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New in Beaujolais Is Not Nouveau

to avoid risks, and compensating, a legal process of adding sugar to the grape juice to increase alcohol content, which can give an impression of artificiality. They want to maximize yields, which can mean lower quality, and they would make decisions according to the standardized preferences of the négociants, who bought wine from the growers to be sold under their own labels.

Things were good, nobody much worried now that the nouveau fashion had faded — nouveau is now the least recent of Beaujolais producers in the lesser regions of the region are stuck with an oversupply of wine. And the public is stuck with a generation of insipid wine meant to be sold immediately.

"It really contributed to the decline," said Mathieu Lapiere, 30, here with his father, Marcel, who owns about 30 acres of grapes in Beaujolais. "People overproduced and made bad wine."

But Lapiere does not see it that way. He says the problems in Beaujolais are the same as those faced all over France. Cheap, insipid wines have been losing market share to top World wines. Increasing worldwide consumption combined with a decline in consumption is the rea-



But a different, equally insistent message is also emerging from Beaujolais, and it is a sign of hope for a region that has borne more than its share of condescension and scorn. It comes from the best, most serious producers in Beaujolais, who are making superb wines that bear as much resemblance to mass-market Beaujolais nouveau as a fine, dry-aged steak does to a fast-food burger. In a region known for jolly little knock-back wines to be drunk and forgotten, these are memorable wines of depth and class, thoughtful wines that nonetheless retain the joyous nature imbued in Beaujolais.

Few wines can induce joy the way Beaujolais does, and I would argue that that is an undervalued quality. When you add in the perfume and the nuance of the best Beaujolais wines, and combine them with a little bit of structure, you have a wine that deserves far more credit than it gets.

Beaujolais, known for lightness, had an interesting 2005.

The great thing about ambitious Beaujolais, I think, is that it retains its joyous character while augmenting its depth and structure. We all, even Jean-Luc, agreed that our No. 1 wine, a finely etched Moulin-à-Vent from Domaine du Vissoux, had everything going for it — depth, charm and balance.

Pierre-Marie and Martine Chermette of Domaine du Vissoux are based in St.-Vérand in the southern end of the appellation, but they also own plots in the higher-status crus of Fleurie and Moulin-à-Vent. Doggedly, they keep yields low and scrupulously sort the grapes. They do not chaptalize, they use only the natural yeasts on the grapes rather than specialized yeasts that emphasize particular flavors and aromas, and they use very little sulfur as a stabilizer.