



PLUMPJACK

WINES

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If I were a rich man (insert a big sigh!), I would love to drink wines like 2001 Domaine de la Romanée Conti “Le Montrachet” (\$3500 a bottle) or buy a few bottles of 1947 Château Cheval Blanc (\$5000 a bottle) for the cellar. Being just a humble pilgrim on an organoleptic journey doesn’t mean I can’t find ways of enjoying the vast array of luxurious flavors the world has to offer. For example, if I am craving Beluga caviar, I can buy pressed caviar. If I crave white truffles from Piemonte, I can drizzle some truffle oil on my risotto. While there is nothing like the real thing, sometimes these more affordable choices can be very gratifying. If I long for the taste of a quality Burgundy or Bordeaux, I don’t have to take out a second mortgage, because fortunately there are delicious wines from lesser-known regions, such as the ones we are featuring this month, available at very reasonable prices. Isn’t it wonderful when a wine goes far beyond the expectations of what its price infers?

Burgundy is without doubt the most fragmented wine region in the world with no fewer than 30,000 growers and over 700 different *appellation contrôlées*. Although Burgundy’s fame undoubtedly rests on the reputation of the Côte d’Or, this is just one small region within Burgundy. The Mâconnais lies south of the Côte Chalonnaise, north of Beaujolais, and is the most southerly region in Burgundy, where the classic Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes are grown. The land around Mâcon consists of undulating hills of vineyards interspersed with orchards and other agriculture. The bedrock is similar to that of the Côte d’Or, as is the climate. With the price of vineyards in the Côte d’Or being prohibitively expensive – land is cheaper in Manhattan than in the grand cru Le Montrachet – vigneron wishing to find decent-sized plots to grow Chardonnay are increasingly looking to this southern outpost of the region. The result is a quantum leap in the quality of once-dismal wines such as Mâcon Blanc and Mâcon Villages, and a rapidly growing number of delicious wines from better appellations such as Pouilly-Fuissé. Pouilly-Fuissé is the name of an appellation located about 10 kms from the city of Mâcon in Southern Burgundy. Wine labeled as Pouilly-Fuissé can come from five villages, Pouilly, Fuissé, Vergisson, Chaintre and Solutré. The only grape permitted within the appellation is Chardonnay. Without doubt, the vineyards around Mâcon produce some of the best value Chardonnay in the whole of Burgundy. Château des Rontets has been owned by the Gazeau-Varambon family since 1850, and is located at the top of the weeded hill at the south of the village of Fuissé, in the resort known as Les Rontes. All the vines, except for one plot (Pierrefolle), surround the house. These vineyards are surrounded by stone walls, thus forming a clos which overlooks the landscape toward Pouilly, Solutré and Vergisson. Fabio Montrasi was born in Milan where he met his wife Claire Gazeau. When Claire’s grandmother died, the two decided to return to her estate in Fuissé and take over the property. Instead of simply cultivating the grapes and contracting them to négociants, they decided to return the soil to its natural state, and put their own personal mark on the wine. Their vineyards are cultivated and plowed, with no use of chemical pesticides. Grapes are picked by hand and in small cases, in order to respect the integrity of the fruit. The addition of sulfites is reduced to a minimum, and fermentation takes place in temperature-controlled 30 hl oak vats, using only natural yeasts. Aging periods vary from 10-24 months depending

**2004 Château des Rontets
Pouilly-Fuissé, “Pierrefolle”
Fuissé, France**



**2003 Château Renard Mondésir
Fronsac
La Rivère, France**



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on the cuvée. The 2004 Pouilly-Fuissé “Pierrefolle” comes from a 1.2 acre vineyard located 548 yards south of the Château, and was planted between 1965 and 1970. The granite subsoil, the silty soil, and the east orientation of the vineyard create a Chardonnay different from the estate’s other wines. The wine is racked in stainless-steel vats just before the following harvest, and bottled a few months later without filtration. The wine displays fresh citrus and pear aromas and flavors backed by a distinctive and definitive minerality. There is bright acidity and the wine finishes with lingering fruit and toasty oak flavors. This wine will continue to improve for many years (if you can stop yourself from drinking it immediately.) The 2004 Pouilly-Fuissé “Pierrefolle” pairs beautifully with PlumpJack Café Squaw Valley’s Champagne-poached lobster with crab brandade, baby carrots and haricot verts.

The 2004 Château des Rontets Pouilly-Fuissé “Pierrefolle” is \$22.99/bottle, \$248.30/case.



Located on the right bank of the Dordogne, Fronsac lies west of Pomerol, across the River L’Isle, a tributary of the Dordogne, which it joins at Libourne. Viewed from the river or from the opposite bank in the Entre-Deux-Mers, one can see the land rising sharply. On this limestone bluff, the Tertre de Fronsac, and on the land behind it, descending gradually toward the village of Galgon, are the Fronsac vineyards. The Fronsac plateau dominates a bend in the Dordogne and the surrounding countryside. The soil is clay-limestone, with some sand on the lower-lying land nearest to the Dordogne, on a limestone base known as Molasses de Fronasais. Merlot and Cabernet Franc are the dominant grape varieties, supplemented by Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon. Fronsac’s small population of négociants, growers and vintners live in an area that’s about the same size as Pomerol and consists of two appellations spread over six communes. There are those who claim that Fronsac was the first vineyard in Bordeaux. Emperor Carolus Magnus built the first “château” in 769 on the site, which was named *Franciacus*-the château of the Francs. Robert Parker writes, “in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the vineyards sprinkled over the hillsides and hollows of Fronsac and Canon-Fronsac regions, only several miles west from Libourne, were better known than the wines of Pomerol, and sold for higher prices than the wines of Saint-Emilion. But because access to Pomerol was easier and because most of the brokers had their offices in Libourne, the vineyards of Pomerol and Saint-Emilion were exploited more than those of Fronsac or Canon-Fronsac. Consequently this area fell into a long period of obscurity from which it has just recently begun to rebound.” Fronsac’s modern renaissance was set in motion in the 1970s when imaginative, wine-minded real estate investors began staking claims in the area. In recent years, substantial progress has been made both in the vineyards and in the cellars. The wines from Fronsac were initially perceived as attractively-priced substitutes for Pomerol and Saint-Emilion wine, but the best wines from this region have gradually become recognized as rich, full, and fairly big wines with excellent aging potential. Château Renard Mondésir is located in La Rivière. Amédée Chassagnoux, the grandfather of Xavier, the present owner of the Château, adored the region’s wines. For almost half a century, he made it his business to promote the wines of Fronsac by selling these wines in Northern France and Belgium. In 1978, the Chassagnoux family acquired and renovated Renard Mondésir that covers 17.8 acres. The 2003 Château Renard Mondésir Fronsac is a blend of 85% Merlot and 15% Cabernet Franc. The vineyards are on steep slopes with soils composed of chalky clay, siliceous clay, and “renard” or “fox” sand. The grapes were hand-harvested and fermented in epoxy-coated tanks. Following a gentle pressing, the wine was aged in French oak barrels, of which 30% were new. Only 1500 cases were produced. The wine has a deep red color and has a rich concentrated nose that combines ripe red fruits, cherries and chocolate. In the mouth, the wine has good weight and intensity, and the tannins and acidity are well-integrated. It is the perfect wine to accompany a grilled rib-eye steak or braised lamb shanks.

The 2003 Château Renard Mondésir Fronsac is \$24.99/bottle, \$269.90/case