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Pouilly-Fuissé

The imminent release of its first officially recognised premier cru wines marks the dawn of a new era for this much-respected region of southern Burgundy. But will the wines live up to their newly elevated status? We profile the area and meet its winemakers

STORY CHARLES CURTIS MW

The excitement in Mâcon these days is palpable – the vintners of Pouilly-Fuissé are about to release their first premier cru wines. These groundbreaking 2020 vintage wines represent the first vineyards to be classified not only in Pouilly-Fuissé, but in the Mâconnais region as a whole. Winemakers appreciate the attention and are proud of their achievements after a long, drawn-out process (the formal application to recognise specific sites as premiers crus was submitted to the INAO in 2010).


And yet, there seems to be a sense that INAO has got things slightly askew. Some feel that the classified terroirs represent the best of the best as they were prior to the submission of the brief to INAO – but which might not be the top sites now, in the context of global warming. That the Mâconnais is capable of producing superb white wine is a well-established fact. Winemaking has been the chief occupation of the region since the foundation of the Cluny Monastery in 910 by Guillaume, Duke of Aquitaine and Count of

Mâcon. Within the wider Mâconnais region, it has long been recognised that the wines produced in the southern sector stand apart in their character, and in 1922 a court decision led to the protection of the wines of Pouilly-Fuissé, defined as coming from specific portions of the villages of Fuissé, Solutré-Pouilly, Vergisson and Chaintré. It was granted appellation contrôlée status in 1936.

ON THE ROCKS

The Pouilly-Fuissé appellation is set apart by its dramatic landscape, with crags of limestone that spring from the earth in Solutré and Vergisson. These dramatic cliffs are the last remnants of the same limestone formations that form the Côte d'Or to the north before this landscape gives way to the granite and schist of Beaujolais and the northern Rhône. Most of the vineyards in Pouilly-Fuissé are underpinned with limestone, although a few sites have a foundation of granite and schist.

Known as the 'Porte Sud de la Bourgogne', the region is known for its sunny climate, and the ►



The limestone
Roche du Solutré,
west of Mâcon

growing season here is warmer and wetter than in the Côte d'Or. Chardonnay dominates throughout the Mâconnais, and it is the only grape permitted in the Pouilly-Fuissé appellation.

The warmth and limestone-rich soils combine to deliver a rich, almost voluptuous wine with aromas of ripe apple that can border on the tropical, with the nuance of floral and mineral notes. This lush character has been accentuated in the string of recent warm vintages, the soils providing a mineral, saline quality for balance.

The lay of the hills in Pouilly-Fuissé results in a variety of exposures. Vines can face east, south, west or north, although the premier cru slopes nearly all face east or south. While these are the sites that had traditionally yielded the greatest wines, the situation is beginning to change in this time of warming. In very hot vintages, the sites at the top of the hill and those facing north and even west may deliver a welcome freshness.

In total, just over one quarter of the vineyards have been classified as premier cru (194ha out of a total of 751ha), across 22 individual climats, or plots. Some feel that this is already perhaps generous. 'One has to draw the line somewhere,' admits Antoine Vincent, general manager and winemaker of Château-Fuissé, owned by his family since the 19th century (*see right*).

THE CLASSIFIED VINEYARDS

The largest surface of premier cru vineyards is in Solutré-Pouilly, with 71.7ha out of 215ha. Pouilly is a hamlet that was incorporated with the village of Solutré in 1912, and its grapes may be used to

The region at a glance

Established Union des Producteurs des Grands Vins Blancs de Pouilly-Fuissé formed 1929; the appellation officially recognised in September 1936.

Planted area Pouilly-Fuissé is 751ha out of 6,241ha in the greater Mâconnais region (and 30,738ha in Burgundy overall)

Elevation Vineyards at 200m-300m (summit of the Roche du Solutré: 493m)

Soils Limestone, clay and sandy soils

based on granite and schist

Climate Warm and damp (up to 1,000mm per year) compared to the rest of Burgundy, with roughly 10% more precipitation and temperatures 10% higher

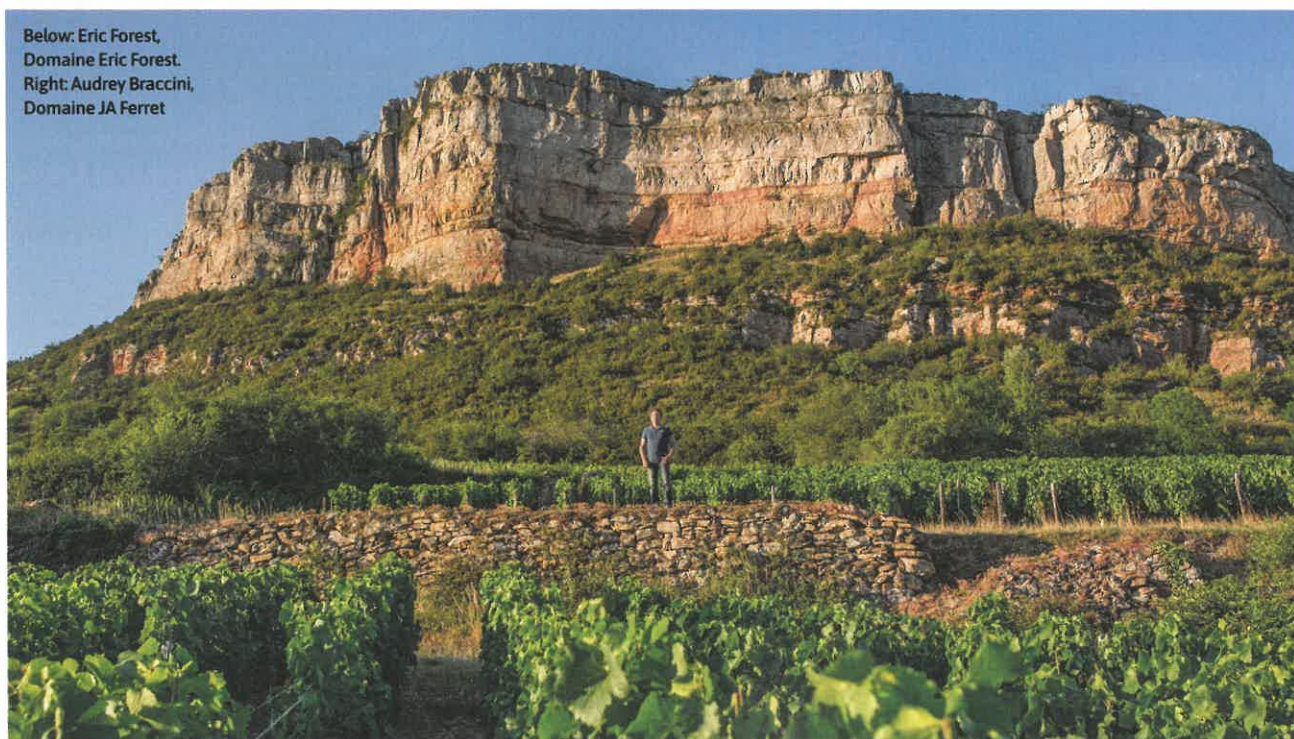
Producers 250 producers with an average annual production of 41,000hl

Grapes 100% Chardonnay

SOURCES: BIVB; POUILLY-FUISSE.NET

produce Pouilly-Fuissé, St-Véran or Mâcon-Solutré-Pouilly, depending on their location in the village. Soils are predominantly clay leavened with limestone pebbles, the slopes exposed to the south and east. The premier cru vineyard plots in the village are: Au Vignerais, Aux Bouthières, Aux Chailloux, En Servy, La Frérie, Le Clos de Solutré, Pouilly and Vers Cras. A number of these, such as Au Vignerais, are composed of several different climats – and, from the 2020 vintage, the portions that aren't included in the premier cru classification will no longer be permitted to use the lieu-dit name. There is some ill-feeling in the area about this, but producers involved are waiting for a response from the INAO regulators to reach some resolution.

Fuissé to the southeast has the next-largest surface of premiers crus, at 51.3ha, across communes: Vers Cras (split between Pouilly and Fuissé), Le Clos, Les Brûlés, Les Ménétrières, ►



Below: Eric Forest,
Domaine Eric Forest.
Right: Audrey Braccini,
Domaine JA Ferret



POUILLY-FUISSE: EIGHT NAMES TO REMEMBER

CHATEAU-FUISSE

The Vincent family has owned the Château-Fuissé domaine since 1862. Today, the family has more than 40ha of vineyards, including 25ha in Pouilly-Fuissé. The wines are made by Antoine Vincent, who ferments on native yeasts, mostly in cask, and ageing over two winters. Single-vineyard premiers crus include south-facing Les Brûlés and the walled Le Clos monopole located behind the winery, and even more premier cru grapes are blended into its Tête de Cuvée bottling.

DOMAINE BARRAUD

Founded in Vergisson in 1905, Domaine Barraud was among the first to bottle a domaine wine in the region, back in 1947 – the future premier cru Les Crays. The domaine has grown to 11ha under Daniel Barraud, who has recently passed the reins to his son and daughter Julien and Anaïs. Its vineyards are home to a number of premiers crus, including En France, Les Crays and Sur la Roche.

DOMAINE ERIC FOREST

Based in Vergisson, Eric Forest learned winemaking from his grandfather and took over the family domaine from him in 1999. Today, he works 7.5ha in and around Vergisson. He uses organic and biodynamic methods in the vineyards, although is not certified. The fruit is gently pressed without crushing and then fermented in cask on native yeast with much of the lees. It's

matured over two winters before bottling without filtration and with very little sulphur.

DOMAINE GUFFENS-HEYDEN

Belgian by birth, Jean-Marie Guffens (pictured p40) arrived in the Mâconnais in the 1970s and worked as an apprentice with local vignerons. With his wife, he has built their 5.7ha domaine and négociant business Verget to produce some of the most exciting whites in Burgundy. He and his winemaker Julien Desplans produce wines in a luxurious style while avoiding excess. Their Pouilly-Fuissé parcels in the Vergisson climats of Sur la Roche and Les Crays will be blended and labelled as Premier Jus des Premiers Crus from 2020.

DOMAINE JA FERRET

This superb 18ha domaine was founded in 1840. It has been directed for decades by women, notably the indomitable Jeanne Ferret, who began to domaine-bottle her wine in the 1950s when this practice was still very rare. She developed an insightful classification of the terroirs of the region and began to bottle single-vineyard wines separately. Today, under proprietors Louis Jadot, the winemaking and vineyards are in the hands of Audrey Braccini, who is doing marvellous work with this heritage.

DOMAINES LEFLAIVE

No longer a singular estate based in Puligny-Montrachet, there are now two Domaines Leflaive. In the Mâconnais, the

same biodynamic techniques and best-in-class winemaking are used – overseen by Pierre Vincent, with overall direction from Brice de La Morandière – as in Puligny. The Leflaive operation is still growing, but it owns or rents more than 18ha in the Mâconnais and has begun to produce an exquisite range of wines, including the premier cru En Vigneraie, fermented mainly in used casks.

DOMAINE THIBERT

Christophe Thibert and his sister Sandrine manage this domaine, the vineyards being owned by the family for eight generations. However, it was not until 1967 that their parents Andrée and René formally founded the domaine. Under Christophe, it has grown to 20ha. He and his team harvest and ferment with a sensitive hand in the vineyards and the cellar to produce wines from several single-vineyard sites, including premier cru wines Vignes Blanches and Les Ménétrières.

ROC DES BOUTIRES

The Parinet family purchased the Château du Moulin-à-Vent in Beaujolais in 2009 and first produced a Pouilly-Fuissé in 2011 using purchased grapes. They secured the 4.2ha domaine Roc des Boutires in Mâcon-Soltré in 2016. The vineyards are farmed using organic techniques by Brice Laffond, who makes the wine as well. The vines for its premier cru Les Bouthières are located around the domaine.



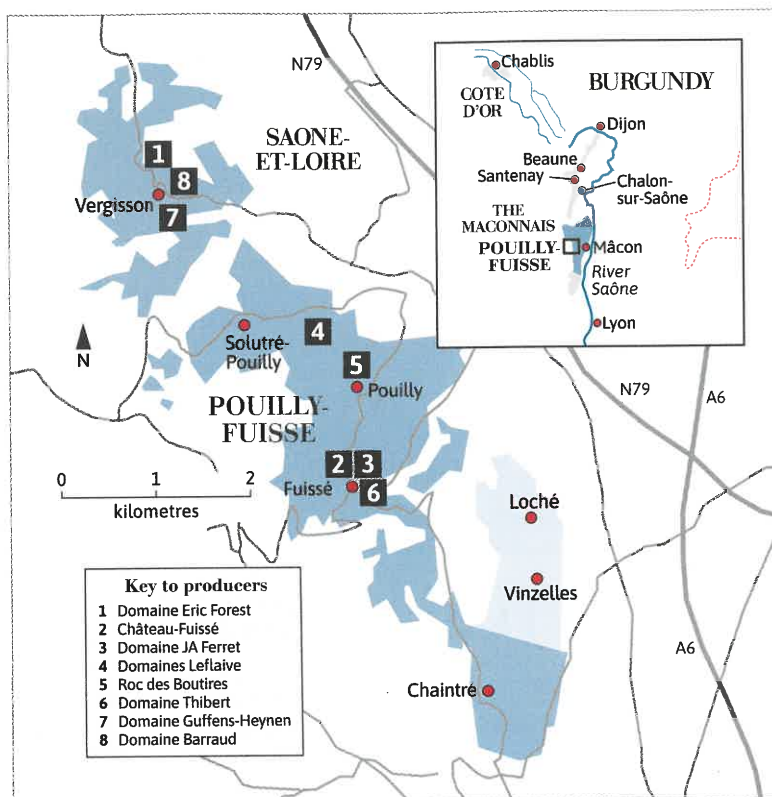
Les Perrières, Les Reisses and Les Vignes Blanches. The majority of Fuisse vineyards are located in an amphitheatre of vines behind the village, with soils similar to those of Solutré-Pouilly. There are also granite-based soils in the western portion.

On the other side of Solutré is the village of Vergisson, where the limestone outcropping of the Roche de Vergisson rises to 483m. Vines cover the slopes, although the highest sites, such as the upper reaches of Sur la Roche, are not classified as part of the premier cru. Though the vines stretch almost to the peak, only those exposed south or east have received the higher classification. The classified sites here are: Les Crays, Sur la Roche, portions of En France and La Maréchaude (combined with parts of several other lieux-dits).

Chaintré, southeast of Fuisse, is the final village included in the appellation, and most of its vineyards are exposed to the east. These are the vineyards with the lowest elevation and are among the warmest, lying due south from Vinzelles. There are four premiers crus here: part of the lieu-dit Le Clos de Monsieur Noly, which lies west of the village on some of the steepest slopes; Aux Quarts (commercialised as the Clos des Quarts by proprietors Dominique Lafon and Olivier Merlin); Le Clos Reyssier (on gentle slopes); and Les Chevières, south of the village.

These vineyards provide a wide array of aromas and flavours and some delightful (and affordable) wines. Tasting the range is the best way to discover the possibilities, not only of the new premiers crus, but of the high-quality cooler sites as well.

As with anything new in Burgundy, there is a bit of trepidation. Jean-Marie Guffens (*pictured above*) worries that wine lovers won't understand: 'They classified the sites that were exposed to the south and not too high on the slope. Today, however, it is an advantage to be exposed west or



POUILLY-FUISSE: KNOW YOUR VINTAGES

2020

A warm winter, and the season started almost three weeks in advance of 2019. Frost damage was avoided. In a hot and dry growing season, there was mostly enough rain to avoid blockage of ripening. Harvest began on 25 August, earlier even than (the extremely hot) 2003.

2019

Mild winter, abundant rain. The night of 4 April saw frost that reduced potential crops by 60%-80% in low-lying vineyards. Hot and dry conditions caused vines to shut down, impeding ripening, but a bit of rain in late August and early September allowed vines to finish. Harvest began on 9 September.

2018

A wet winter served to replenish reserves in general, yet flowering was thorough and a large crop of grapes was set. Some vines suffered in a hot, dry summer, but harvest began early, between mid-August and the beginning of September.

2017

After a frigid, dry winter, March was warm, bud break began early in April and a large crop was set. The summer was mostly hot and dry, with thunderstorms in June and July but fortunately no hail. A large storm on 31 August delivered 60mm of rain and interrupted harvest, but the skins were already sufficiently thick that little damage was done.

east. Who is going to know these crus? They are destined to be misunderstood.'

Let's hope that he is wrong – there are marvellous wines throughout the Pouilly-Fuisse appellation, better than they've ever been. The excitement in the air is thoroughly justified, and Burgundy fans everywhere will do well to share in it.



Curtis selects: 15 top wines from the crus of the appellation

These are Curtis' pick of wines he feels represent Pouilly-Fuissé at its best, regardless of whether or not they will gain premier cru status. Prices, stockists and alcohol levels are shown where available. 2020 vintage wines may not have completed maturation when tasted

① **Château-Fuissé, Le Clos Pouilly-Fuissé 2017 95**

£55-£67.50 Christopher Keiller, The Solent Cellar
This monopole of 2.7ha is at the centre of the Fuissé appellation, exposed to the east. Vine age averages 60 years with the oldest dating to the 1920s. This site has thin soils at the top, and marl with limestone pebbles at mid-slope. Grapes are fermented in cask, 80% new. Luxurious aromas of apple, honey and spice with fresh cream and beeswax. The texture is dense but, despite the ripeness of the year, it is not heavy. Should age for decades. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alcohol** 13.5%

Eric Forest, La Roche Pouilly-Fuissé 2014 95

From a site at 401m, too high on the rock to be premier cru. The altitude and limestone subsoil deliver a wine with complex aromas of citrus, bergamot and fresh coconut. The palate is crisp, but not lacking in body, with a savoury, salty note and lots of minerality on the finish. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 13%

② **JA Ferret, Hors Classe Pouilly-Fuissé 1er Cru Les Ménétrières 2020 95** £55 Hatch Mansfield

This site is highly esteemed by Mme Ferret, whose domaine holds 0.8ha here. Clay over

limestone and marl. The wine is fermented and aged in cask (20% new) with a second winter in tank before release. The result is lemony and very fine, with floral notes, a well-integrated cask element and bright acidity on the palate. Not lacking in length, this is delicate yet firm. **Drink** 2023-2033

Leflaive, En Vigneraie Pouilly-Fuissé 2019 95

US\$89.99 Michel Thibault Wine
This 0.23ha parcel at the base of the rock of Solutré is exposed fully to the south with chalky clay soils. Biodynamically grown grapes are lightly crushed and fermented in cask (15% new) before ageing for 18 months in total. Aromas of green apple and camomile with a touch of honey; superbly balanced, crisp and clean with richness but no heaviness. The lingering finish and substance hint it will improve for decades in the bottle. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 13.5%

③ **Château des Quarts, Clos des Quarts Pouilly-Fuissé 2018 94**

£33.33 (ib)-£39.17 Bery Bros Exchange, Millésima
The Clos des Quarts is a 2.63ha vineyard whose oldest vines were planted in 1917, in the village of Chaintré, where Olivier Merlin has farmed the vines since 2003. In 2012, he

purchased the property with Dominique Lafon: the two make an impressive team. This was barrel-fermented (6% or 7% new casks) and aged 18 months to produce a stupendous wine that is creamy and rich yet very elegant. It's powerful, but with plenty of freshness and delicacy here as well as loads of extract and tremendous potential for ageing. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 13%

④ **Château des Rontets, Les Birbettes Pouilly-Fuissé 2020 94**

Superb wine from vines 60-110 years old in the windswept clos of Les Rontets at 350m at the top of the village of Fuissé. Organic methods and sensitive fermentation in large oak uprights deliver a wine of great complexity and depth. Aromas range from pear, elderflower and coconut milk. Spice and a mineral note on the palate, where the texture is silky yet substantial enough for decades of cellaring. **Drink** 2023-2033

JA Ferret, Hors Classe Tournant de Pouilly, Pouilly-Fuissé 1er Cru Les Reisses 2020 94

£55 Hatch Mansfield
Tournant de Pouilly is the domaine's traditional name for this parcel. The limestone-rich site is located in the ►

premier cru Les Reisses. The 1ha holding averages 60 years of age, and produces wine of density and concentration, yet the trademark finesse is still in evidence in the lovely aromas of camomile, citrus peel and spice. The substance is apparent on the powerful, lingering finish. **Drink** 2023-2033

Olivier Merlin, Sur La Roche Pouilly-Fuissé 2018 94

£32.08 Millésima

A highlight in Merlin's line-up, this comes from clay and limestone soils at 370m facing southeast. The wine ferments in cask and ages over two winters to produce a result that manages to be at once very rich, with a creamy texture and plenty of body, but also incredibly fresh and lively. The aromatic palate shows everything from lemon peel to ripe apple, although it does not veer into tropical territory, and there are plenty of mineral/saline accents. Marvellous length, great potential for ageing. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 13.5%

Bret Brothers, Aux Vignerai Pouilly-Fuissé 2019 93

£33 Berry Bros Exchange

Produced from a half-hectare holding on this steeply sloping premier cru located on the south side of the rock of Solutré. The organically farmed grapes are fermented and aged in used casks to produce this lush wine with delightfully hedonistic aromas of acacia and quince, buttressed by fresh lemon peel aromas. The texture is silky and very fine, and although there is ripeness and heft here, the wine has a surpassing elegance. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 13%

Leflaive, La Chaneau Pouilly-Fuissé 2019 93

La Chaneau is the extension of the Vignerai slope as it turns to face east. It is located further up the slope and is thus not classified as premier cru. The holding of 0.27ha in iron-rich limestone and clay soils produces delightful wines. Gentle fermentation and ageing highlights lemon peel and pomelo fruit with delightful salty mineral notes. Crisp and fine on the palate, cask maturation (15% new) is completely integrated to produce a seamless, delicious wine. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 13.5%

⑤ Robert-Denogent, Les Reisses Pouilly-Fuissé 2018 93

US\$69 Kermit Lynch

A rich but elegant style from a half-hectare of vines farmed using biodynamic methods and averaging 60 years of age. Winemaking is very hands-off: after a light crushing, the must is fermented mostly in cask (some in stainless and in concrete). No stirring of the lees and little topping up, yet the wines remain precise and nuanced, with a great definition of lush ripe apple fruit, notes of spice and cream and a pleasant mineral undercurrent. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 13%

Château-Fuissé, Les Combettes Pouilly-Fuissé 2020 92

This monopole of 1.8ha is situated between Les Rontets and premier cru Les Perrières, exposed to the east and north at 280m. The site has more limestone than clay, and the stony character comes out in the wine, with a bright, lemony aroma and notes of mint and liquorice. The texture is silky but still

substantial. The wine is fermented in used casks and matured over two winters to deliver great finesse. **Drink** 2023-2033

⑥ Guerrin, Pouilly-Fuissé 1er Cru Les Crays 2020 92

Produced from 45-year-old vines on a parcel of 0.4ha on south-facing slopes in Vergisson, grapes are fermented in cask (15% new). An enchantingly smoky nose with lemony fruit and bright minerality. On the palate there is rewarding breadth and weight but absolutely no heaviness. While this is drinking now, it should age for some time to come. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 13%

JA Ferret, Autour de la Roche Pouilly-Fuissé 2020 92

£50 Hatch Mansfield

The lieu-dit Les Terres du Perret site lies at high altitude in Vergisson and faces north, and is thus not classified as premier cru. Grapes are fermented in stainless steel and blended with grapes from the Verchères lieu-dit. Has a purity of fruit and vibrant acidity but enough substance to please the hedonist as well. **Drink** 2023-2033

Olivier Merlin, Les Chevières Pouilly-Fuissé 2018 92

£31.67 Millésima

From a parcel of very old vines in Chaintré. The grapes are whole-cluster pressed with fermentation on native yeasts in cask (10% new). The result is ripe and round with aromas of golden apples, acacia flowers and a hint of cream. The texture is elegant with a solid heft balanced by bright acidity. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 13% **D**



Vins présentés uniquement sur le site internet

Decanter.com



Domaine Ferret, Tête de Cru, Pouilly-Fuissé, 1er Cru Les Perrières, Burgundy 2020

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This wine is from east-facing vines behind Mme. Ferret's house, and is thus called by the domaine 'Clos de Jeanne' although it is in premier cru Les Perrières. It delivers a substantial wine; here the cask ferment (20...

Points 92



Château des Rontets, Pouilly-Fuissé, Clos Varambon, Burgundy 2020

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This is produced from the grapes of a 6.5-hectare clos surrounding the Château at 350 meters above the village of Fuissé, too high to be classified premier cru. The vines average forty years of age, and are...

Points 92



Domaine Carrette, Pouilly-Fuissé, 1er Cru En Servy, Burgundy 2020

[+ Add to My Wines](#)

A lovely effort from this young domaine in organic conversion. This comes from a parcel located near the village of Solutré. Luxurious, rich, ripe buttery apple aromas with some smoke and spice from the cask...

Points 92



Eric Forest, Pouilly-Fuissé, 1er Cru Les Crays, Burgundy 2020

[+ Add to My Wines](#)

In 2020, there was an uneven ripening in this parcel and Forest waited for physiological ripeness, introducing some very ripe, almost tropical fruit notes on the nose and a note of honey. The barrel ferment and le...

Points 91



Château-Fuissé, Pouilly-Fuissé, 1er Cru Les Brulés, Burgundy 2020

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This premier cru site is located at 280 meters elevation but faces due south. The marly soil delivers ripe sunny fruit, and the style is nearly the opposite of the 'Combettes' bottling. The nose displays voluptuous...

Points 91