



## THE FINEST WINES OF BURGUNDY

By **BILL NANSON**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON WYAND

320 pages. Published by Aurum Press Ltd for Fine Wine Editions

**£20.00**

I have always maintained that serious wine books are best left to the professionals; for it is only professionals today that have the time to delve deeply into the wines of any region and properly get to know all the main producers. Hence, for Burgundy, Anthony Hanson and Jasper Morris (and, if you will forgive me, yours truly); for Bordeaux, Edmund Penning-Rowell, David Peppercorn and also myself; Nicolas Belfrage on Italy, and so on.

Bill Nanson – by profession a chemist - is more than just an amateur, however; he is a gifted and experienced amateur, who has spent many a year journeying around Burgundy and many an autumn working the vintage. He is more than just a moderate or immoderate imbiber of good bottles. He knows his stuff.

So this is a good book. Moreover it is attractively presented with copious colour photographs from Jon Wyand. It is confined to the Côte d'Or and the meat of the book is 87 individual domaine profiles, introduced by a how-to-make-wine section and an overview of each Côte (Beaune and Nuits).

I learned something from Nanson's discussion of bio-dynamism. We have known for some time that vines reared bio-dynamically are more robust than their counterparts. Recent research has shown that bio-dynamically produced grapes have higher levels of phenols and anthocyanins and have SAR (systematic acquired resistance), the plant having produced defence compounds able to counter-attack insect and pathogenic threats. These compounds are mainly phenolics and include anthocyanins, flavonoids and revesterol. It is claimed that certain biodynamic treatments (silica, for example) can trigger or boost SAR responses, while the use of pesticides will negate it. For this information, Mr Nanson, much thanks.

Where I have a criticism of this book is in the choice of who to profile. Obviously there are constraints of space, but in Gevrey, for example, neither of the Dugats are included, nor Denis Bachelet, Rossignol-Trapet or Trapet itself; in Vosne there is an absence of Cathiard, Grivots and all of the Gros. Among the larger, domaine-holding merchants we have Bouchard P!re et Fils and Bichot but not

Drouhin, Faiveley nor Jadot. Sauzet and Carillon in Puligny are absent and the book should have included another half dozen top producers in Chassagne-Montrachet. At the same time, while there are several enterprising minor players, there are some whom I would not really consider first division. But this is Nanson's selection, as is his last chapter: his lists of top tens – *grands crus*, *premiers crus*, village wines, best domaines, best winemakers, best values and best domaines to visit. Again you can agree or disagree with his choices. A plus point, when he discusses the domaines individually and describes the wines he really favours, is that there is no lack of village wines, even generics, singled out. Nanson has not been unduly seduced by the super-star wines.

The Finest Wines of Burgundy is up-to-date, easy to read and largely free of mistakes. I only noticed two important errors: private individuals *can* now bid at the Hospices (though the *élevage* and bottling still have to be entrusted to a Burgundian merchant): and he has confused Anne-Claude Leflaive's father Vincent with her cousin Olivier.

The photos by Jon Wygand are generally good, but they are not really outstanding. There is a better selection around the bar in the Restaurant/Hotel Montrachet in Puligny (and the food is good too). I understand that these were made by various suppliers to the local magazine *Bourgogne Aujourd'hui* rather than the work of a single individual. But some of the best grower photographs I have ever seen decorated a catalogue mailed some 12 years ago by John Armit Fine Wines in London. These were the work of Morgan Driscoll. Really inspired.