

THE SOURCE
JEAN COLLET
2023 CHABLIS 1ER & GRAND CRUS



STORY BY TED VANCE

LABELS

Domaine Jean Collet et Fils hasn't changed their US labels for about fifty years. When I presented the “new labels” used in the French market as a possible switch in the US, our team responded positively, and some others thought customers might think of the vintage-style rebranding as contrived. But these are the labels Collet used in the early 1900s; they're an authentic and gorgeous homage to an earlier time in the company's history.

Perhaps the changing of labels could've started about twenty years ago when a twenty-one-year-old Romain Collet took the reins of the domaine in 2008 after his father Gilles began to suffer from nerve issues in his legs and could hardly stand anymore. With the blessing of his parents, Gilles and Dominique, Romain quietly began changing some of the domaine's labels to reflect the use of organic methods in the vineyards and spontaneous fermentations in the cellar. Before changing the entire domaine to these methods, he wanted to put all these changes to the test.

Today, everything is fermented spontaneously, and the vineyards are under organically certified, and not because these practices became fashionable. With the stable of old vines largely planted by his late grandfather, Jean Collet, together with their enviable collection of Premier and Grand Crus, and Romain's enological palate continuing to sharpen, the Collet brand has everything going for it, and the use of these newer techniques for them just adds to its abundance of incredible traits.

While Chablis growers' interpretations are often labeled somewhere between the Loire and Côte d'Or, Romain's style has leaned more toward the white wines he most admires and drinks regularly: Hautes-Côtes, Corton-Charlemagne, Meursault, and, within Chablis, Raveneau as his local stylistic north star. But in the cellar, he follows the same principle as Gilles and Jean before him: to customize each *climat* according to their particularities. The result is remarkable consistency of quality across the range while allowing each climat to retain its own identity.

Some, such as Chablis Village, Vieilles Vignes and Vallée de Valvans, and the 1er Cru Montmains are raised in steel to highlight the rockier terrain. Other Premier Crus, like Vaillons, with less clay and more rock are raised in a mix of inert tanks and large-format oak. Fôrets, the youngest vines in the Premier Cru range, is raised in concrete eggs to bring a little more body and depth missing with the younger vines. Butteaux spends a year in steel followed by two to three months in second- and third-year oak to soften the lines of this generous cru before bottling. Those with deeper topsoil go in young wood—but never new (except Séchet, which shoulders the burden of new oak alone—the reason we've never imported it), like the right bank's Mont de Milieu, Montée de Tonnerre, Valmur and Clos.

While some debate the approach, I find it brilliant. To sculpt the wines based on each climat's idiosyncrasies and strengths rather than a sterile recipe across the range regardless of topsoil depth, exposition, slope, and other considerations demonstrates great confidence, perception and know-how. Having tended these vines since the 1700s, the Collets know their vineyards as well as any grower in the region knows their own.

Most growers, even average ones, can look better than they are when the season makes every decision easy.

But I don't believe there is a more consistent grower in the appellation with regard to price and quality, than Romain, or anyone with a better handle on diversifying approaches to achieve success, regardless of the weather. In his modesty, Romain attributes the consistency in quality between vintages to the vines that are now averaging about 65 years old.

I admit that since we started importing their wines with Romain's first vintage, there were some years I skipped or reduced quantities—the warmer ones, of course: 2009, 2015, 2018, as I bent to the market and to my own preferences for colder years, they allowed me to do it. I wouldn't make that decision today. Looking back, I realized I had labeled those vintages far too prematurely and underestimated them. Not only because there are now so many warmer years and that Chablis is easy to sell, it's that people need to experience the quality of their work in all conditions to understand just how good this domaine is, and 2023 is no exception.



Romain Collet, December 2025

ROMAIN COLLET ON 2022-2024 VINTAGES

2024 was a very complicated vintage. In terms of viticulture, we began with damage and crop losses caused by the spring frost. Then, in May, we had a historic hailstorm of significant scale and great violence, and to finish, a lot of water during May and June, historic downy mildew pressure, with a loss rate between 60 and 80% depending on the sector. Organic viticulture was very complicated because the amounts of copper allowed to fight downy mildew are limited [by law], so we suffered significant losses. So we were dealing with a cool vintage and we picked at the end of September, with a fairly classic profile of fresh and taut wines which gave us beautiful tension and beautiful freshness—a classic vintage. Regardless, I think the aging potential will nevertheless be greater for the 2024s.

The **2023** vintage was the complete opposite of 2024. It was a warm vintage of wines with roundness and fruit—easy to drink in their youth, while keeping a certain minerality and freshness in their finish. This is where we realize that we really do have some rather magical terroirs with old vines in Chablis. The 2023 vintage surprised us with a yield that allowed us to have a very respectable commercial volume.

With the **2022** vintage, we return to something more classic. Today, the wines are beginning to taste very well, often with what we could call maritime characteristics, with mineral reduction. And I think we are going to have a very beautiful lifespan on the 2022 vintage. 2022 was early, warm, and dry,

but technically well balanced. After frosts between April 3 and April 11, the damage was limited thanks to a vegetative stage that had not yet advanced enough to be truly vulnerable. Then a very warm spring accelerated the cycle with full flowering at the end of May, about 10 days ahead of the average of the last 20 years. The Yonne department was placed under drought alert as early as May 19, then rains arrived on June 21 and lasted until June 25, leaving between 42 and 88 mm in Chablis. When it became hot again in mid-August, the rain limited excessive concentration of the juices and preserved the sugar and acid balance. The sanitary condition remained excellent thanks to the dry weather, although some young vines or parcels on shallow soils showed signs of water stress.



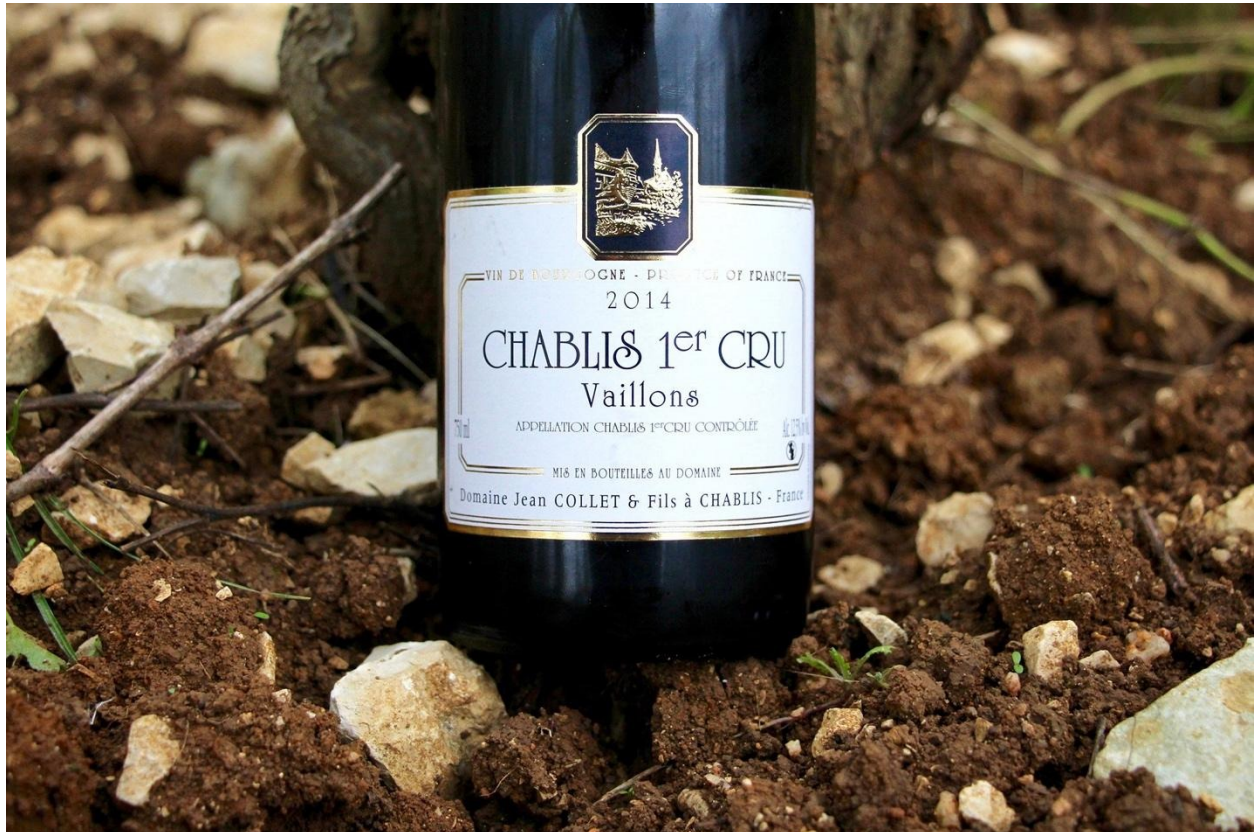
Butteaux at the bottom of the picture, Forêts where the road going down turns right, Montmains (though it includes the previous two lieux-dits) is further toward the village on this hill slope, Grand Crus all the way in the back and Vaillons on the hill just to the left along the forested top.

PREMIER CRU | LEFT BANK

The Montmains hill is subdivided into three lieux-dits that can all be labeled Montmains: *Montmains*, *Les Forêts* and *Butteaux*. Here we find more topsoil at both sites than at the **MONTMAINS** rows closer to the village. **LES FORÊTS**' young vines usually prove to be the most exotic in their range, while **BUTTEAUX**, with its old vines, heavier topsoil and massive rocks, is one of the stoutest, and in a blind tasting it could easily be taken for a Grand Cru wine on weight and power alone.

The long hill of **VAILLONS** parallels Montmains just to the north, separated by Chablis *village* vineyards on the same Kimmeridgian marls as the Premier Crus that face more toward the north—the sole reason for their classification. (This village appellation makes up Collet's Chablis 'Vallée de Valvans' bottling.) Vaillons is often my "go-to" Chablis in Collet's Premier Crus range, for when I want a balance of everything. It's minerally due to the very rocky soil and has good body because of its

~40% clay in the topsoil. Tension is always there no matter the vintage because of the richer, more water-retentive soil that prevents hydric stress compared to sites with sparser soils. The majority of the vineyard faces southeast, with some parcels due east, bringing an advantage from the morning sun and less solar power in the baking summer and autumn evenings. Though not as hot as the right bank, with the Grand Crus facing more toward the west, it shows its breed with a constant evolution rising in the glass due to the many different lieux-dits parcels blended into it. I believe that Collet is the owner of the largest portion of vines on this big cru hillside, making for that sort of MVP character without anything missing due to the large stable of parcels to choose from. Given its size, it is also the largest quantity of wine from any single Collet Premier Cru we receive.



Vaillons shot in the upper vines in Vaillons

PREMIER CRU | RIGHT BANK

The Collets are advantaged with a fabulous collection of vineyards from both sides of the river, though most of their Premier Cru land is on the left bank. While the left bank wines could be characterized as more mineral-dominant than the right bank, there are indeed exceptions. I've often said that **MONT DE MILIEU** is one of those wines that, though it is on the right bank, is very left bank in style compared to the Grand Crus and many of the other right bank Premier Crus, and there are few who bottle it. Over the years, this wine was always good but less impressive than many in Collet's range, at least for me. These days, I lament the small quantities we're allocated (based on

past purchases) because the most recent versions are starting to fight for top billing in the Premier Cru range.



Montée de Tonnerre in the center and Mont de Milieu to the right

There is no greater call in the Chablis Premier Cru world than **MONTÉE DE TONNERRE**. Yes, it's like a Grand Cru in some ways, mostly in how regal it is, but it's its own terroir as well. Positioned between Mont de Milieu and the Grand Cru slope, just a ravine away from Blanchots and Les Clos, it finds the balance with a gentler slope in many parts than the Grand Cru hillside, which has many different aspects and greater variability between the crus.

GRAND CRU

Collet also has (in very small quantities) the Grand Crus, **VALMUR** and **LES CLOS**. Their Valmur is situated at the top of the cru on its south side, facing northwest, which was less ideal for a Grand Cru decades ago but perfect for today's shifting climate. Stout and minerally, I believe it to consistently be one of the greatest overall wines in our entire portfolio. Les Clos is its equal but perhaps more extroverted and even slightly more balanced, gilded with Chablis' royal trim and the sun's gold. The topsoil toward the bottom of the hill is deeper and richer, bringing an added advantage against the hydric stress of warmer years, though disadvantaged in fending off frost.