

NEW ARRIVALS
2023 VINCENT BERGERON
MONTLOUIS-SUR-LOIRE
(AVAILABLE FROM THE SOURCE IN ALL U.S. MARKETS)



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2023 PREGAME

The first time barrel-tasting Vincent Bergeron's 2022s, he'd just bottled undoubtedly his most successful vintage. His 2021s were a stunning realization of more than a decade of preparation for masterpiece-level wines in Vincent's uniquely angelic, understated, and humble style. It's no secret that I greatly admire the man as much as the wine. His honesty, humility and fragility somehow translate into everything he makes. He has this nervous, anxious energy—a true artist in the middle of the process always—seemingly second-guessing every move yet never failing to deliver on what's bottled under his name. He's always pushing his wines to succeed without added sulfites, as he did across the entire range in 2021. They always show the work of a man who accepts the season as it is and builds on its assets instead of correcting its liabilities.

Ready for more, after our second thieved taste of 2022 Chenin Blanc from his 500-liter old French oak barrels, a familiar anxiety began to take hold. The wines were complex and beautiful but seemed

maybe a little *too* Vincent-gentle. It was another warm vintage, and today's most successful and sought-after renditions of dry Chenin and dry white wines in the wine market where we play often expect crackle and fire—Saumur's strong contribution to the conversation over the last two decades.

It was hard to read where these were headed. Given Vincent's complete eschewing of additives aside from rare sulfite additions at bottling (which can get them to sit up a little straighter), they had to land where they naturally would. Today, when I open them, as I did two bottles of 2022 *Matin, Midi et Soir*, at the beginning of July this year, I am humbled yet again by these wines. Like so many northern European white wines from this vintage, they built their structure slowly, rock by rock, into something almost megalithic; where they lacked in sharp snap, they often made up for it with enticing texture and salty mineral impressions. I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop, but they only seem to improve with each passing month.



Vincent thieving the 2023s, Spring 2024

We entered the market with half the US allocation of 2020s after Vincent switched from his importer at the time—pandemic fallout. A few well-seasoned buyers in California immediately recognized the quality of the 2020s despite its drought-plagued season. By the time it reached the glass, it evolved into a softer, rounder, rosy-cheeked sunny Chenin with plenty of complexity, while a little short on tension. When our sales team first took out the 2021 wines, they simply weren't moving. So we changed our approach by putting them into our Rare and Allocated tastings about six months after they arrived. We host these tastings two or three times a year in California and New York and will soon in many other states. In this focused and intimate flight tasting of 40 limited-

production wines, we let them sit with the buyers with only our technical details on paper and time to think uninterrupted. Suddenly, everyone understood them, and they sold out quickly. The 2022s did the same thing: about six months of virtual silence after arrival, then the tasting events, then gone. In New York, where almost no one had ever heard the name Vincent Bergeron, the reaction followed suit. Many first-time tasters of Vincent's wines were surprised that he wasn't already one of the "anointed."



Montlouis-sur-Loire, late Fall 2024

That success came with a complication of its own. For the first couple of years working together, Vincent's sales outside of Japan were mostly through us and some local businesses around Tours. At some point I explained that while I adore him and his wines and don't understand the slow movement, my market at the time had a ceiling, and he needed to expand. He made a move sometime in the mid-2022 release and focused on Paris. Not surprisingly, Paris immediately absorbed a significant share, and by the time we came back around for our 2023 allocation, the numbers we'd once received had been considerably trimmed. I had to reassert my intention that we're all in, so don't forget about us!

2023 SEASON

The 2023 season had the same narrative: warm year, hottest on record. But something equally unexpected happened. While his iodine and salty 2022s are textured and friendly, these 2023 warm-vintage wines across much of northern Europe are more fluid and gentler—almost the opposite of 2022. The fruit, herb and flower are sweeter but finer, and in a much higher octave, like a gentler,

more fragile 2021. Vincent's 2021s were almost perfect wines for me. The 2022s overdelivered on expectations, and the 2023s are equally perplexing as they are inviting. Everything about the vintage's temperatures suggests they should be burned out and flabby, but they're the opposite. I found the same thread five hundred kilometers drive from Montlouis in the Jura with Philippe Chatillon's 2023s, of which I am beyond completely obsessed. This modern Jura legend that few know said while tasting at the domaine, "Vintages like 2023 don't come around very often. The 2023 vintage wines are special; magical."

But why is 2023 an anomaly for a warm year? Where did this "magic" arrive against the odds? Perhaps in regions with naturally high-acid varieties, the early budbreak, the drying summer heat, and the early-picked but perfectly clean fruit paid off, transformed into an almost green, nectar-like state even when picked at a potential alcohol of 12%. When Philippe talks about it, his smile is filled with anticipatory joy. Vincent's face is calm and soft, and his anxiety-stressed grip relaxed. There is indeed magic and joy in this vintage—Amalfi Coast Biancolello-like joy with their majestic limestone cliffs overlooking the sea: a capture of that sweet green and yellow citrus fruit, the sunshine, the saltiness, though unmistakably Loire Valley Chenin Blanc. Vincent nailed it in 2023, and now that I'm back in the States until October, there will be a shortage of at least a case of each *Matin*, *Midi et Soir* and his *parcellaire* wine, *Maison Marchandelle*, that will improve my first California summer in nine years.

TWO DAYS: 2023 MATIN, MIDI ET SOIR & 2023 MAISON MARCHANDELLE

This is possibly the fifth set of these wines I've observed and drunk over the last eight months. I started with a three-pack of each that Vincent shipped to me in Spain a few months after bottling. Making appearances in back-to-back-to-back company of wine people, they were quickly dispatched. My wife and I drove through France for three weeks early this spring and, of course, we stopped to see Vincent (or as I often call him, Vinny, which always makes present company in Montlouis smile) and collected another set of six each for the house, of which surely only three or four of each remain.

The following tasting notes were from a set in California on August 12th and 13th, during three different engagements: the evening of the 12th, the morning, and again at *apéro* hour on the 13th.

The bottles I polished off some months ago in Europe were more fruit-forward than the set here from which I've drawn some observation notes. I expect that their charming sweet lime and sweet minty notes will rise again a few more months after these expats have better settled into their new US residences.

I had the two sitting upright for two weeks before opening and in a pretty cold fridge. The wines were transparent; their very light lees settled into the bottom.

Consistent with all the bottles I've tasted, the beautiful and elegant austerity of Vincent's style is heightened in these two wines. *Matin*, *Midi et Soir* (MMS) is tighter in the nose while *Maison Marchandelle* is distinctly richer; the former has such a gorgeous and vivacious palate—energizing but not brutish. Ripe lemon, nutmeg family spices, white flowers. It tastes like a barrel sample just before bottling, which is a high compliment to his craft as one could give so early in a wine's life. Barrel tasting just before its early peak, before bottling preparation is, in my experience, often an

unparalleled moment of purity and honesty in a young wine's life; it's not only the wine itself but the thrill of its potential. I reckon the other peak moment that can match it is when it's perfectly aged and in the prime of its slow bottle evolution.



Maison Marchandelle's petit dollop of new oak is present within the context of the two, but sparingly. It's equally charming, but the tone is softer, and the fruits start with Golden Delicious apple and pear with ripe lemon lifting the back end. The palate is notably more decadent than spare, a slight contrast to the nose.

On second pour, MMS is relentlessly salivating and soft-starch textured: more high-altitude Saint-Aubin than Corton-Charley. I wish more white Burgundy were like this—such a pleasure to smell, swish in your mouth, and stain on your palate.

The CO₂ comes up a bit more on Marchandelle's second pour but continues its same trajectory, with its horizontal breadth widening. There's a bit of bitterness in the palate—likely from oak but maybe also because this is 12.7% alcohol in a year that could've easily reached 14% if picked a week later. It's a touch flatter at this precocious moment than MMS (12.5%), but the CO₂ keeps it perky.

After the first two tastes, I wanted to see how the clay-like lees at the bottom of the bottles would play in a more realistic restaurant or just-grabbed-on-the-way-home-for-dinner setting where they'd be a little shook up instead of my gently staged and slow observation, so I gave the bottles a gentle and steady swirl to disturb them. Their color and turbidity immediately became more like absinthe

with a touch of water, and the aromatics, particularly on Marchandelle, became more reductive and gained a faint celery-essence note I didn't notice earlier.



Maison Marchandelle, late Fall 2024

With the third glass, post-light bottle swirl, MMS is slightly more bitter on the palate and working more toward a sweet celery-green, milky jicama texture. The bottle swirl helped Marchandelle more than MMS. It's still effervescent, but the midpalate is fleshing out more. A little more vigorous swirling in the glass over 30 seconds and the CO₂ goes flat, and Marchandelle's seduction begins after a long courting from the moment the cork is pulled until the gas dissipates. Without the CO₂, it's much more interesting, settling into more lime than lemon and fuller white citrus and malic fruits.

The morning of the second day, about 18 hours later, MMS's lees cream is gently tangy, making this potentially a good partner for foods with more acidic profiles, like lightly dressed, deeply herby fresh garden greens, fish with herb salsas, or even more in the vinegar world of cured food, like escabeche, or Japanese cucumber salad, sunomono. It's easy to see why his wines are prized in Japan and why many of his friends' wines are from the area.

The mountain herb notes in both wines ring the same tune as young Jura Savagnin, Savoie Altesse, and Ribeiro Lado and Treixadura; it's indeed no surprise that Chenin Blanc was brought to Galicia centuries ago, where it's called Agudelo, or Agudello.

Marchandelle's nose is a little more lees-creamy, and the palate closer to Jura Chardonnay—a great second day. Some CO₂ still forms in the glass quickly but dissipates with only a few swirls, where the nose leaps from that CO₂ restriction into a full theatrical flourish. Some of the straw notes have a sweeter-fruit and honeyed character that were missing yesterday. Like the 2022 version, there's a

big win on texture here, but it's creamier and warmer in feeling, sharper yet lighter with a slightly more glycerol back palate.

LAST TASTES OF THE SECOND DAY

Matin, Midi et Soir still has a welcoming austerity in the nose—the minerally petrichor of wet rock. The lactic/sour-fruit nose is uncannily like early-picked Jura Savagnin or Chardonnay, or even a blend of the two, with the similar lab numbers on paper and vintage. The palate has begun to stain with metal-rich rock and an energetic, concentrated thin beam of sweet lime and the delicate and sweet and pale heart of a long grass blade. At this point, it remains fragile, ascending and tilting into a nearly vertical position and becoming even sharper as it continues to open.



On first nose, Marchandelle maintains more opulence, staying on the Lamy Saint-Aubin line without the girth. Marchandelle remains true to its initial calling and never collapses in on itself to open later. It opens, and opens and opens. After 24 hours and well more than a dozen tips of the bottle, it's fully open and at its cruising altitude—in first class, of course.

What draws me most to these two bottles of nature is that they feel so alive, like charm-filled plant extracts as much as fruits, spring-water fragility. They will be gorgeous with delicate fare and a long lunch with fewer friends who live their own sort of poetic life. Overall, these two are surprisingly herbal, mineral, and slightly green-tinted Chenin from a very warm year. Like many 2023s, these two darlings play a different tune than the music on paper.



Vincent, 2022