

OUR NYC PANEL DIGS  
INTO THE CHALKY,  
FOCUSED WINES OF  
**PREMIER AND GRAND  
CRU CHABLIS**



*Our panel (left to right): Eduardo Porto Carreiro, Édouard Bourgeois, Mike Madrigale, Victor Pinkston.*

# Mineral Rights

by Lana Bortolot / photos by David Handschuh  
team captain: Mike Madrigale



*Team captain Mike Madrigale, Head Sommelier at Café Boulud and Boulud Sud.*



*Eduardo Porto Carreiro, Beverage Director at DBGB.*

## TALK TO A SOMMELIER ABOUT TERROIR, AND INVARIABLY CHABLIS

enters the conversation. Widely produced and widely varied, Chardonnay may have suffered a general downswing with consumers (to wit: “ABC”—Anything But Chardonnay), mainly for its association with big, oaky New World versions—but true Chardonnay, as expressed in Chablis, never left the imagination of those who sell and serve it.

After visiting Chablis last year, I was seduced by the deliciousness of the wine, which struck me as both nervy and salt-of-the-earthly, even as it dissolved the enamel from my teeth after a week of tasting. And it wasn’t hard to convince Quaff Report captain Mike Madrigale to put Chablis to the test before a panel of his colleagues from the various Daniel Boulud restaurants, where Mike is Head Sommelier at Café Boulud and Boulud Sud.

Of the 193 million bottles produced in Burgundy, 38 million are Chablis, Eric Szablowski, a former winemaker at Domaine William Fèvre told me. Szablowski, now an educator in Chablis, said, “If you want to produce Chablis, you must be on Kimmeridgian,” referring to the ancient soil mix packed with fossilized oysters that give the wines both its chalky and saline characteristics. Other Chablis is planted on Portlandia—also a chalk and limestone mix, but without sea-fossils.

Our call for submissions netted so many samples, we decided to explore the region in two reports: the Premier and Grand Crus in one, and Chablis Villages, the 19 appellations surrounding Chablis, in the other. The weightier Premier and Grand Crus seemed more seasonably suitable for a winter report, we look forward to blinding the Villages bottles in the near future.

Mike invited Édouard Bourgeois, Head Sommelier at Café Boulud, and veteran panelists Victor Pinkston Head Sommelier at db bistro moderne and Eduardo Porto Carreiro, Beverage Director at DBGB, for our tasting.

As usual, the panel tasted blind, with the bottles organized by vintage year and cru (Premier first), starting with Fourchaume, north of the town of Chablis and east of the Serein River; and wrapping counterclockwise around to Les Clos, the largest of the seven Grand Cru climats, positioned on the southwest-facing slope above the town.

Where possible, I grouped wines from like crus together and we were able to taste wines from Fourchaume, Vaillons, Vaugiraut, Fourneaux and Les Clos side by side.

The \$30 Premier Cru from Domaine Boudin (Fourchaume) gave the panel an excellent start out of the gate. “This is what Chablis is, in my opinion,” Mike said. “It’s classic in its aroma with flowers, lemons, minerals, flinty, chalky, sea-shelly. The mid palate had a really nice—almost plush quality, but quickly transitioned into this saline, mouthwatering mineral finish.” The group agreed, with Édouard calling it a “very rich wine, ready to drink now,” and Victor noting its “generosity” and “very focused and citrusy finish.”

In most wines, the group found traits that telegraph Chablis. Minerality would dominate as the overarching flavor characteristics of most wines—in some cases overwhelming the fruit. Citrus was another prevalent note, ranging from candied lemon to lime rind. Some wines had a peach aspect to them (Domaine Jolly, both wines from Domaine Vincent Damp, Joseph Drouhin).

Flint would lead in wines from Domaine Jolly, Charly Nicolle and Louis Michel, and other notes such as “milk carton” and “lactic” showed up in wines from Domaine Jolly, Vincent Damp, Domaine Philippe Goulley, Domaine Oudin (2011), Jean-Pierre Grosset (2010 from Les Fourneaux), and Joseph Drouhin.

But all panelists agreed that what most defines Chablis is precision, clarity, and a balance of fruit and earth—whether smoky flint or a taste of Jurassic soil.

“Great textbook Chablis is a balance of purity of fruit and chalky minerality laced with flinty smokiness. I know that sounds like everybody else’s definition of Chablis, but it rings true to my markers of that place,” said Eduardo. “If too much oak is present, that is a major detractor. If the wines lack precision or are muddled in aromatics or flavor, it’s tough to pinpoint their place and so, those wines lack typicity of Chablis.”



Édouard Bourgeois, Head Sommelier at Café Boulud.

## BEST IN SHOW



### Louis Michel & Fils 2012 Grand Cru Vaudésir (\$56)

Wowed this panel with its “river water purity,” minerality and high quality of fruit. “Exciting wine. Great balance, good energy, full and focused.” “Elegant and inspiring.” “Off-the-charts extraordinary.”

VINEYARD BRANDS



### Domaine Boudin 2013 Premier Cru Fourchaume (\$30)

Classic, pleasant clarity and pure chalk expression. Focused palate, plush, mouth-watering finish.

MICHAEL SKURKNIK WINES



### Domaine Oudin 2010 Premier Cru Vaugiraut (\$33)

Citrus, spice and everything nice. Lots of well-placed acidity, mineral, clean. “Nice texture, touch of salt, ripe pears, cooked apples, great length, poached pear finish.”

JENNY & FRANÇOIS



### Jean-Pierre Grosset 2010 Premier Cru Les Fourneaux (\$40)

High-energy palate with “great” acid and very good length. Classic dusty, chalk profile with lemon pith, “woolly” gunpowder finish. Salty and powerful style of wine.

VOS SELECTIONS





**Victor Pinkston, Head Sommelier at db bistro modern.**

We tasted five pairs of wines from the same producer, separated by either climat or vintage year, and yielding different results. By coincidence, in all cases, the second wine in these pairings was the stronger representation of Chablis. That, Mike said, “goes to show you, you never own wine; wine owns you. And that’s a good thing.”

After all 16 bottles were revealed, the panel retasted five that intrigued them the most (parenthetical indicates position in tasting order): Domaine Boudin 2013 Premier Cru Fourchaume (#1); Jean-Pierre Grosset 2011 Premier Cru Mont de Milieu (#8); Domaine Oudin 2010 Premier Cru Vaugiraut (#10); Jean-Pierre Grosset 2010 Premier Cru Les Fourneaux (#12) and Louis Michel & Fils 2012 Grand Cru Vaudésir (#13).

While the 2011 Domain Oudin did not impress (“When you try to go deep and get the most out of it, you can’t because the minerality was too well-hidden,” said Édouard), the 2010 did, especially after opening up and with “the naturalness coming out of it,” Mike noted. Of the two Jean-Pierre Grossets, the panel decided the Mont de Milieu became too lactic, and gave the nod to Les Fourneaux for its high energy. What reigned supreme: Louis Michel & Fils Grand Cru Vaudésir, a wine Eduardo called “too legit to quit,” and which won accolades from all as a wine that kept on giving.

“For me, this has the richness and complexity you want in a textbook Chablis,” said Victor. **SJ**

## CHALKING UP CHABLIS

**Domaine Jolly 2013 Premier Cru Fourchaume “L’Homme Mort” (\$30)** Easy with fruity aromatics and fleshy peach palate, but with a lack of dimension that keeps it from being classic Chablis. Still found traces in smoky, slightly lactic nose, lime rind, mineral notes. More of a BTG selection. **ESPRIT DU VIN**

**Domaine Vincent Dampé 2013 Premier Cru Côte de Lechet (\$35)** Residual sugar overshadowed the fruit, with candied notes ranging from cotton candy to confectioner’s sugar and taffy. Not showing typicity. **MICHAEL SKURNIK WINES**

**Domaine Vincent Dampé 2013 Premier Cru Vaillons (\$35)** Exotic nose of peach and citrus, cloves and mineral. Long mineral finish, very good but not intense. Good for every day drinking. **MICHAEL SKURNIK WINES**

**Laroche 2012 Premier Cru Vaillons Vieilles Vignes (\$51)** Dominant sulphur. “Very challenging to assess at this time.” **WILSON DANIELS**

**William Fèvre 2012 Premier Cru Montmains (\$50)** Not as expressive as expected from this producer. Mineral character was coarse and intense with tart lemon and saline. **HENRIOT INC.**

**Domaine Philippe Gouley 2008 Premier Cru Montmains (\$30)** Off-putting nose. Sulphuric and bitter even with some age on it. **GOLDEN RAM IMPORTS**

**Jean-Pierre Grosset 2011 Premier Cru Mont de Milieu (\$45)** Bitterness and hard phenolics overwhelmed the fruit, though one taster liked its flint and chalk and “encompassing presence on palate.” **VOS SELECTIONS**

**Domaine Oudin 2011 Premier Cru Vaugiraut (\$34)** Mineral, stony. Some bitterness and lemon pith. Not showing depth nor typicity. **JENNY & FRANÇOIS**

**Charly Nicole 2012 Premier Cru Fourneaux (\$45)** Ripe, full and somewhat “pushed.” Strong oak spine that needs time to integrate in the wine. **ROBERT KACHER SELECTIONS**



**William Fèvre 2012 Premier Cru Vaulorent (\$60)** Lean, lemony, acidic. Brassy flavors. “Toothpick quality,” lacking typicity. **HENRIOT INC.**

**Laroche 2012 Grand Cru Le Clos (\$136)** Oak-dominant, comments ranged from sexy to complex and textured. Better received than the earlier Laroche, but needs time to integrate. **WILSON DANIELS**

**Joseph Drouhin 2011 Grand Cru Les Clos (\$81)** Off-balanced with bitter, green/phenolic notes; lactic and caramel on the finish. **DREYFUS ASHBY**

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