

Beaujolais Nouveau time

TEXT BY MARGARET SWAINE
PHOTOS BY CORBIS/SCANPIX, ALAMY AND INTER BEAUJOLAIS



One of the coolest wines around, Beaujolais is the first French red to come to market after the year's harvest. With great fanfare at a minute past midnight on the third Thursday of every November, the fresh new wine is rushed at high speed from Burgundy to all corners of the globe. The race to be the first recipient in the bistros of Lyon, Paris and then elsewhere can be quite the competitive sport. The wine has travelled in the past by plane, train and automobile, as well as by rickshaw, balloon, Concorde and helicopter



© DANIEL GILLET, INTER, BEAUJOLAIS

When I was a student in Aix-en-Provence in southern France during the 1970s, I joined in the chorus of people gleefully shouting “Le Beaujolais Nouveau est arrivé!” and ordered it – as was the custom – in a pitcher at one of the popular bistros along the Coeur Mirabelle. Our anticipation of its arrival and subsequent partying made November a special month that I still remember with fondness.

How did this *vin de l’année* become such a success? Its popularity began in the 1950s due to four key factors: a legal decision made in 1951; a grape variety (Gamay) that’s almost exclusively Beaujolais and that produces marvellous young wines; the verve of local winemakers and brokers, and the enthusiasm of the public, who loved the conviviality surrounding the introduction of the new wine every year.

When the Beaujolais AOC was first established in 1937, rules stipulated the wine could only be officially sold after December 15th in the harvest year. These rules were altered in 1951, allowing Beaujolais Nouveau (and several other AOC wines) to be sold straight away, without waiting for the general release date in December. This decision helped to turn Beaujolais Nouveau into a phenomenon. A new regulation in 1985 fixed the consumption date for Beaujolais Nouveau to the third Thursday of November. This remains the rule today.

Production has increased from barely two million bottles to an average of 35 million bottles of Beaujolais Nouveau each year – out of the total Beaujolais production of 120 million bottles. The planetary success of this “out-of-the-ordinary” wine has reached cult status. It’s sold in 110 countries, with the most important markets being Japan, the United States and Germany.

Before the Beaujolais rush thrilled the world, back in the 1930s the wine was associated with the ‘*mères lyonnaises*’ (women restaurant owners and chefs of nearby Lyon), who served the wine with their simply-cooked but hearty dishes. Every year, as soon as the wine was ready, drink salesmen and grocers brought the wine to the city. The wine finished fermenting along the way in ‘*pièces*’ (216-litre barrels) on bumpy trips in horse carts or in wooden barges on the River Saône. At that time, sales were neither regulated nor organised. The wine was enjoyed in such quantities that it was considered to be Lyon’s ‘third river’.

With the change in harvest rules during the early 1950s, some producers, such as Georges Duboeuf, saw the enormous potential for Beaujolais Nouveau. Producers could sell lots of “ordinary” wine at a good profit and within weeks of the harvest, which was also good for cash flow. To hype things up, the wineries established a race to Paris with the first bottles of the new vintage. With the help of media coverage, the race became a national event by the 1970s and later an international one.

RESTORĀNS AMBIENTE

The *Ambiente* restaurant is arranged like a typical Art Nouveau apartment in Riga at the beginning of the 20th century, with five unique rooms: a kitchen, dining room, living room, cabinet and library. You will be treated to a luxurious interior, distinguished cuisine with a Latvian touch and refined service à la Art Nouveau in the very heart of Riga's Old Town!

Open daily 12:00 – 23:00

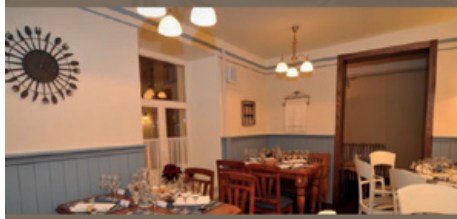
Business lunch served on working days
12:00 – 16:00

Address: Konventa Sēta, Kalēju iela 9/11

E-mail: ambiente@kolonna.com

Tel.: (+371) 67087580

www.ambiente.lv



© DANIEL GILLET, INTER BEAUJOLAIS

This year's harvest was among the smallest ever. On the other hand, the quality of the grapes is high and the hot weather in August optimized maturity

Best served slightly chilled, Beaujolais Nouveau is light and berry-flavoured, almost like *sangria*, but without the floating fruits. Made from the Gamay Noir à Jus Blanc grape, better known simply as Gamay, it must come from the Beaujolais AOC (excluding the ten "Cru" appellations which are more appropriate for longer aging). To make this aromatic and fruity wine, the grapes are macerated for a maximum of only four to five days. This is not as easy as it sounds. If a wine is drawn off even a few hours too early, then it will be light and colourless. On the other hand, if vatting is just a few hours too long, then the new wine will take on tougher tannins.

The traditional slogan, even in English-

speaking countries, was "Le Beaujolais Nouveau est arrivé!" (The new Beaujolais has arrived!). In France, René Fallet made it the title of one of his novels. In 2005, the slogan was changed to "It's Beaujolais Nouveau Time".

Welcome and celebration are the buzz words for the third Thursday in November. Every year, about 100 Beaujolais celebrations of all kinds take place in the region. From cellar to cellar, the visitor can taste the first wines of the year without ever coming up against a closed door.

The most famous festival, dating from 1988, is the Sarmantelles de Beaujeu, a five-day celebration in the historic heart of the Beaujolais region. Taking place

from November 14 to 18 this year, the festivities start with a tasting competition, followed by a torch-lit parade, fireworks and dancing all night long. For further information, see www.sarmentelles.com.

The nearest large city to Beaujolais is Lyon, where fireworks and the 'Beaujol'ympiades' take place. The high point of the celebrations is when barrels of Beaujolais Nouveau are breached by a team of young winemakers at midnight. (www.beaujolaisdays.com).

Of course, the city's bistros hold the Beaujolais standard high, including *La Meunière* (Lyon 2nd district), *Le Café des Fédérations* (Lyon 2nd district), *Le Fleurie* (Lyon 7th district), and *Chez Hugon* (Lyon 1st district), to name a few.

Runners enjoy Le Marathon du Beaujolais Nouveau, which takes them through the 11 Beaujolais villages and includes refreshment stations in châteaux and cellars along the way (www.marathondubeaujolair.org). Other regular events include the Fête du Beaujolais Gourmand (www.beaujolaisgourmand.com). For general event information, check out www.beaujolais.com.

Duboeuf remains a big producer of Beaujolais Nouveau. This year, the winery will be donating bottles to parties and organizing events as far abroad as Canada. The winery reports a year of weird weather ending in a lot of storms, including hailstorms that caused much damage. Hence, this year's harvest was among the smallest ever. (Overall, the harvest for the region was about half the norm.) On the other hand, the quality of the grapes is high and the hot weather in August optimized maturity.



The area's upcoming generation of young winemakers, aged between 25 and 35, are helping to further the quality of Beaujolais and to encourage tourism to the region.

Fabien and Claire Chasselay, for example, have 11 hectares of vines organically certified in 2008. "Wine culture is also about eating," says Fabien. "That is why in 2007, we opened up a guest house, with Claire in the kitchen making the meals. We combine hospitality and food."

Wine tourism in Beaujolais gained a major boost in 2000, when Céline Dutraive opened a guest house on a beautiful site with a 360-degree view of the vines. She even hired her husband – a former trainer of France's under-21 mogul skiing team – to help at her establishment.

With various fine guest houses like Dutraive's and the Chasselays' in operation, the region has become well-primed to offer visitors a joyous time. A Beaujolais Nouveau Time. **BO**

WP CONSTRUCTION
Creativity. Control. Carefulness. Capacity.

www.wpconstruction.lv
info@wpconstruction.lv
Phone: +371 29246754

Kemerl Sanatorium



Recommended Beaujolais stays and visits:

Domaine Chasselay

Claire and Fabien Chasselay
157 ch. de la Roche, Chatillon
d'Azergues
fabien.chasselay@hotmail.fr
www.domaine-chasselay.com

Domaine Tour de la Belle Mère

Céline Dutraive
Les Combes, Charentay
denis.dutraive@wanadoo.fr
www.dutraive.com

Château Thivin

Claude Geoffroy
Brouilly, Odenas
geoffroy@chateau-thivin.com
www.chateau-thivin.com
Claude-Edouard Geoffroy
is one of the 'jeunes talents'
(new talents). Accommodation
available at Les Gîtes de Thivin.

Château de la Chaize

Caroline de Roussy de Salles
Odenas
The Chateau is in the Brouilly Appellation,
one of the 10 Crus, and thus does not
produce any Beaujolais Nouveau. However
their historical cellars are opened for visits
and tasting. The gardens can be visited
from May to October. All on appointment at
chateaudelaizaie@wanadoo.fr

Château de Montmelas

Delphine d'Harcourt
Le Château, Montmelas-Saint-Sorlin
chateau.de.montmelas@wanadoo.fr
www.chateau-montmelas.com
Another beauty of Beaujolais.

Hameau Duboeuf

796 route de la Gare
Romanèche-Thorins
www.hameauduvin.com
A theme park dedicated to wine and vine.

Writer Margaret Swaine has been covering the wine and culinary world for three decades. She pens a weekly wine column for the National Post newspaper, as well as the culinary travel columns "Global Gourmet" for travelindustrytoday.com and "Forks & the Road" for the National Post.

Fly to Paris with **airBaltic**

- Direct flights from Riga starting from **EUR 55***
- From Scandinavia and Eastern Europe via Riga starting from **EUR 69**
- Earn 1-10 BalticMiles Points per each Euro spent on flight tickets
- BalticMiles partners in Paris: Hilton Worldwide, Worldhotels, Radisson Blu, Park Inn By Radisson, Avis, Sixt, airBaltic Card, Language Direct

* Price available for bookings at least 6 months before departure.

Network and trading base
for the farmers and their supporting
industry in Latvia

farming.lv
KNOW 2 GROW



Join us and know to grow!

www.farming.lv
E-mail: info@farming.lv
GSM: 00371-27031655

**AGRICULTURE BUSINESS SUPPORT
in Latvia**

Business & Legal Consulting

establishment of companies; legal support; tax consulting and administration;
accounting and assistance to management, etc.

Agricultural Real Estate

professional and reliable assistance for acquisition, lease or sales of agricultural real estate

Project Management

all-embracing project consulting / business plans;
applications for national and EU grants, incl. subsidies; assistance to agricultural
construction projects (incl. green field); acquisition of environmental permits

www. **actusQ** .LV
since 2003

ActusQ • Valmieras 20A • Cesis LV-4101 • Latvia
Phone (+371) 641 07 185 • Mob. (+371) 294 75 739 • www.actusQ.lv • actusQ@actusQ.lv

