

# Domaine Joseph Voillot 1990–2006

by Neil Beckett

Burgundy lovers often exclaim, only half-jokingly, that growers in one village should not be allowed to make wines from another. But most would make an honorable exception of Domaine Joseph Voillot in Volnay, which, on the basis of six vintages of Pommard Rugiens and Volnay Champans (offered for tasting by UK agent Anthony Sarjeant and Goedhuis & Co in London), produces Pommards almost as elegant as its Volnays. The Rugiens may not conform to the false typicity of Pommard, seeming to borrow some of Volnay's silken trappings, but few, surely, will regret it.

On the basis of this tasting, Domaine Joseph Voillot is an underappreciated source of fine Burgundy—a reminder that small producers who stick to the knitting, or rather plowing, can remain off the radars of even the most attentive devotees. Five generations of the family have tended the vines. Most of the 10ha (25-acre) domaine is divided between Volnay and Pommard, and while Champans and Rugiens may be the top wines, it also produces Pommard premiers crus Epenots, Micault, and Pézerolles, and Volnay premiers crus Brouillards, Caillerets, and Fremiets.

Some of the vines are held under a *métayage* arrangement—in the case of Champans ever since Marius Voillot sharecropped in 1933. He passed the estate on to his son Joseph in 1953, and it is now run by his son-in-law Jean-Pierre Charlot, who has continued the *lutte raisonnée* and regular plowing.

After rigorous selection in vineyard and winery, the grapes are destemmed. The fermentation, with indigenous yeasts, takes place in temperature-controlled vats, where the cap is broken twice a day by foot, the *cuvaison* lasting 12–14 days. The wines are matured for 14–16 months in barriques, only 15–20 percent new, before being bottled by gravity. They are never fined and are filtered only when necessary.

## 2006 Volnay Premier Cru Champans

Medium ruby red, limpid, natural luster. Restrained on the nose, but painfully shy rather than sullen. A bonbon character without being too confected; dried roses and violets, no overt fruitiness but a ripeness and sweetness (that may be derived partly from Brett, though this is not too intrusive). Silken entry, appetizing, brightly fruited, well-integrated acidity, crisply ripe, good intensity and vivacity; a lovely unforced quality and harmonious finish of good length. Very good for its age and vintage. **15.5**

## 2005 Volnay Premier Cru Champans

Medium ruby, a denser and more intense color than the '06. More expressive on the nose, too, but with a definite family resemblance: the same authenticity and faint rusticity. Cherry and damson, but neither overtly fruity nor lacking in purity. Richer silken texture, with more abundant but ripe and very well-extracted tannins. The same lively acidity, lending clarity and refinement to match the richness; controlled energy, impressive intensity. Harmonious finish of good length if still to fan out. **17**

## 2003 Volnay Premier Cru Champans

Only a shade lighter than the '05. The most expressive of these first three, not surprisingly, but still a very recognizable scent, here with a dry warmth and faint nuttiness as well as the sweet earth; faintly exotic but far from overblown. Looser, softer, more voluminous, still with fresh, seemingly natural acidity, which retains some elegance and freshness, so that this betrays little of the heat of the vintage. It lacks a little of the focused energy and purity of the '05 and is warmer on the finish, but nevertheless it is a good interpretation of the year (when the harvest started four weeks early). Still very Volnay. **16**

## 1999 Volnay Premier Cru Champans

Lustrous medium ruby, a beautiful core color, even gradation toward the rim, holding well. An intense, powerful nose—blackstrap and licorice, as well as earth and violets—really starting to open up at ten years old. A rich but less supple and flowing texture, with more dryness and rub to the tannins. An animating acidity still, but slightly sluggish and solid, with less follow-through on the finish. The stamp of the vintage, as well as the trappings of the village. **15**

## 1995 Volnay Premier Cru Champans

The light, limpid, pale ruby and rather tawny rim arouse suspicions, confirmed on the nose and palate, that this is a less-than-perfect bottle—old before its time and probably unrepresentative. **NS**

## 1990 Volnay Premier Cru Champans

Lovely pale ruby. A beautiful, gentle, natural perfume: exquisite, expressive, completely clean but of the earth, in full bloom but far from overblown, still remarkably fresh. Satin-

smooth, expansive but still sufficiently supportive, racy and still vibrant for all its caressing refinement. Perfectly harmonious on the finish; good, perfumed length. The epitome of Volnay, still going strong (unlike many 1990s) and still time to go. **17.5**

## 2006 Pommard Premier Cru Rugiens

Very pale, even gradation, rosé toward the rim. Attractive, clean, and ripe, an amalgam of black and red fruit, a whiff of red licorice, notably delicate and elegant for Pommard. Brightly fruited, round and smooth, with an elegant, refined tannin. Adequate clarity and intensity of fruit, lacking only a little core density and direction on the mid-palate. Crisp finish, with a faintly bitter edge. **15**

## 2005 Pommard Premier Cru Rugiens

Medium ruby, dullish luster, violet rim. A little inexpressive but balanced, clean, sweet fruit, licorice and violets, greater depth and intensity than the '06. Greater immediacy and vibrancy on the palate, harmonious, rich, and smooth. Brilliant clarity of flavor and a well defined finish of good length. Better than any of the Pommard premiers crus at a large tasting of 2005s (*WFW* 22, pp.172–73). **17**

## 2003 Pommard Premier Cru Rugiens

A shade deeper than the '05. Warm but rather ill-defined nose, earthy and ripe, with a rugged, rustic appeal. Rich and weighty, more abundant but still smooth tannin. Balanced and fresh enough but lacks a little energy on the mid-palate; a shade dry on the finish. **14**

## 1999 Pommard Premier Cru Rugiens

Medium ruby, holding its color well. Appealing, ripe, sweet strawberry fruit, exotic and seductive on the nose. Equally rich and ripe on the palate but not at all clinging, still cut by fresh acidity and supported by smooth tannins. Good clarity, intensity, and grip. An excellent Pommard, an excellent '99, still with several years to go. **17**

## 1995 Pommard Premier Cru Rugiens

Medium ruby with the first signs of tawny on the rim. Clean but deep, earthy, exotic, the last vestiges of summer fruit turning to fall. Balanced acidity and rich, refined tannins. It lacks a little of the clarity and elegance that distinguishes the best of these but compensates with a mature, gamey, savory richness. For marinated hare. **15.5**

## 1990 Pommard Premier Cru Rugiens

A beautiful color and very impressive depth; bright, intense, holding well. Clean and composed, but also exotic and somehow risqué to smell, deeply mysterious in its roseate intrigue. A gorgeous mouthful: balanced and clean, expansive but fresh, rich but vibrant; great energy and harmony, saturation and sustain, still with gentle grip on the end finish. Outstanding Pommard, from old vines planted in 1959. **18**