

CLUB CHEVALIER

◆ VIGNERONS WHO FEED US WELL ◆



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A

wine importer's life on the road is not all glamour. Picture yourself, exhausted and purple-toothed, returning from a long, arduous day of tasting to your five-star Relais & Châteaux resort.

You'd like to unwind at the spa for a moment—enjoy a minute

in the Jacuzzi, get a quick foot massage, and sweat away all the stress in the on-premise Turkish bath—but alas, the kitchen is closing soon, and the concierge is pressuring you to have a seat at table before the six-course tasting menu ceases to be an option: “*Par ici, monsieur . . .*”

You drearily peer through your scintillating, amber-gold pour of 1983 Château d'Yquem at the unctuous slab of seared foie gras the *garçon* has placed before you, contemplating the sheer misery that is an inevitable part of the job, and dreading the next day's early-morning wake-up to saturate your palate with yet another series of *grands crus* from the wine world's most skilled craftspeople.



All right—the truth is, we wine importers do not eat lonely dinners in hotels every night, and when we do, the aforementioned scenario is far from the norm. (Instead, picture hostile personnel, frozen food, and pompous sommeliers asserting their expertise about a poorly curated wine list before you amble down a creepy, dimly lit corridor back to a room that reeks of cigarette smoke.) No, the real privilege of being a wine importer is having the opportunity to sit down around a table with the *vignerons* themselves and enjoy a moment of conviviality, savoring the house wines served alongside a home cuisine of fresh, local products.

But it would be a mistake to presume that we don't have favorites; when it comes to gastronomy, not all *vignerons* are created equal. Certain estates are run by winemakers who are particularly savvy in the culinary sense, and the annual visit to these domaines can be a revelatory moment in one's appreciation of wine, food, and the sacred marriage of the two.

Here we've highlighted six of our favorite producers to visit, strictly from a gourmet point of view. These are the *vignerons* who feed us well; those who take the concept of hospitality to a new level by combining extreme generosity with excellent taste. It beats a five-star hotel any day of the week.

— ANTHONY LYNCH



2014 VOUVRAY “LE PORTAIL” ♦ CHAMPALOU \$38

IN ADDITION to being extremely talented vigneron, the Champalous (Catherine, Didier, and their daughter, Céline) are quite skilled in the culinary arts. Ever the warm and generous hosts, they take pleasure in toiling away in the kitchen to create brilliant and often unexpected pairings for their wines. With Vouvrays of all styles available in their cellar—still and sparkling; dry, off-dry, and fully sweet; oak-aged and tank-aged; vintages young and old of every *cuée*—the options are truly endless.

Upon placing a dish on the table, Didier likes to play a game. He'll pour a glass of a mystery bottle brought up from the family cellar and then let the guests determine its vintage and bottling. On a recent visit, he served one of the more luxurious creations imaginable: oysters topped with foie gras, baked for several minutes until the whole reached a rich, tender, decadent apex. What wine could possibly accompany this sublime combination of briny and unctuous? One with a fresh spine of acidity and a texture voluptuous enough to stand up to foie gras—their 2009 Vouvray *sec*. Next, Catherine emerged from the kitchen carrying a Moroccan-style chicken *tagine* with olives, currants, and preserved lemons—not exactly local Loire Valley fare, but delicious nonetheless, and perfect with a refreshing, ever-so-slightly sweet 2008 Vouvray Les Fondraux, hinting at honey and candied citrus. Finally, to accompany a simple slab of aged *comté*, Didier poured a radiant golden liquid reminiscent of melted stone and black truffle. It prickled the palate with a gentle effervescence—surely this must be an aged *pétillant*? Didier flashed a devious smile as he brandished the crusty old bottle and announced triumphantly, “1986!”



➤ *The Champalous' Vouvray Le Portail is a Chenin Blanc from a very chalky terroir, fermented and aged in 500-liter demi-muids. The most serious and age-worthy of their dry wines, it has a depth and richness of flavor that allow it to shine alongside refined cuisine. Lobster or Loire goat cheeses are an easy match, but don't hesitate to check out the Champalou website for additional gourmet ideas.*

2015 BANDOL ROUGE ♦ DOMAINE TEMPIER \$49

DOMAINE TEMPIER epitomizes the idea of open-armed hospitality—it's no coincidence the great Provençal cuisine of matriarch Lulu Peyraud has been immortalized in Kermit's early writings as well as in Richard Olney's recipe books, such as *Lulu's Provençal Table*. One could even argue that Lulu's influence on Alice Waters and her pioneering restaurant, Chez Panisse, shaped America's culinary landscape over the last forty years. Alice wrote:

It is impossible for me not to love the wines of Domaine Tempier. Once you have visited the Peyrauds in their 17th-century house surrounded by perfectly tended vines, eaten Lulu's garlicky food cooked over the coals, and drunk the wines with Lucien in his cellar, it is clear that they love wine and they love people drinking wine. Their dedication and belief in the beauty of the ancient Mourvèdre grape is positively convincing.

➤ *With the chewy, fragrant 2015, something garlicky cooked over coals will do just fine. In the cooler months, a rich Provençal stew will ensure that you stay warm—check out Richard's compilation of Lulu's recipes for inspiration.*

2009 BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO ♦ SESTI \$85

EXPERTISE IN THE KITCHEN is just one ingredient of great hospitality—the first step is the ability to source the finest products because, as with wine, starting out with top-quality raw materials makes all the difference. Around Montalcino, the Sangiovese grape is capable of yielding majestic reds of remarkable finesse, but Tuscany's stellar *terroir* extends beyond the realm of wine. The abundant sunshine and long history of living off the land here has resulted in skilled artisans taking advantage of the area's natural riches to their fullest extent.

A meal with the Sestis can be a simple affair: on a warm summer day, one might enjoy a plate of pasta with cherry tomatoes and basil from the garden, drizzled with oil from the family's olive trees. More extravagant feasts might include a seasonal salad, roasted vegetables, wild mushrooms, braised rabbit, *fegatello* (roast pig liver), beef tongue covered in a garlicky *salsa verde*, or even bone marrow.

➤ *With this profound and elegant Brunello, they served venison supplied by a local hunter—a match made in heaven.*



2016 FAUSTINE *BLANC VIEILLES VIGNES*

◆ DOMAINE COMTE ABBATUCCI \$40

AT THE DOMAINE, Jean-Charles Abbatucci often greets his guests with copious platters of Corsican charcuterie: heaping piles of *coppa*, *lonzu*, *panzetta*, and *prisuttu* saturated with wild, smoky, gamey flavors. Made from *nustrale* black pigs, a breed exclusive to the island, these meats feature savory, salty flavors that inspire gulp after gulp of crisp, stony Vermentinu or spicy, juicy reds from native grapes. ➔ *This delicate, floral white guarantees palate-cleansing refreshment when heavenly Corsican meats and cheeses are on the table.*



2016 CÔTE DE BROUILLY ◆ CHÂTEAU THIVIN \$27

THIVIN IS AN INSTITUTION in the Côte de Brouilly appellation: the splendid château dates back to 1383, and the Geoffroy family, who has called it home for generations, has a long history of producing fabulous wines from this fabled *cru*. Arguably even more legendary is the cuisine of Evelyne Geoffroy, who tackles the crucial task of feeding hungry harvesters every September. Her cooking embraces the best of the French culinary tradition and puts forth the Beaujolais' richness of fine local products. Loaded with wild fruit, spice, and crunchy minerality, Thivin's Côte de Brouilly marries to perfection with Evelyne's generous, soulful cuisine. ➔ *For dessert, Evelyne's tarte au sucre has reached almost mythical status. We were lucky enough to receive a copy of the recipe—see the back cover and try your hand!*

2004 BARBERA DEL MONFERRATO SUPERIORE "VALPANE"

◆ CANTINE VALPANE \$24.95

CANTINE VALPANE lies in the heart of the Monferrato, a beautiful, rustic land of rolling hills, small towns, and abundant vineyard plots. Proprietor Pietro Arditi's earthy Barberas are perfectly at home with the specialties of Piemontese cuisine. A gracious host who is not content until his guests are filled to the brim with food and wine to the point of lethargy, Pietro gets help from his whole family in the kitchen. The result is akin to a clinic on well-executed local dishes, including *vitello tonnato*, *carne cruda alla piemontese*, *risotto al barbara*, *tajarin al ragù*, and *bunet* for dessert. This convoy of food is naturally accompanied by a procession of various vintages of Pietro's Barberas. ➔ *With this luscious, velvety, brooding 2004, try egg noodles with a hearty sauce for an optimal pairing.*





<p>2016 Faustine <i>Blanc Vieilles Vignes</i> Domaine Comte Abbatucci CORSIKA</p>	Vermentinu	40-year-old vines Granite	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–52° F	Wildflowers, fresh herbs, almond Bright, delicate, crisp, saline	Drink now
<p>2014 Vouvray “Le Portail” Champalou LOIRE</p>	Chenin Blanc	16-year-old vines Clay, chalk	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–52° F Decant optional	Honeycomb, mirabelle plum, hazelnut Unctuous, classy; chalky finish	Drink now through 2025
<p>2016 Côte de Brouilly Château Thivin BEAUJOLAIS</p>	Gamay Noir	50-year-old vines Blue volcanic rock	Serve <i>cool</i> 55–60° F Decant optional	Sour cherry, wild berries, pepper, peony Medium-bodied, dense, mineral, crunchy	Drink now through 2030
<p>2015 Bandol <i>Rouge</i> Domaine Tempier PROVENCE</p>	75% Mourvèdre, 14% Grenache, 9% Cinsault, 2% Carignan	40+-year-old vines Clay, limestone	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant 1–2 hours	Blackberry, black cherry, <i>garrigue</i> , game Powerful, fleshy, smoky, chewy	Drink now through 2030
<p>2004 Barbera del Monferrato Superiore “Valpane” Cantine Valpane PIEDMONT</p>	85% Barbera, 15% Freisa	Vines planted in 1980, 2000 Clay, limestone	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant optional	Ripe cherry, spices, dried flowers, balsamic nuances Smooth, rich, velvety, earthy	Drink now through 2020
<p>2009 Brunello di Montalcino Sesti TUSCANY</p>	Sangiovese	20-year-old vines Oceanic sediment	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant 1–2 hours	Sweet spices, turned earth, bitter cocoa, truffle Plush, savory, luxurious; fine, ripe tannins	Drink now through 2030

cover: Lulu Peyraud prepares a bouillabaisse. Photo © Gail Skoff
inner panel: Mussels at Domaine Tempier. Photo © Gail Skoff

oysters: Photo © Anthony Lynch
tart: Photo © Steve Waters

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◆ TARTE AU SUCRE ◆

BY EVELYNE GEOFFRAY, CHÂTEAU THIVIN



◆ DOUGH ◆

*⅓ cup + 1 tablespoon
lukewarm milk*

2 teaspoons baker's yeast

2 cups flour

2 large eggs

½ teaspoon fine salt

3½ tablespoons sugar

5½ tablespoons creamed butter

◆ TOPPING ◆

¾ cup sugar

3½ tablespoons butter

4 tablespoons heavy cream

Mix yeast with milk in a small bowl. In a large bowl, add flour and make a well in the center. Break eggs into well and add salt, sugar, milk-yeast mix, and creamed butter. Blend vigorously until well mixed and let rest for 2 hours under a damp rag.

Preheat the oven to 390° F.

In a large pie dish (or two small dishes), spread the dough to a thickness of 1 cm. Let sit for 30 minutes. Coat fingers in flour and make a dozen indentations in the dough. Sprinkle with sugar and little bits of butter, then drizzle heavy cream on top.

Bake for 20 minutes, or until lightly browned around edges.

*Serve with fresh berries
and a dessert wine of your choosing.*