

CHEVALLIER

JULY
2019

TO
DECANT
or NOT
TO
DECANT?



T TO DECANT *or* NOT TO DECANT?

That is often the question upon pulling a cork, and the answer is rarely ever clear-cut. Even seasoned vigneron and other wine professionals cannot reduce decanting to an exact science; more often than not, it comes down to some combination of dogma, convenience, and educated guessing, without forgetting the all-important variable of personal preference. So if we don't really know, then is it even worth it? Hopefully, this month's shipment will help to debunk decanting, as we delve deeper into the nuances of the act of pouring the contents of a bottle of wine into another vessel.

"Giving the wine air" is probably the most oft-cited reason for decanting, and it is also the most important. Oxygenating a wine by gently splashing it into a carafe, also giving it greater exposure to the atmosphere than it would

experience from a narrow bottleneck, accelerates its evolution, allowing it to reach its peak sooner than it otherwise would. Initially timid aromas begin to flourish, tightly knit tannin and acid structures soften, and a rather austere, inexpressive wine rapidly becomes full of life. The repercussions for the diner, who may require a recently opened bottle to shine as soon as the main dish hits the table, are paramount.

Which bottles, then, should be decanted? There are no hard rules, as wines of all styles can benefit. Whites and rosés from serious *terroirs* need time for their aromas to fully develop, just

as many reds do not show their best immediately upon opening and would therefore profit from *un passage en carafe*. Even certain sparklers can improve thanks to the aeration decanting provides, but be careful—splash one around too violently and it will sparkle no more. In general, while decanting may not be *necessary*, it can help a wine reach its full potential over a time frame that is more practical on any given night.



This month's selections demonstrate how various wine styles respond to the process of decanting. When you open a bottle, we encourage you to pour half of its contents into the carafe/vase/beaker/jug/coffeepot of your choice and compare its evolution in the decanter versus the bottle over an hour, two hours, or however long it takes for the wine to be drunk! You may find that some, or all, of the wines open up and blossom before your very eyes (and nose). Or perhaps you'll find that decanting changed little—but at least you got to enjoy a few bottles along the way!

—ANTHONY LYNCH

N.V. ROSÉ BRUT *GRAND CRU*

◆ PAUL BARA \$68

THE MONTAGNE DE REIMS boasts some of the best Pinot Noir in Champagne, and Bouzy is its capital. The village of Bouzy and the Paul Bara house, in turn, are practically synonymous. It's no coincidence that Bara's *grand cru* rosé is a staff favorite and best-seller: with its ripe, juicy red fruit, fine bead, and creamy yet lively texture, it is the perfect pairing for anything, everything, or nothing at all.



2016 VERDICCHIO DEI CASTELLI DI JESI CLASSICO RISERVA

“PASSOLENTO” ◆ LA MARCA DI SAN MICHELE \$35



THESE VINEYARDS, in the historical heart of the Castelli di Jesi DOCG, are worked organically on limestone hillsides facing the Adriatic Sea, with the Apennine Mountains at their back. The wine takes its time throughout every stage of the production process. Picked carefully, fermented slowly with wild yeasts (including full malolactic fermentation), aged in large Slavonian oak *botti*, and bottled unfiltered, Passolento deserves to be decanted and savored with fine cuisine, and it has development potential in your cellar. It provides vivacious refreshment but also delivers ample layers of flavor and refined texture. Suggestions of pine nuts, hay, and spring flowers lead to an ultra-precise, stony finale—you will never think of Verdicchio the same way again!

2016 SANTENAY BLANC 1ER CRU “LE BEAUREPAIRE”

◆ JEAN-MARC VINCENT \$68



WITH EACH SUCCESSIVE VINTAGE, Jean-Marc Vincent is proving that with high-quality vineyard sites, tireless hard work in the field, and careful mastery of vinifications, Santenay is capable of rivaling more prestigious *crus* in the Côte de Beaune. Working the vines organically, as Jean-Marc strives to do, is no easy feat: he estimates approximately 700 hours of

manpower *per hectare* are required over the course of a single growing season! The result is palpable with this latest release, among the most pure, precise, classy wines the domaine has made. The Beaurepaire is a deep, expressive Chardonnay with a minerally grain and the subtlest kiss of toast. From Santenay’s highest-altitude *premier cru*, this rare white is not to be missed. Enjoy this masterpiece over the next fifteen years.

2017 RÉGNIÉ ◆ GUY BRETON \$32



AT FIRST, a dollop of supple, juicy fruit evokes the sandy layer of topsoil into which these Gamay vines—many of them a century old—sink their roots. Then a granite kick, full of gritty spice, clutches the palate with gusto, conjuring the stony bedrock beneath. After all, the vineyards of Régnié sit high on a slope between Brouilly and Morgon, so you can expect the perfume and brightness of the former along with a hint of the mineral-driven structure typical of the latter. And let us not forget the house style—Breton’s wines are designed to be drunk with reckless abandon, and this one is no exception.

2015 CHIANTI CLASSICO

◆ VILLA DI GEGGIANO \$30



GEGGIANO lies just north of Siena, in the southern reaches of the Chianti Classico zone. This fine Chianti, made in an ancient cellar that hasn't changed since the Renaissance, is a wine of rustic country beauty. Broad-shouldered, with hearty tannin and acidity and a dark, earthy quality to its fruit, it is a lumberjack wine that can cut through anything a Tuscan table throws its way—wild game and aged cheeses are some of our favorites. The brothers at Geggiano rely on organic farming, indigenous yeasts, and long aging in large oak *tonneaux* to achieve authentic Sangioveses, to be enjoyed now and for many years to come.

2009 CANON FRONSAC

◆ CHÂTEAU MOULIN PEY-LABRIE \$46

CANON FRONSAC is an appellation on the right bank of the Bordelais, but this red does not taste like the Bordeaux most of us are accustomed to. First, the *terroir* is rather atypical for the region: this Merlot is sourced from a limestone hillside rather than from the clay and gravel plains that make up the majority of the landscape. You may find it to be leaner and livelier than the rich, plush Merlots of Pomerol and Saint-Émilion, while a subtle minerality provides a tense energy on the finish—undoubtedly the effect of these poor, well-draining slopes. The vignerons at Château Moulin Pey-Labrie also set this estate apart: Bénédicte and Grégoire Hubau are the type of small-scale farmers we typically encounter in the Loire or Beaujolais, not Bordeaux. Adamant about organic viticulture, they make natural wines of purity and finesse that deliver loads of pleasure upon release, with cuvées like this one also providing typicity and ageability. Forget any preconceptions you may have about Bordeaux!





N.V. Rosé Brut <i>Grand Cru</i> <i>Paul Bara</i> CHAMPAGNE	80% Pinot Noir, 20% Chardonnay	35-year-old vines Clay, limestone	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–50° F	Red currant, wild berries, rhubarb Seductive, plush, exuberant	Drink now
2016 Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Riserva “Passolento” <i>La Marca di San Michele</i> MARCHE	Verdicchio	Vines planted in 2001 Limestone, clay	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52° F	Lemon curd, acacia, marzipan, herbs Saline, mouthwatering, zingy yet waxy	Drink now through 2025
2016 Santenay <i>Blanc 1er Cru</i> “Le Beaurepaire” <i>Jean-Marc Vincent</i> BURGUNDY	Chardonnay	11-year-old vines Marly limestone	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 52–56° F	Hawthorn blossom, hazelnut, orchard fruit, toast Rich, pure, elegant, chalky	Drink now through 2030
2017 Régnié <i>Guy Breton</i> BEAUJOLAIS	Gamay	35- and 100- year-old vines Granite, sand	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 56–60° F	Sour cherry, peony, cranberry, spice Bright, lean, juicy, crunchy, stony	Drink now
2015 Chianti Classico <i>Villa di Geggiano</i> TUSCANY	95% Sangiovese, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon	4- to 25-year-old vines Clay, silt, sand, limestone	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F	Black cherry, leather, sunbaked earth Rustic, chewy, mouth-filling, grippy	Drink now through 2030
2009 Canon Fronsac <i>Château Moulin Pey-Labrie</i> BORDEAUX	95% Merlot, 5% Malbec	65-year-old vines Clay, limestone	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F	Black currant, plum, bitter cocoa, faded violets Deep, supple, perfectly mature	Drink now through 2025

cover: Aubert de Villaine decanting an aged wine off its sediment.
Photo © Gail Skoff

inner panel, left: Photo © Clark Z. Terry

inner panel, right: In the cellar at Paul Bara. Photo © Paul Bara

far left, top: Photo © Paul Bara

far left, bottom: The sibling team of the La Marca estate.

Photo © La Marca di San Michele

middle, top: Jean-Marc and Anne-Marie Vincent.

Photo © Gail Skoff

middle, bottom: The 2018 harvest. Photo © Guy Breton

near left, top: Brothers Andrea and Alessandro Boscu

Bianchi Bandinelli. Photo © Dixon Brooke

near left, bottom: Bénédicte and Grégoire Hubau tasting
in the cellar. Photo © Château Moulin Pey-Labrie

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IF YOU DECANT . . .

BARA'S CHAMPAGNE ROSÉ

GOAL Render bubbles less aggressive, open up nose

RESULT Gentler bead, creamier texture, more floral aromas, and less exuberant fruit

TAKEAWAY Turn a fruit-driven, festive Champagne into a more contemplative, gastronomical one

- ♦ *Decanting a Champagne completely changes its character, which may or may not be desirable depending on the situation.*

LA MARCA'S VERDICCHIO

GOAL Open up nose, soften acidity

RESULT Rounder, more elegant, expressive, aromatic wine

TAKEAWAY Better see all that this complex, textured white has to offer

- ♦ *Few would typically decant a white such as Verdicchio, but this is no ordinary Verdicchio.*

VINCENT'S SANTENAY

GOAL Allow reductive aromas to blow off, open up nose, soften acidity

RESULT Less gunflinty, reductive aroma and more fruity, floral, and mineral nuances; more depth and complexity

TAKEAWAY Enjoy a young white Burgundy in all its *terroir*-driven glory

- ♦ *Vincent's winemaking yields "struck-match reduction" in his whites, which blows off with air as other aromas emerge.*

BRETON'S RÉGNIÉ

GOAL De-gas, open up nose, soften tannins and acidity

RESULT Rounder mouthfeel, less spritzy, smoother and more elegant fruit

TAKEAWAY Effectively de-gas a young natural wine and experience its full spectrum of aromas

- ♦ *Breton leaves dissolved CO₂ in his wines to protect them, allowing him to bottle with less added sulfur. The gas adds a prickly liveliness that can be reduced by decanting.*

GEGGIANO'S CHIANTI

GOAL Soften tannins, open up nose

RESULT Softer tannins; more red fruit, earthy, and secondary aromas; less grip

TAKEAWAY Make a young, tannic red from a big vintage more accessible

- ♦ *Tight, grippy young reds like this one are ideal candidates for the decanter.*

MOULIN PEY-LABRIE'S CANON FRONSAC

GOAL Rack wine off sediment (if there is any), open up nose

RESULT Softer, more generous wine; more fruit and spice, more broad and generous texture

TAKEAWAY Better appreciate full complexity of a mature red while avoiding unpleasant sandy deposit

- ♦ *With their delicate flavors, older wines can evolve rapidly in the decanter, but over the course of a meal this one will only improve.*