

IN THE 'SIGHT' CELLAR, ONE IS SHOWN HOW WINE CHANGES COLOUR AS IT AGES – THE BLUE-PURPLE COLOURS OF YOUNG RED WINES EVOLVING TO RED, CHERRY AND TAWNY RED, BECOMING CLEARER AS TIME GOES ON, WHEREAS WHITE WINE BECOMES CLOUDIER WITH AGE

Premier Cru, Bouchard Aîné et Fils 2009; Roasted Lamb with a Ginger Crust marries a Pommard Premier Cru, Domaine Michel Gaunoux 2007, and for the captain's dinner on the last night, a Beaune Les Aigrots Premier Cru Louis Latour 2004 comes with the foie gras, followed by a Charmes-Chambertin Grand Cru, Camus Père et Fils accompanying a fillet of Charolais beef with peppercorn sauce.

Afternoons are spent sightseeing, using the boat's attendant people-carrier and the captain's car. Again, the emphasis is on wine. A highlight is the visit to Beaune, seeing the famous Hospices and walking around the town after a private tasting at Bouchard Aîné in their noble town house premises erected over 18<sup>th</sup> century cellars.

This is a far more memorable wine education than the customary line up of bottles to be tasted against each other. In a series of different cellars, one's wine appreciation is enhanced by being taught how to apply the five senses to evaluating a wine, each cellar being designed to bring out one of the senses and in each, the expert guide offers a wine to highlight that sense. In the 'sight' cellar, one is shown how wine changes colour as it ages – the blue-purple colours of young red wines evolving to red, cherry and tawny red, becoming clearer as time goes on, whereas white wine becomes cloudier with age. A poster shows the spectrum of colours through which wines can pass and a look at the small owner's cellar displays a 1911 Pommard, the wine having changed its appearance every 20 years.

"Touch" involves the temperature of the wine and its feeling in the mouth whether light, heavy, thin, full, rich or crisp. Tannin, which can feel anything from round to gritty, is more a sensation of touch rather than taste, with its astringent impression on the tongue and mouth. Tannins are one of the few flavour elements of wine that cannot be smelled. Regarding temperature, wine served

# Barging Through BURGUNDY

Carol Wright samples the best of Burgundy's food and wine on an unhurried canal boat cruise

The Burgundy canal follows the curve of the Ouche river to pass through forested hills

The names gild the grandest wine lists: Romanée-Conti, Aloxe-Corton, Bâtard-Montrachet, Charmes-Chambertin. Visiting these vineyard areas in Burgundy should not be hurried. One can "fly" Burgundy's wine lists in hot air balloons dipping down over the vines or landing on châteaux terraces for tastings, but the most comfortable way is to take it at snail's pace (snails with a good red wine are a local favourite) on a canal boat cruise lasting six days.

From April till the end of October, one can sample the vineyards in the changing seasons. October, after the harvest is over, is a mellow time to travel when the tall

trees overlooking the Burgundy canal are as golden as the local sweet wines, as red as a Beaujolais. L'Impressionniste, a converted working barge, takes a maximum of 12 passengers on six-night cruises from near Dijon where passengers get on board.

The route, following the curves of the river Ouche, is not through vineyards. Instead, the boat passes rolling forested hills from which defensive castles – as at Châteauneuf-en-Auxois – guard the hill ridges above lush meadows in which Charolais cattle, the base of beef dishes cooked in Burgundy wine, graze.

Mornings are spent on deck sipping wines from the

open bar and watching the boat traverse the many locks where lock keepers sell local wines. On summer days one can wallow in a hot tub in the boat's prow, exchanging greetings with tow-path walkers and cyclists. Lunch and dinner – on deck in summer – are taken around a communal table and emphasis is placed on wine paired with local produce-based dishes. Each wine and dish are introduced by the knowledgeable crew. For example, a Rully, Domaine Chanzy 2009 comes with Snails local-style and Parmesan Crusted Pork Schnitzel with Slow-Poached Hen's eggs, Anchovies, Capers and Rocket Salad. At dinner, Pan-Roasted Duck Breast calls for a Monthélie



Clockwise from top: Oak cases in the Bouchard Aîné cellar. Refreshing glass of local wine on the deck of L'Impressionniste with a lock keeper at work in the background. Abbaye de la Bussiere hotel where wine is made by the region's monks. The cheese course at the end of a meal on board the boat



Barge cruises for a maximum of 12 passengers leave on six-night excursions from Dijon

L'IMPRESSIONNISTE'S "TASTE" CELLAR IS A FASCINATING PLACE TO DEVELOP ONE'S NOSE. THE AROMAS ONE HAS TO GUESS AT HERE INCLUDE SPICES, LEATHER, FLOWERS, CHERRIES, EUCALYPTUS, LIQUORICE, HONEY, COFFEE AND CHOCOLATE

cold gives a taste impression of being less sweet and more acid than the same wine at a warmer temperature. Thus it is best to serve fruity wine chilled and dry, and astringent wines near or just below room temperature.

In the "taste cellar" one learns that most tannins are strong because the wine is young but this is also a sign that it can safely be kept between five and seven years in cellars with good humidity, during which time the tannins will soften. This cellar, filled with places to sniff at all the varied flavours that come from wine, is a fascinating place to develop one's nose. The aromas one has to guess at here include spices, leather, flowers, cherries, eucalyptus, liquorice, honey, coffee and chocolate. The guide explains there are over a thousand flavours in wine and as it ages it will develop more flavours such as truffle, smoke and leather, and eventually chocolate.

A contrasting tasting visit is made to the 200-year-old family firm, Domaine Camus Père et Fils at Gevrey-Chambertin, a biodynamic wine producer. Here the tasting is more traditional with wines opened on barrel tops and described as they are tasted. Originally producers of edible oil, Camus began cultivating vines in 1850 and now have 18 hectares of which two-thirds produce Grands Crus including Charmes-Chambertin made the traditional way with hand-picked grapes fermented for between 18 days and 3 weeks and stored in oak for 14 to 18 months before bottling.

As the barge cruises along, the sight of the narrow 40 km by 2 km wide strip of prime vineyards seen from the side of the Côte de Nuits is particularly dramatic. One looks down over land where 24 out of the 25 red Grand Cru appellations of Burgundy are grown in soil that can vary within a hundred



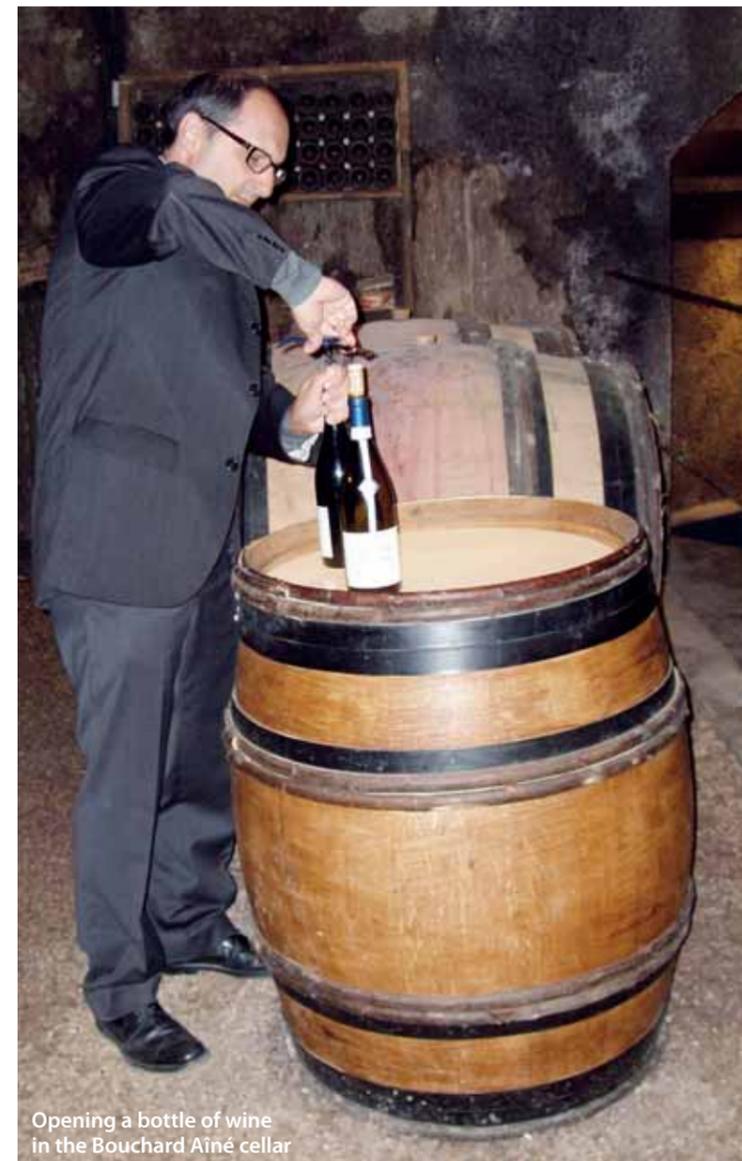
Clockwise from top left: Passengers are served a fine range of Grand cru wines. Vines growing on the wall of the cottage of the lock keeper of the Burgundy canal. The cheese course with good bread and never-ending glasses of wine on the L'Impressionniste. Wines ageing in the Bouchard Aîné cellar. The hotel barge, L'Impressionniste anchored on the river Ouche



Dormitory style accommodation at the Hospices de Beaune

### HOW TO GO BARGING

From Paris or London, getting to Dijon and the start of the cruise is fast and easy by train: Eurostar from London, then TGV non-stop Paris/Dijon. Railbookers ([railbookers.com](http://railbookers.com)), a specialist company, can book trains and overnight accommodation, such as the central Hotel la Cloche in Dijon. Stay at Hotel Abbaye de la Bussière ([abbayedelabussiere.fr](http://abbayedelabussiere.fr)), or opt for European Waterways ([GoBarging.com](http://GoBarging.com)), which have a number of hotel barges travelling on canals in different parts of Burgundy. L'Impressionniste's itinerary is adjacent to the prime wine areas and full wine-themed cruises are arranged. Contact Château de Marsannay at [chateau-marsannay.com](http://chateau-marsannay.com) and the Côte-d'Or tourist office at [cotedor-tourisme.com](http://cotedor-tourisme.com) for general and wine tour information.



Opening a bottle of wine in the Bouchard Aîné cellar

metres. The visit along the mapped Route des Vins takes in the Château du Clos de Vougeot, the headquarters of the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, to see the spacious medieval cellars and the mighty wooden wine presses used by the monks.

The winemaking methods of the region's monks can also be seen on a visit made to the Abbaye de la Bussière for lunch and a tour. This English-owned Relais et Châteaux hotel near the Burgundy canal is a former abbey founded in the 11th century. In the grounds are the 14th-century wine press and the cellar where the monks made their sacramental wine. The present owner plans to install a wine-and-cookery school in the old cellars. Michelin-starred meals are served in the old chapel and sommelier Freddy Jauger introduces local wines like Marsannay Champs Salomon 2003, Rully

Premier Cru La Pucelle 2009 and Clos Vougeot Prieur 2006 to guests, pairing them with courses in the tasting menus that may include Burgundy snails, pearl barley risotto and goat's cheese foam, or fish steamed with ginger, coconut milk risotto and coriander cream.

The Abbaye makes a good place to stay before or after the wine cruise and the hotel can arrange tours of the vineyards by classic cars or individual visits to châteaux not normally open to the public where the guests can often taste wine with the owner. One to see is the Château de Marsannay which has 38 hectares of vineyards in the Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune. Here tastings and tours, seminars and theme tastings with bread, cheese and wine are offered – just one of hospitable wine experiences available in this area of Burgundy. ♦