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HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES
WINE MERCHANTS
CORNEY & BARROW LIMITED
LONDON

**CORNEY &
BARROW**
INDEPENDENT WINE MERCHANTS - 1780

DOMAINE COMTE ARMAND

Domaine des Epeneaux

2018 VINTAGE, EN PRIMEUR



INTRODUCTION

This was the last visit of 'day one' during our tasting trip last June. We had visited some serious growers in the Côte de Nuits and our final push of the day was here in the Côte de Beaune, concluding the day on a pretty exciting note.

It was the first visit for the Asia team to the Domaine, this was doubling our excitement.

We met with Paul Zinetti in the tiny courtyard and went on to taste in the even tinier cellar the full range of the reds, from barrel. Alas we don't have yet an allocation for all the wines and expect to get the missing appellations from next year.

All the wines were sumptuous and confirmed our feeling to have added a real gem of a Domaine to our portfolio. I could not visit the Domaine in March this year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. I can't wait to travel again and be back to Comte Armand for another tasting and in depth visit of the cellar and the estate. Watch this space for future news!

THE DOMAINE

Domaine Comte Armand, also known as Domaine des Epeneaux, is located in Pommard (Côte-d'Or). It has nine hectares of vines, of which the most important part is a magnificent five hectare monopole of Pommard 1er Cru Clos des Epeneaux, planted 100% to Pinot Noir. The domaine takes its name from this plot, which is one of the largest monopoles in Burgundy. The vineyard is enclosed by a stone wall and sits across two *lieux dits*, Les Petits Epenots and Les Grands Epenots, both *premier cru* plots.

This vineyard was acquired by Nicolas Marey in 1850 and throughout its history the domaine has had several talented winemakers. Pascal Marchand, of today's Domaine Marchand Tawse, ran the estate from 1985 to 1998. The mantle passed to Benjamin Leroux from 1999 until 2014, when he left to make his own wines. Paul Zinetti has worked at the estate since 2010, taking over the reins after Leroux's departure.

Each of these winemakers has added their contribution to what is the Domaine du Clos des Epeneaux today. Marchand elevated the domaine back to its former glory, as well as convincing the Comte to add a plot in Volnay (1er Cru Les Fremiets) and 2 plots in Auxey Duresse (1er Cru Les Breterins and Les Duresse) in 1994. Leroux worked on the conversion to biodynamic certification (achieved in 2005).

Zinetti has large shoes to fill. Although his real task is simply to let the wine shine. From what I understand from our discussion, he strives to give space to the expression of *terroir*. He makes all the wines the same way, in order to let the land do the talking and not the winemaker. He has also a lightness of touch, allowing the purity and inner power of the wine to emerge.

VITICULTURE AND WINEMAKING

The domaine is certified organic by Ecocert and is run biodynamically. No chemicals or pesticides are used, only plant-based treatments, in the form of teas and decoctions (nettles, dandelion, horsetail for instance). The soil is ploughed and the vines are worked the same way. In the course of the year, up to 60 people work at the domaine, with a large part at harvest time. So much manual labor as opposed to usage of chemicals is to preserve the microbiological life of the vineyard and train the vines to fight for themselves.

Ornamental and medicinal plants have been introduced in the plots, to encourage biodiversity. The vines are 50 years old on average, with some plots in the Clos des Epeneaux being 90+ years old. There is a high density of planting, up to 12,000 vines per hectare in the Clos.

Similar to the vineyard management, the winemaking process follows the lunar cycle. Vinification takes four weeks. The grapes are fully destemmed when arriving at the cellar but are kept intact, not crushed. There is a pre-fermentation maceration of a week at 13-14°C, then the

alcoholic fermentation takes place naturally, with indigenous yeast, for 5-10 days. The cycle finishes with a post-fermentation maceration of up to two weeks. The wines then spend two winters in barrel with only one racking, before bottling, allowing enough time for the malolactic fermentation and the natural clarification. Only a little of SO₂ is added post fermentation. When it comes to oak treatment, the village appellations see only aged barrels, the *premier cru* wines see 15-25% new oak and the old vines of the Clos des Epeneaux, 30% new oak. The wines are not fined prior to bottling.



2018 VINTAGE NOTES

By now it is clear 2018 was a good vintage in Burgundy, warm to very warm, with little unordinary challenges during the growing season. The challenge was to not harvest too late over ripe berries and maintain good freshness in the final wines.

It was the 2nd harvest in normal quantity at Domaine Comte Armand and Paul was very happy to make taste all his red wines. Fruit aromas, depth, richness dominate all the wines, some with more tannins but none lack the tension so necessary to age well and long.

In fact, the explanation of the vintage 2018 by Paul was restricted to its bear minimum, explaining that it had rained before the harvest, which ultimately helped the ripeness to get over the line. The skin of the crop that was then brought in was in top condition; this aspect is key for the quality of the grapes.

TASTING NOTES

We did not taste the whites for a simple logistic reason. 2018 is the first vintage with a normal size and Paul can't move the walls of his tiny underground cellar! So the whites are stored elsewhere to leave all the space of the peaceful and cool cave enterrée to the mighty reds. I was supposed to taste the whites in March this year but my trip was cancelled because of the coronavirus crisis. Nevertheless, we will stock up on the Aligoté because the 2017 was so satisfying.

ALIGOTÉ

£95/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND

AUXEY-DURESSES 1ER CRU

The simple mention of 1er Cru (without the addition of a name) makes you guess that the wine is probably a blend of parcels. The fruit comes from a plot in the cru Les Bas Dureses and another one in the cru Les Breterins. Structured, balanced, the wine is long, rich and sharp. Mostly dark ripe fruit aromas jump out of the glass mixed with savoury spices, supported by a pleasant delineation which structures the palate elegantly. It is a precise wine. It has potential.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE 17.5
(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2025 – 2040)

£195/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND

VOLNAY

70% of the blend is from the *lieu-dit* Les Grands Champs (located under 1er cru Les Mitans across the road from Beaune to Volnay) and 30% from Les Famines (east to Les Grands Champs and bordering the *Route Departementale D974*). I liked this wine. It is focused, it has elegant tannins, broad shoulders but the nose was shy, slightly reductive on that day. Yet the bouquet was alive and big. It is a Volnay with a presence, with flesh but not at all over-extracted. In the line-up of the *domaine*, it would be overshadowed on paper by the 1er cru Fremiets and the other *premiers crus* on the basis of being a mere *village* wine. This would be a mistake. A wine to consider.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE 17.5-18
(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2024 – 2035)

£230/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND

POMMARD 1ER CRU CLOS DES EPENEAUX MONOPOLE

The *Clos* is a proper stone-walled vineyard, spanning two *premier cru* parcels, Les Petits Epenots and Les Grands Epenots. Over the years, the domaine has identified nine different *terroirs* that go into five base wines. Winemaker Paul Zinetti groups these *terroirs* in five blocks. The classification is defined by type of soils, age of vines and location in the *monopole*. Each time I talk about this way of working at Clos des Epeneaux I can't help but compare with one of our top exclusivities in our UK portfolio, Clos de Tart, which has a similar approach to its *climat*.

Paul let us taste the five base wines, from barrel...

Wine 1: From young vines, planted on shallow soil on the upper part of the Clos. Its traits are spice, sapidity, instant appeal.

Wine 2: This comes from the lower part of the Clos, from 55+ year-old vines, planted on soil with a high clay content. This is all about fruit, richness and unctuousity.

Wine 3: From older vines (65~75 years old) in the top part of the Clos. It is all about complexity.

Wine 4: From 85~98 year-old vines, located in the lower part of the Clos, on the Beaune side of the appellation. The wine is deep and rich. I was inspired by this glass. It is pure, mineral (flinty notes), red fruit scented, black tea infused, with sweet spice notes. This is the elegant component of the blend, well balanced, with a lingering acidity, well integrated tannins and a touch of warmth. Paul does not look for big extraction, wanting to avoid bitter notes.

Wine 5: This is the press wine from the base wines, but only a tiny portion goes in the blend.

The final blend is clearly greater than the simple sum of its parts. From the first smell, you guess an intense and complex wine, mostly red fruited. A floral note tells that it is not a heavy wine. From the first sip, you feel the innate power, the ripeness; aromas of wild berries emerge, followed by some subtle citrus notes of orange peel. There is a slight taste of oak, powdery tannins to add some tension and support the long finish. This is such an appealing wine.

CORNEY & BARROW SCORE 18+
(RECOMMENDED DRINKING FROM 2024 - 2045+)

£610/CASE OF 6 BOTTLES, IN BOND

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TASTING GUIDE

Our tasting notes provide full details but, at your request, we have also introduced a clear and simple marking system. We hope these guidelines assist you in your selection.

Wines are scored out of 20. Customers seem to like it and it has the benefit of simplicity.

We will often use a range of scores (e.g. 16.5 to 17) to indicate the potential to achieve a higher mark. When a '+' is shown it adds further to that potential. Wines from lesser vintages will, inevitably, show a lower overall score.

Wines are judged, in a very broad sense, against their peers. Why? Well, you cannot easily compare a Ford with an Aston Martin, other than they are both cars and have wheels. It is not that different with wine.

A score is a summary only. The devil is in the detail, so please focus on the tasting notes and, as always, speak to our sales team.