

the initial glossy texture yielding to intense red fruit flavours and a spicy kick on the resounding finish.

Château de Monthélie

rue du Pied de Vallée, 21190 Monthélie
Tel: +33 3 80 21 23 32
www.domaine-eric-de-suremain.com

Unlike many châteaux all across vinous France, which are little more than fanciful etchings on labels, there's a real one at this address. Mansard-roofed in polychrome tiles, it faces the setting sun, a situation that causes its pink walls to glow on clear days as evening approaches. It dates from 1746 and was inherited by the great-grandfather of the current owner, Eric de Suremain, in 1903.

After completing his studies at the 'Viti', Beaune's wine school, de Suremain started here in 1978, overlapping with his grandfather and father for a period. Vineyard holdings amount to 10.5 hectares, split about 50:50 between Monthélie and Rully, the latter coming from de Suremain's grandmother. The vineyards are worked according to biodynamic principles, though are not certified because of the weight of administrative work that that carries. They are certified organic and the wines are labelled as such: 'AB' – *Agriculture Biologique*. Eric de Suremain is a hardy individual and thinks nothing of hosting visitors on a bitter December evening in shirtsleeves and shorts, explaining his winemaking by way of anecdote and quip. Yields can vary wildly depending on the weather during the growing season. He aims for an average across the domaine of 35 hectolitres per hectare, which dropped to 25 in 2015 and then plummeted to 2 in frost-ravaged 2016. Over his time at the domaine, harvest dates have been similarly variable: he started on 17 October in 1980 and 17 August in 2003.

There isn't a strict policy on destemming, the starting point being that it may be carried out 100 per cent, though some whole bunches are usually used, up to 30 per cent depending on the vintage. Wooden vats are used for fermentation with natural yeasts and the wine is then aged for a year in a mixture of standard 228 litre barrels (no more than 20 per cent new) and wooden *foudres* of 35 to 70 hectolitre capacity. The resulting wines have an immediate, lively appeal and, because Monthélie does not rank as a blue-chip appellation, equally appealing prices.

Try this: Monthélie 1er cru Sur la Velle

The Sur la Velle vineyard abuts Volnay Clos des Chênes and sits upslope of Meursault, the name meaning 'above the village'. It covers 6 hectares, of which de Suremain owns half, the remainder being divided between about a dozen others. It is a fine and elegant wine and could easily be mistaken for a Volnay. What it may lack in length it makes up for with a delicious tingle and it ages well too, the 1985 was still vibrant, delicate but not frail, at thirty years of age.

MEURSAULT

The village of Meursault possesses a scale and grandeur relative to its neighbours that is echoed by Gevrey-Chambertin in the Côte de Nuits. And Meursault the wine might be seen, without too ambitious a stretch of the imagination, as the southern white echo of Gevrey's reds. Their wines occupy similar positions in the firmament; they are bold, structured expressions of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, seldom rivalled as statements of each grape's character. When one thinks of Meursault ethereal finesse is not the first quality that comes to mind. The classic descriptors utilize fuller flavour triggers: toast and honey, nuts and butter.

Travelling south on the main road past Volnay, Meursault is the first of the Côte de Beaune's triumvirate of great white wine villages you meet and is easily spotted thanks to the tall spire of the church that sits on a small rise at the centre of the village, across from the *mairie*. Along with a number of other Côte d'Or villages there has been significant regeneration of the town centre in recent years. The layout of the area between church and *mairie* has been completely reworked and opened up thanks to the removal of railings and low walls, and a focal point by way of a fountain has been added. Down the slope past the post office the Place de la République has had a similar facelift. There's an abundance of restaurants of varying repute, some interesting shops and a good butcher, all of which makes Meursault a sound base for exploration of the Côte d'Or and an excellent stopping point if one is based elsewhere.

The village stretches away and down from the centre in different directions rather than packing tightly around it, and some substantial