

## What's for English? Wine in Easy English

### Beaujolais Nouveau

#### *Questions Before You Listen*

1. What's Beaujolais?
  - a. A type of grape.
  - b. A French wine district
  - c. A French chateau
  - d. An appellation in Burgundy
2. What kind of wine do they make in Beaujolais?
  - a. Usually light and fruity.
  - b. Dark and opaque.
  - c. Wine that ages well.
  - d. Sweet, desert wine.
3. What's Beaujolais Nouveau?
  - a. A new style of wine that became popular in recent years.
  - b. Wine made from the young (new) grape vines.
  - c. Wine made in new barrels.
  - d. Wine that needs almost no aging.
4. What's the grape used in Beaujolais?
  - a. Pinot Noir
  - b. Sangiovese
  - c. Grenache
  - d. Gamay noir
5. How's the quality of Beaujolais Nouveau?
  - a. It's produced from the best vineyards.
  - b. It's produced only in the best years.
  - c. It's made from the lowest quality grapes.
  - d. It's OK for a party wine, but don't expect too much.
6. What's your attitude toward Beaujolais Nouveau?
  - a. I've never tried it, but I'd like to this year.
  - b. I like to taste it every year.
  - c. I enjoy the party spirit of Beaujolais Nouveau.
  - d. It's too expensive for a wine of such low quality.
  - e. It's helped to ruin the "real" Beaujolais.
  - f. It's given Beaujolais an image of cheap wine.



Here's a tasting note of a type of wine you may be drinking soon. What is it?

*Clear, dark purple, with a clear violet edge. Very **forward** ripe-strawberry aromas, reaching toward banana but not quite getting there. Juicy and fresh strawberries on the palate, nicely **framed** by mouth-watering acidity. A simple wine, as you expect of Nouveau, but better than the more familiar mass-market brands for style and balance, and pleasantly **quaffable** at an old-fashioned 12.5% alcohol.*

A simple wine - Purple, juicy, fruity - strawberries and banana? And a wine you are likely to drink in the fall - if at all. It can only be one wine: Beaujolais Nouveau.

The third Thursday in November is coming up soon. And that's the first day you're allowed to buy and taste the Beaujolais Nouveau. Today on Wine in Easy English, I'll be talking about this wine - and giving you some perspective so you can decide if you really do want to drink it. You may decide to spend your hard-earned recession salary on something else.

It's hard to believe but just a few short weeks ago, the grapes that make this wine were still ripening on the vines. This is a wine made at great speed. Because it's wine that needs no aging, it's going to be light, fruity and refreshing... fairly low in alcohol... a party wine. And they say Beaujolais Nouveau gives you your first taste of the vintage. So if you would like a little insight (and **I stress LITTLE**), try the Beaujolais Nouveau.

On November 19, Bistros in Paris will put out the sign, "Le nouveau Beaujolais est arrivee" and a great night of partying will begin. And here in Japan you might see the first bottles being opened live on TV at midnight on the 19th - and that's 9 hours before the French can begin pulling corks. The Japanese love seasonal festivals and so Japan has become perhaps the the second or third largest export market for Beaujolais Nouveau.

Beaujolais Nouveau. Is it all just hype? Or should we take it seriously? Should you try a bottle? Which Beaujolais Nouveau should you buy? What exactly is Beaujolais Nouveau?

**forward:** the fruitiness is out "in front" - i.e. the first thing you notice.

**framed by:** inside a "frame" of something. (i.e. the taster noticed both fruit and acidity)

**quaffable:** easy to "quaff" - to drink in large quantities.

**"I stress little":** the speaker wishes to emphasize a particular word said earlier. He believes you will get very little insight - understanding of the vintage.



**Hype?** Bathing in Beaujolais at a Japanese hot spring.

It's the last question that I will mainly focus on. And I'll leave it to you whether or not you want to take it seriously or just ignore it.

If you look at a map of French wine regions, you'll see Beaujolais just south of Burgundy. In fact, it's just south of Macon, a part of Burgundy well-known for white wines. But Beaujolais is a red wine region (just a tiny amount of white wine is produced), and red Beaujolais wine is not at all like red Burgundy. Red wine in Burgundy is made from Pinot Noir. But the grape of Beaujolais is the Gamay - or otherwise known as the *gamay noir a jus blanc* the black gamay with white juice.

This grape is grown in some other parts of France - for example, in the Loire Valley region of Touraine. A long time ago - perhaps more than a century ago - it played a much larger role in Burgundy - until the locals admitted it was dragging down their quality. But in Beaujolais - many people say it reaches its finest **potential**. There is something about the granite soil in parts of Beaujolais that brings out the best in the Gamay grape.

Now let's talk about the wine of Beaujolais. If you look at the map, you'll see there are three distinct areas in Beaujolais. The quality of the vineyards is quite different in each area and that's why you might be confused by Beaujolais wine labels. In the lower half of Beaujolais - known as Bas-Beaujolais - the land is flat and the soil has a lot of clay. Wines made here can only be labeled as **AC** Beaujolais - or Beaujolais Superior, which is not very superior and not made in large quantities. In the upper half of the region, the Haut-Beaujolais, more vineyards are planted on hilly **terrain** and there's a lot more granite in the soil. The very best vineyards in this part of Beaujolais are found in 10 different **communes**. The wines here are known as **Cru** Beaujolais, and they are labeled with the name of the particular commune. You may have seen these wines. The famous ones include Morgon, Moulin-a-Vent, Julienas and St. Amour. This could be confusing for some of you - because you won't see the name "Beaujolais" on these labels. You might even think these wines are Burgundies. After all, the bottles have a similar shape - and you could easily think that Brouilly, Fleury or Chiroubles are other Burgundian wine appellations that you weren't familiar with.

**Potential:** Capable of being or becoming.

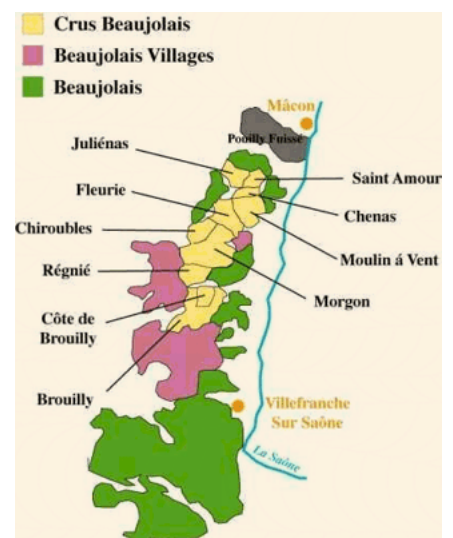
**AC:** Appellation Controlee - *controlled term of origin* - the French certification that certain agricultural products meet certain standards.

**Terrain:** an area of land.

**Commune:** village or small community

**Cru:** a grade or class of wine - e.g. *grande cru, premier cru*.

**The Cru Beaujolais:** Morgon, Moulin-a-Vent, Julienas, St. Amour, Brouilly, Fleury, Chiroubles, Chenas, Regnie, Cote de Brouilly.



The other wine made in this upper part of Beaujolais is labeled Beaujolais-Villages. The vineyards do not produce wines as outstanding as those Crus Beaujolais, but with their granite soils they are supposed to have a bit more character or be less simple than the AC Beaujolais.

A few more details that differentiate Beaujolais, Beaujolais-Villages and Cru Beaujolais. **Aging.** Beaujolais is not meant to be put away. AC Beaujolais should be drunk within a year after the harvest; the Beaujolais-Villages can age for about 2 years and the Cru Beaujolais for 3. However, some of the best Cru Beaujolais can age for even 8 to 10 years.

So to recap: there are three basic types of Beaujolais: the AC Beaujolais which is the most common and simple; the Cru Beaujolais, which is made in small quantities from the best vineyards; and the Beaujolais-Villages, which represents something in the middle. So where does Beaujolais Nouveau come in?

Beaujolais Nouveau - a simple wine made for very early drinking - is made from either the AC Beaujolais or the Beaujolais-Villages; and it will be labeled as such: Beaujolais Nouveau or Beaujolais-Villages Nouveau. Cru Beaujolais is not made in a nouveau style.

Beaujolais Nouveau goes from grape vine to wine shops around the world in about two months. It's always light and fruity. It's very light in tannin and high in acid - so it's refreshing and easy drink - easy to gulp down, in fact. The fruity character reminds some tasters of bananas - but also strawberries, cherries... It should also be fairly low in alcohol - around 12%. (12% is in reality not low. But in comparison to much wine on the market today, 12% is low. I'll talk more about this later.)

So the question is: what do they do to make it that way?

All Beaujolais Nouveau - and all AC Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages - is made with by applying one particular wine making technique. This is called Maceration Carbonique - or Carbonic Maceration. Carbonic refers to carbon dioxide - and as you will see, CO2 is important here.

**Aging:** storing wine for a period of months or years so that it improves. *How long will this wine age? You can age your best Beaujolais wines for 8 or 10 years.*

**AC:** Appellation Controlee - *controlled term of origin* - the French certification that certain agricultural products meet certain standards.

**Carbonic maceration:** a method of processing grapes that extracts color but not tannin.



**Cru Beaujolais - Aged 12 years!** This 1996 was delicious when it was opened in 2008. (Photo by Gerald)

The grapes are harvested gently and by hand. In the winery the grapes are not processed in the same way as red grapes usually are. These grapes are not **de-stemmed**, and they are not crushed. In Beaujolais they want to **extract** color from the skins but few **tannins**. So, they dump whole bunches directly into the fermentation tanks - which may be made of stainless steel or cement. (Beaujolais Nouveau may be one of the few mass-market wines where grapes are not harvested by machine. That's because machine harvesting is quite rough with the berries.) What happens is that the weight of the grapes at the top crushes the grapes down below. The fermentation begins in the grape juice at the bottom of the tank, and as that happens, the carbon dioxide rises to surround the grapes at the top of the vat. In some cases, producers may also pump in more carbon dioxide to create a CO2 blanket around the fermenting grapes. Now the fermentation begins in the grapes at the top, but the fermentation takes place inside those whole grapes that are still attached to the bunches. And this is what leads to that characteristic fruitiness of Beaujolais - which may remind some of bananas or bubblegum.... Not exactly what many wine enthusiasts are looking for in wine. To extract a little more color - and to maintain the right temperature - juice from the bottom is pumped over the grapes on the top. They will keep the grapes in these tanks for a rather short time - just a few days. After that the grapes will be pressed and the juice will continue to ferment without the grape skins.

I'm not sure how much pressing is actually done. I have a feeling that the juice for Beaujolais Nouveau is separated out with just a minimum of pressing. Then the pressing continues and that juice will be made into regular Beaujolais or Beaujolais-Villages, which would then need a few more months of aging to smooth out the tannins that are present due to the pressing of the grapes.

As I said, carbonic maceration extracts color without taking in a lot tannin. And since the wine is mostly made from the free run, unpressed juice, it can be bottled and sold in a matter of weeks rather than months. I should note that carbonic maceration is used to make not only the Beaujolais Nouveau - but the regular AC Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages, too. I think it's also used to some degree in the Cru Beaujolais as well. On the other hand, much Cru Beaujolais is made according to traditional red winemaking techniques as well. That is, grapes are de-stemmed, berries are sorted, and crushed and pressed. That's why you probably do not want to drink a Cru Beaujolais that's too young.

**De-stemming:** removing the berries from the stems.

**to extract:** to remove, to take out.

**tannin:** the compounds in wine (and tea, walnut skins...) that dry out your mouth.



Beaujolais vineyards in the hills.  
(Photo by [Karaian](#) - Creative Commons)



Harvest by hand in [Beaujolais](#).

I should now mention one more aspect of winemaking in Beaujolais - but it's one that the wine producers and their websites probably don't mention: chaptalization. Chaptalization: what's that? It's adding sugar to increase the alcohol level. Remember that during fermentation, yeast converts sugar into alcohol. The more sugar in the grapes, the higher the potential alcohol. The level of sugar in the grapes is a product of sunshine and warm temperatures that lead to higher levels of ripeness. So what if summertime temperatures are too cold? The grapes won't ripen enough and the resulting wine's level of alcohol will be low. So what's a winemaker to do? They can add sugar. Adding sugar to increase the level of potential alcohol is called chaptalization.

Chaptalization is illegal in California, Italy, and Australia. These are countries where cold temperatures are rarely a problem. But it's legal in France and Germany - and even in Oregon and New Zealand. In many areas it's an emergency measure - to be used in case of a wet, rainy and cold harvest. But in Beaujolais apparently it's used quite a lot. And not just in emergencies but as a short cut and as a way to give consumers that wine they like these days - a wine with higher levels of alcohol.

In AC Beaujolais, there's a rule about the ripeness of grapes. The rule is that grapes must have a minimum natural **potential alcohol** of 10 degrees. In Beaujolais-Villages, the minimum ripeness is 10.5 degrees potential alcohol and Cru Beaujolais grapes are supposed to have 11 degrees potential alcohol. What this means is that in a bad harvest, the growers just have to ripen the grapes to that minimum and then chaptalize - add sugar - to raise the alcohol to 12 or 12.5%. But in a regular year (or in a good, sunny vineyard), the grapes may naturally reach 11 or even 12% potential alcohol. Only a minor amount of chaptalization would be necessary. Or the winemakers can also choose to make their wine in a natural low-alcohol style. And apparently, before World War II, Beaujolais was rarely a wine with 12% alcohol. 10 or 11% was the norm.

But now imagine that you are a grower making wine for that very important, very lucrative Beaujolais Nouveau. And you have that date that deadline of the third Thursday in November when you will officially release your wine. In fact it has to be delivered by that date. Are you going to pick your grapes on the date they naturally reach the best level of ripeness? Mother nature doesn't always cooperate. Some harvests come early. Some come late. Or are you going to let that deadline tell you when to pick - whether or not your grapes are really ripe? Chaptalization lets you pick at the time you need to pick in order to make that deadline.

This is one reason you can assume that all the Beaujolais Nouveau has been chaptalized. In a good year, they might only need to add sugar to raise the alcohol 1 or 1.5%. But in a really bad year, some winemakers may even cheat and add sugar beyond the 3 degrees of alcohol maximum. This was a scandal that happened a few years ago - and a number of wine producers were caught and arrested and fined for cheating in exactly this way.

**Potential Alcohol:** the amount of alcohol a wine *could have* if all the sugar is converted to alcohol.



**Jean Antoine Chaptal:** 18th century French Chemist who discovered the process of Chaptalization.

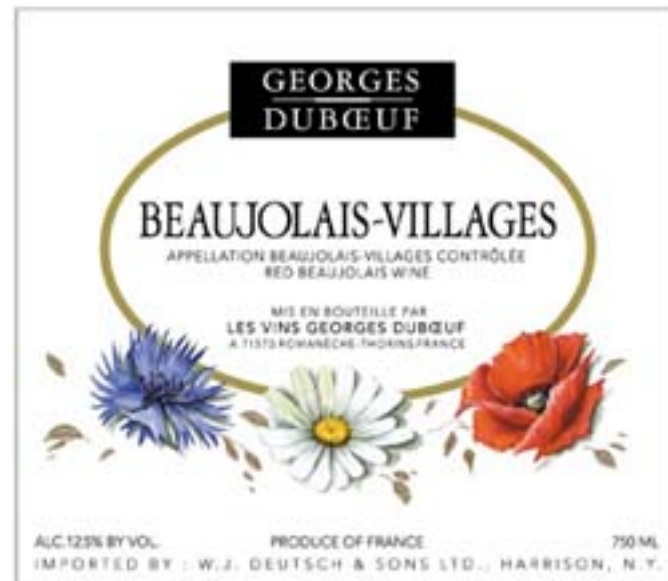
How about Cru Beaujolais? Don't assume that it hasn't been chaptalized either. But in this case, they're adding sugar not to make a deadline, but to make wines that have that rich, lush mouthfeel that many consumers (and many wine writers) believe is a sign of a high quality wine. You get this lushness when wines have higher levels of alcohol. In my research for this podcast, I came across one writer who says in the past Cru Beaujolais did not have high alcohol. It was a light wine. But it was light with a most extraordinary perfume. This is what made it special. Excessive chaptalization gives it body, but at the expense of that delicacy. So if you see a bottle of Cru Beaujolais with 13.5% or 14%, I guess you would have to assume it's been chaptalized.



Georges Duboeuf: King of Beaujolais.

Mind you, chaptalization is not necessarily a bad thing - especially when used in emergencies. A little chaptalization can extend the fermentation in some of these wines, allow them to get better color, body - maybe even balance. But it's also nice to make wines that express something natural and genuine. Too many wines around the world are becoming homogenous - that means they are all looking and tasting the same. A low alcohol wine with an extraordinary perfume might be nice.

There's one last item to talk about regarding Beaujolais. And that's the business of Beaujolais. There are many small vineyard owners in Beaujolais. But few of them bottle their own wines. So a huge amount of Beaujolais wine business is handled by a few, very large, *negociants*. A *negociant* buys grapes or even wine in bulk from many small holders and then blends and bottles it to sell under his own label. There's one *negociant* that you will surely have heard of: Georges Duboeuf. He's directly responsible for the creation of modern Beaujolais Nouveau. He didn't invent it - but he surely popularized it. And as a result all Beaujolais - not only Beaujolais Nouveau - is considered by many consumers to be a mass market quaff that you only buy in November. Duboeuf created a huge market for Beaujolais, but some might feel in the end that they did a deal with the devil.



**Mis en Bouteille Par ...**

Some of the Cru Beaujolais are bottled by the growers themselves - though many of these wines are also bottled by the negociants. So be sure to look at the labels and remember that Mis en Bouteille au Chateau or Mis en Bouteille a la propriete mean that the grower bottled his or her own wine. But if the label says Mis en Bouteille par <<Georges Duboeuf>> it was bottled by the negociant.

So in this podcast, we've talked about Beaujolais - where it's located and the different wines that are made there. We talked about how Beaujolais is made - in particular what they do to make the Nouveau style so quickly.

Are you going to buy a bottle of the Beaujolais Nouveau? If you do, I'd recommend buying the Beaujolais-Villages Nouveau - it comes from better vineyards. And, who knows, it may be less chaptalized. You might also try to buy from a negociant other than Duboeuf. Why? Well, I don't know. I like to avoid the largest, most commercial enterprise in Beaujolais. Joseph Drouhin and Louis Jadot are two very reputable negociants from Burgundy that produce Beaujolais Nouveau.

But here in Japan, Beaujolais Nouveau and Beaujolais-Villages Nouveau really are relatively expensive. Because of the air freight, the prices start at around 1,800 yen and rise up from there to 2,000, 2,500 even 3,000 and up. 3,000 yen is over 30 dollars. I notice that some of these expensive ones appear to be responding to some of the concerns I raised. They are estate bottled. Some feature Vieilles Vignes (or old vines) and even non-chaptalization! Still, 30 dollars has got to be too much for any Beaujolais Nouveau. You can get some very good Cru Beaujolais for less than that.

## **Questions and Exercises**

### **True or False**

1. "Beaujolais Nouveau" means that the wine was made by a new, modern style of winemaking.
2. You can drink Beaujolais Nouveau around 2 - 3 months after the harvest.
3. Beaujolais-Villages wine labels carry the name of the commune or village.
4. Beaujolais-Villages is located in the upper half of Beaujolais.
5. Any grapes grown in Beaujolais can be made in the Nouveau style.
6. The best Beaujolais vineyards are on flat land.
7. The Gamay Noir grape is grown only in Beaujolais.
8. Grapes for the Nouveau Beaujolais are harvested by hand.
9. Cru Beaujolais may be chaptalized.
10. Beaujolais is mostly red, but a small amount of white wine is made, too.
11. All Beaujolais should be drunk young.
12. Beaujolais is often considered to be part of Burgundy.
13. Beaujolais-Nouveau has been made for a long time.
14. A negociant is likely to blend wines from many vineyards.
15. Georges Duboeuf helped to popularize Beaujolais Nouveau around the world.

## Choose the best answer

1. Cru Beaujolais labels include
  - a. the name of the commune.
  - b. the name of the vineyard.
  - c. the name of the grape.
  - d. the name of the winemaker.
2. Carbonic maceration gives the wine a nice red color ...
  - a. and low levels of alcohol.
  - b. as well as sweetness.
  - c. without tannins.
  - d. without a lot of acidity.
3. With carbonic maceration...
  - a. low quality vineyards can produce good wines.
  - b. the potential alcohol can be increased.
  - c. whole bunches of grapes are thrown into fermentation vat.
  - d. wines can age longer.
4. Chaptalization is a method of adding sugar in order to
  - a. make wine sweeter.
  - b. conform to the A.C. rules of Beaujolais.
  - c. age the wine faster.
  - d. increase the alcoholic strength of the wine.
5. Chaptalization should be used...
  - a. to make the November 19 deadline.
  - b. when cold weather prevents grapes from ripening.
  - c. in order to process grapes quickly.
  - d. to help wines conform to a popular international style.
6. A large amount of Beaujolais wine business is handled by
  - a. the French government.
  - b. negociants.
  - c. the Chateaux.
  - d. the villages and communes.

**Match the sentences on the left with the best one on the right**

1. In the past, Gamay played a much larger role in Burgundy
2. But in Beaujolais - many people say Gamay reaches its finest potential.
3. There are several details that differentiate Beaujolais, Beaujolais-Villages and Cru Beaujolais.
4. The fruity character reminds some tasters of bananas
5. Beaujolais can be a nice quaff.

1. Beaujolais, Beaujolais-Villages and Cru Beaujolais are different in a number of ways.
2. Gamay used to be more important in Burgundy.
3. Beaujolais brings out the best in Gamay.
4. Beaujolais can be an easy drinking wine.
5. The fruity character is reminiscent of bananas.

**Answers**

**True or False**

1. F; 2. T; 3. F; 4. T; 5. F; 6. F; 7. F; 8. T; 9. T; 10. T; 11. F; 12. T; 13. T; 14. T; 15. T

**Choose the best answer**

1. a; 2. c; 3. c; 4. d; 5. b; 6. b

**Matching**

1 = 2; 2 = 3; 3 = 1; 4 = 5; 5 = 4

