



Corton, Burgundy

THE HILL OF CORTON is the only projecting hill in the Côte d'Or and, as such, it has particular thermal advantages. The flat-topped hill, capped by woods, rises approximately 160 metres above the surrounding plain and has south-, east- and west-facing slopes. The lower and middle slopes of isolated and projecting hills develop an especially pronounced thermal zone, i.e. a layer of warm night air sitting above the layer of cold dense air on the flats below; because there is no source of chilled air from above, the thermal zones of such slopes are very stable. Further up the slope, the temperature decreases with altitude at the normal lapse rate but the diurnal range remains narrow.

The Côte d'Or is the best known of the Burgundian appellations: the northern part comprises the Côte de Nuits and the Côte de Beaune makes up the southern. It is an irregular escarpment approximately 30 km long, stretching from Dijon in the north to just south of Santenay. The ridge of Côte d'Or is the edge of a plateau built up of sandy limestones. The width of the slope and thus the appellation vineyards varies from a few hundred metres to 1.5 km. The aspect is generally south-easterly and slopes are 20% or more.



The vineyards of the hill of Corton are situated 230 metres to 350 metres above sea level and are located almost entirely within the commune of Aloxe-Corton, which has just 48 hectares of Grand Cru and 29 hectares of Premier Cru classification. It is the only part of Burgundy to produce both Grand Cru red and white wines. Pinot Noir, for the red wine of Le Corton appellation, is grown in a broad band around the hill but Chardonnay is mainly grown on southwest and southerly aspects and the upper part of the southeast and easterly aspects. The soil of the hill of Corton is a shallow calcareous brown earth (loam to clay loam) except at the very top of the slope—just below the hard limestone cap is an immature soil with limestone debris mainly

planted to Chardonnay. The whole Corton area once belonged to the Emperor Charlemagne (742–814), hence the use of the name *Corton-Charlemagne* for white wine.

The Côte d'Or is one of the northernmost regions of Europe to produce a red wine of distinction and there are a number of site factors which increase the chance of successful ripening. In particular, the highest quality wines are produced from vineyards located in the middle of the slope. For example, from the bottom of the slope to the top, both soil depth and fertility decrease and gravel content increases: this



results in reduced vigour and improved vine balance. In addition, the slope is important to maximise frost avoidance, radiation interception and soil drainage. The east to south-easterly aspect provides protection from the cold west wind and creates a rain shadow, thus reducing disease incidence and increasing sunlight. Slopes facing east are warmed by the sun as soon as it rises, when air temperatures are lowest and therefore at their most limiting. The fast warming of a stony or calcareous soil in the morning can contribute greatly to leaf and bunch temperature (Gladstones 1992). The calcareous soil is well structured and well drained; it thus warms readily.

Pinot Noir is the only red grape permitted for appellation wine. White wine of Grand Cru and Premier Cru appellations must be made from Chardonnay, but Aligoté may also be used for commune appellation wines. Aligoté produces lower quality wines than Chardonnay: it has more acid and less body and ageing potential. Aligoté has been grown in this region for centuries (Robinson 1986): it was more popular in the past because it can produce higher yields than Chardonnay. Aligoté is not a major variety in France: two thirds is grown in the Côte d'Or. Prior to the introduction of appellation control, the white wine of Burgundy was typically a blend of Aligoté and Chardonnay, with some Melon and

Pinot Blanc often added. Today, wine from Aligoté must be labelled as *Bourgogne Aligoté* and it is usually sold at half the price of a *Bourgogne Blanc* from Chardonnay.

Chardonnay did not appear in the Burgundy region until after the Middle Ages. By comparison, Pinot Noir was first recorded in the 1370s but it is likely to have been grown in Burgundy well before that date. A grapevine bearing a resemblance to Pinot Noir was already being cultivated by the Allobroger tribe in the Burgundy area when the Romans first invaded Gaul. Seventy per cent of the wines of the Côte d'Or are currently made from Pinot Noir.

The Côte d'Or has a cool and continental climate. Viticultural regions in Australia which are most comparable on the basis of growing season temperature and sunshine hours are Drumborg (Victoria) and Hobart (Tasmania) (Gladstones 1992). Annual rainfall is 696 mm (Dijon) and two-thirds falls during the growing season. Budburst of Pinot Noir can take place any time from the first week of April to the second week of May but, most often, it occurs at the end of April. Harvest can be at any time from the end of September until mid October; it should take place 100 days after flowering according to local experience. Early flowering years usually result in the earliest and best vintages. Rainfall is highest in May, June and October; the latter will coincide with harvest in late years thus increasing the risk of bunch rot.

The typical vineyard of Burgundy is very small: the average number of hectares per proprietor in the 1970s was just 1.3. The rows run up and down the slope. The risk of erosion is

decreased by terracing. Vine spacing is 1 metre × 1 metre and pruning to single Guyot, i.e. 1 × 8-node cane, often with no replacement spur. The trellis is a vertically shoot-positioned type, with a single fruiting wire at 35 cm above the ground, a pair of foliage wires at 60 cm and a single foliage wire at 90 cm. Summer pruning (*rognage*) and leaf and lateral shoot removal from the bunch zone (*effeuillage*) are standard practices. The main rootstock is SO4. The maximum permitted yield is 35 hL/hectare for red wines and 40 hL/hectare for white. While most vineyards are picked by hand, the proportion which is mechanically harvested continues to increase.

The town of Beaune (population 21,000) is approximately 6 kilometres SSW of Corton. The Hôtel des Ducs de Bourgogne, built in the 14 to 16th centuries, now houses the Musée du Vin de Bourgogne. The Hôtel de Dieu hospice, founded in 1443, is a medieval jewel with superb multi-coloured Burgundian roof tiles. The annual auction of wine, from vineyards owned by local hospitals (Hospices de Beaune), is held here in November: the prices are used as a benchmark for the entire vintage.

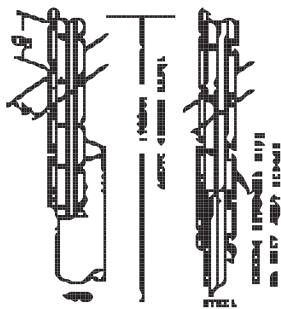


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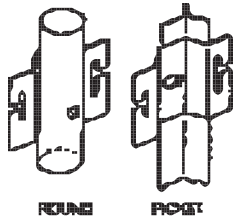


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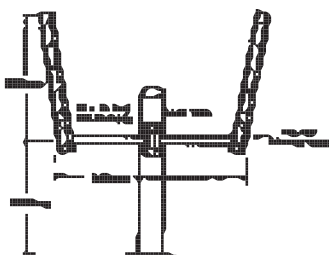
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