



CLUB MAGNUM

VINS ET EXPÉRIENCES

## DOMAINE BERTHAUT-GERBET

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With cars whizzing up and down the Route Nationale, impatiently hurtling towards Gevrey-Chambertin and Vosne-Romanée, the more sedate feel of life in Fixin has a certain attraction.

Indeed for many years, growers here quietly went about their business. Proximity to Dijon helped to ensure a loyal, local market- why chase exports when you can sell up the road? - while the safety net of the Côte de Nuits villages appellation was also there for those content to just tick over. The Berthaut family had been farming vineyards here since the late 18th Century, a time of immense change in France.

Just after the Second World War, Guy Berthaut took the decision to begin domaine-bottling. Needing to find space for his new operations, he was able to buy a larger house and cellars in the village and also took on share-cropping agreements in Gevrey-Chambertin, an appellation more likely to attract attention as he began to court export markets.

Sons Vincent and Denis Berthaut joined their father in 1974. Guy died in 2009 at 97 years of age, able to watch with pride as his sons expanded the domaine further through astute purchases in their home village.



However, Denis also had an ace to play: through his marriage to Marie-Andrée Gerbet, daughter of a prominent family in Vosne-Romanée, a path was set for a transformational moment in the future. This duly arrived in 2015 when part of Domaine François Gerbet and the entirety of Domaine Berthaut were formally joined. Yet it was their daughter, Amélie, who had come back to Fixin two years earlier at the age of just twenty-five, who would now truly propel the domaine into new territory.

There are some people that you meet who just seem to have something special about them, a spark in their eye. Amélie Berthaut is one of those.

Her ascent has been extraordinary and entirely of her own doing: after all, it is one thing being given the opportunity but the story of Burgundy is littered with examples of scions of famous families who have not been up to the task.

Amélie studied oenology in Bordeaux before working in the US and in New Zealand but her ability as a winemaker seemed to produce such immediate results that her parents put their trust in her seemingly without hesitation. Finding curves in Fixin had hitherto been thought impossible but Amélie had shown her skill in coaxing out the fruit from behind the wall of tannin. People began to notice very quickly.

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With the domaine now 18ha in size, further investment in cellars, facilities and personnel has been inevitable, itself an enormous task to fall on Amélie's shoulders. As for her parents, a key recruit has been her husband, Nicolas Faure. Via stints at Jean-Louis Chave, Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and Domaine Prieuré-Roch, Nicolas had already been identified as a serious talent and convincing him to take on the role of Chef de Culture, at first part time but now full-time, in continuation with his own Domaine, was a master-stroke. Together they have been moving further towards more sustainable viticulture, 'tendance bio', being the official position.

This is a good size for a family domaine by Burgundian standards. However, rather than concentrate on large volumes and blends, Amélie instead presents a range of some two dozen small cuvées, in line with her belief in bringing out the complexity and diversity of Burgundy's climats.

At generic level, she presents a red **Bourgogne Rouge Les Prielles** from an hectare at the foot of the village of Fixin near the route nationale, a **Bourgogne Chardonnay** from a tiny slither across the route nationale from Vosne-Romanée and an even smaller cuvée of **Bourgogne Aligoté** (0.05ha) which falls under Nuits-St. Georges.

Good as these are, it is the **Hautes-Côtes de Nuits** that really starts to stir the interest. Here there is a substantial 4ha parcel in Concoeur, up in the hills above Vosne-Romanée and Nuits-St. Georges with six different plantings stretching back to 1970. It is 100% destemmed and vinified in concrete with élevage in both barrel and foudre for 10 months. Its gentle red cherry fruits and lightly floral scents are a joy. Alongside is a very good **Côte de Nuits Villages**, from a small 0.45ha parcel from neighbouring Brochon planted in 1970.





We should not ignore Amélie's **Fixin Blanc** either, a rare wine from the white alluvial soils of Les Champs de Charmes below the village. With only 3% of the appellation in white, this appears on paper to be something of an eccentricity but the family switched the vineyard from red to white back in 2009, feeling that the soils were better suited to white grapes. Elevage is generally completed within the year with the wine being fashioned for short-mid term enjoyment.

Stars of the show in Fixin are the two premier crus. **Fixin 1er cru Les Arvelets** is from a superbly sited 0.7ha parcel in the middle of the vineyard. There are lovely old vines here and Amélie's ability to coax out a sumptuous, seductive wine quickens the pulse. **Fixin 1er cru Les Hervelets** is a much smaller holding, just a quarter-hectare right at the top of the hill to which Amélie gives the 100% whole bunch treatment. Together with the supple, stoney, sandy soil there is a delightful movement and breeziness in this wine.

Appetite whetted, we begin to explore **Fixin**. The village cuvée is a blend of four parcels totalling 2.5ha across heavier clay and marl-based soils. It is a little darker in tone than the Hautes-Côtes that precedes it but keeps a very good balance and energy. During vinification, she favours pumping over, only punching down right at the end in order to ensure against over-extraction. There then follow three Fixin lieu-dits. First up is **Fixin Les Crais** which is on an hectare of alluvial soils below the village. Amélie will typically retain about a third as whole bunches, something that would have been unthinkable to previous generations. It also sees about 20% new wood and she advises to give it a couple of years in bottle for this to integrate. It has lovely length and a beautiful note of redcurrant and rosehip.

**Fixin En Combe Roy** was separated for the first time by Amélie in 2013. The vines are from a massal selection of the famous Clos Napoléon, planted in 1961. This can be a sturdy site with a prominent spine and Amélie chooses to keep half of the cuvée as whole bunches with a slightly longer élevage and increased percentage of new wood. **Fixin Les Clos** is from the north of the village, 1.3ha in one parcel higher up the hill, including old vines from 1933. The whole bunch component is less prominent here, the lighter limestone soils offering a little more natural elegance.

We leave Fixin and head south to Gevrey-Chambertin. There have been changes here recently with the leases terminated on the contracts for vineyards owned by the Mercier family of Domaine des Chezeaux, who have now sold up. As part of the reorganisation, Amélie has been able to buy the slither of **Gevrey-Chambertin 1er cru Lavaut St. Jacques** that the family had been farming for many years and this is shown proudly alongside the **Gevrey-Chambertin Combe du Dessus**, a fine half-hectare holding with old vines in the heart of the village.





The core of the Gerbet family holdings are of course in **Vosne-Romanée**. The village wine is a blend of three parcels across 2ha on the south side and is a lovely, classic representation of this great village, marrying minerality with beautiful black fruits. A separate cuvée is made from the 1.3ha holding of **Vosne-Romanée Aux Réas**, a large lieu-dit at the southern end of the village that in the right hands can yield excellent results. We then move into the premier crus. Collectors understandably clamour for the tiny amounts of **Vosne-Romanée 1er cru Suchots** and **Vosne-Romanée 1er cru Petits-Monts**, two rightly famous vineyards that can produce simply stunning results and in the case of Petits-Monts, can rival the neighbouring Richebourg. There is one further premier cru, in neighbouring **Chambolle-Musigny 1er cru Les Plantes**, just a quarter hectare here of a wine that is seldom seen.

To cap it all, there are two Grand Cru. **Clos Vougeot** is arguably the most instantly recognisable wine in Burgundy, both in taste and in photography.

The 0.31ha holding runs from the foot of the Clos, sandwiched between Domaines Grivot and Leroy, planted in 1956, up to the middle of the vineyard. Amélie likes to retain at least 50% whole bunch and once again seems able to round the shoulders of this traditionally muscular wine. By contrast, delicacy and fragrance are much easier to expose in the sumptuous **Echézeaux**. Three tiny slithers of vineyard, planted in 1934, total just 0.21ha. Amélie has started to avoid using any new oak at all on this wine, seeking to enhance its fragrant, spicy personality. It is utterly captivating and a wonderful way to finish a tasting.

Domaine Berthaut-Gerbet has become a hot ticket and it is not difficult to see why. While there are plenty of domaines producing extraordinary wines in Vosne-Romanée, very few could claim this in Fixin. Yet the very existence of premier cru vineyards there- and indeed a claim about the merits of an historic grand cru- suggest that in times gone by, these vineyards were considered absolutely the equal of those crus in Gevrey and Vosne about which we all go giddy. To be able to unshackle potential is a rare gift.

