

Beaujolais...It's Not Just for November Anymore

By Cicily Corbett

Every year you get a little bit more worldly, right? You know a Kompressor from a Kia, Eames from Ikea, Frida Kahlo from Klimt. Your saggy sofa, metal-framed Van Gogh posters, and mini-fridge have gone to dormitory heaven, to be replaced by a few good pieces. Keggers are a rueful memory....they were fun, but honestly, a microbrew on draft just tastes better.

But have you put a pinkie yet on the topmost rung of the ladder of sophistication? Have you begun your education in wine?

Perhaps you've figured out that Chardonnay is white, Merlot is red, and anything that comes out of a yellow box with a kangaroo on it is a safe bet. Beaujolais is that fruity stuff you drink the day it shows up in the store. (No need to memorize the good vintages.) Maybe you've even hosted or attended that most yuppie of parties, a celebration of the arrival, on the third Thursday of November, of Beaujolais Nouveau.

Beaujolais, from the region of the same name in France, is a red wine made from the Gamay grape. (A small percentage of Beaujolais is white, made from the Chardonnay grape.) The wine is made by a process called "carbonic maceration," which avoids crushing the grapes and thus limits the release of astringent tannins. The result: an light-bodied, easy-drinking wine. So easy to drink that nearly half of the crop is sold within weeks as Beaujolais Nouveau.

Because it's fruity and cheap, Beaujolais is a good casual accompaniment to hors d'oeuvre, chicken or pizza. Perfect place to start if you're unfamiliar with wine—just substitute it for beer or cola at your next get-together. Georges Duboeuf has cornered the market for Beaujolais, and his lovely "flower label" bottles are easy to spot at the store.

If you want to get a little fancier while still sticking with Beaujolais, try Beaujolais-Villages. These wines, from the northern part of the region, have a bit more body and structure than a plain Beaujolais, and flavors and aromas may be somewhat more complex.

Nicest of all the region's wines, and worthy of cellaring a few years or more, are the ten Beaujolais *cru*s. A *cru* in French is a vineyard; with respect to Beaujolais, the term refers to the ten areas in the way-north Beaujolais region where these potentially excellent wines are made. This region is hilly and rocky; the poor soil means roots have to go way down deep into granite and schist. Each mini-region, with its different geological composition, produces a different style of wine.

The ten appellations, each designating a specific area in the region, are: Brouilly, Chénas, Chiroubles, Côte de Brouilly, Fleurie, Juliéna, Morgon, Moulin à Vent, Régnié, and Saint-Amour. Typically, these wines are labelled with the individual appellation. The

word "Beaujolais" may be nowhere evident on the bottle. Many consumers are therefore unaware that these complex wines are varieties of Beaujolais.

But not you! Memorize those names, or write them down. Take your list to the store next time you go. For under fifteen dollars you can find a decent Beaujolais *cru*, a peony- and violet-scented Chiroubles or a spicy, fruity, rose-scented Moulin à Vent. Serve proudly, and tell your guests: Beaujolais isn't just for November anymore.