

Drink...



This month **Richard Hemming** explains why this classic French white from Burgundy deserves a slot in your ultimate wine rack

THE PERFECT CASE, PART THREE: CORTON-CHARLEMAGNE

In simple terms, Coche-Dury's Corton-Charlemagne is an oak-aged chardonnay. But that's like saying Monet's water lilies are oil on canvas or Debussy's *Gymnopédies* are notes on a stave. In fact, all of them are masterpieces of French culture, and their real value lies in the exceptional expertise of the maker.

Coche-Dury is one of the legendary names of the Burgundy region. This domaine produces about 10 different white wines a year, only one of which is ranked as grand cru, the highest accolade in the region. That wine comes from Corton-Charlemagne, a single vineyard on the hill of Corton just north of Beaune.

As with all fine wine, the origin of the grapes is paramount. By default, chardonnay is a fairly neutral grape variety, but that means it is ideally suited to expressing the *terroir* of the greatest vineyards. Corton-Charlemagne is renowned for its richness and flesh, with flavours ranging from nuts and truffles to flint and slate.

In the hands of a top producer such as Coche-Dury, these flavours reach extraordinary levels of intensity. Production levels are minuscule, with only a handful of barrels of Corton-Charlemagne made each year, equating to just a few thousand bottles.



Domaine Coche-Dury, Grand Cru 2012 Corton-Charlemagne (£3,540 *Hedonism*)

At just under £5 per millilitre, this must be about as expensive as chardonnay ever gets. The sheer volume of flavour is breathtaking: flinty and smoky, with baked apple fruit and earthy, mushroom-like flavour – a liquid work of art. The 2012 vintage is one of their greatest, and should age for another 20 years – by which point the price will have only gone up.

Domaine Gérard Thomas, Murgers des Dents de Chien premier cru 2014 St-Aubin (£24.99 *Waitrose*)

St-Aubin is one of the lesser-known villages of Burgundy, but it makes chardonnay just as good as some of its neighbours. Gérard Thomas is the *appellation's* leading producer, and this premier cru example displays all the complex mineral flavours for which Burgundy is renowned. This bottle may not be cheap, but it does represent good value.



Laroche 2015 Chablis (£14.96 *GP Brands*)

Chablis is the northernmost area in Burgundy, where cooler temperatures produce a delicate and crisp style of chardonnay. Domaine Laroche is one of the most reliable producers, crafting a deliciously refreshing, citrusy style year in year out. The crisp acidity and bone-dry finish of this Chablis make it a perfect *apéritif*.