude, à la lisière de la forêt, et jouxte Monthélie. Il n'est séparé que d'environ un kilomètre à vol d'oiseau du premier cru de Monthélie, Les Duresses, mais les styles sont clairement différents.

Sur sa petite parcelle de 0,17 hectare (0,4 acre), Vincent produit environ quatre fûts d'un vin remarquablement vif, avec une légère trame tannique.

Enfin, le Volnay Premier Cru Le Ronceret, voisin en contrebas du Champans, joue une partition plus sérieuse, grâce à un fruit dense, une structure ferme, et une profondeur impressionnante.

Expérience, expertise et maturité

Il est encore trop tôt pour porter un jugement définitif sur le Domaine Pierre Vincent, mais il n'est pas hasardeux d'affirmer que Vincent et ses partenaires ont démarré sur les chapeaux de roues.

L'âge remarquable des vignes impressionne. Comme mentionné précédemment, plusieurs des vins cités sont issus de vignes ayant dépassé le demi-siècle, certaines frôlant même les cent ans, ce qui porte l'âge moyen à près de 60 ans. Une telle richesse en maturité peut être comparée à un fonds fiduciaire viticole : un profond réservoir de potentiel, prêt à être exploité par une main habile. Cette main, c'est celle de Pierre Vincent, dont les 20 années d'expérience et le talent reconnu de vinificateur font de lui le gardien idéal de ce patrimoine.

Bien qu'il n'affiche aucune ambition de conquête mondiale, quelques minutes passées en sa compagnie suffisent pour percevoir la détermination qui se cache derrière ses traits souriants et juvéniles.”

