

2004 BURGUNDY PREVIEW: CELLAR NOTES, PART 1 THE BEST WINES FROM EIGHT TOP DOMAINES

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On my trip to Burgundy, I evaluated the following wines at the domaines I visited. These wines are highlights among the barrel samples I tasted; they are all potentially outstanding (90-94 points on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale) or, in a few cases, classic (95-100).

All the tastings were non-blind. Some 2004s have been bottled and are finished wines. Others were in the last stages of maturation and in preparation for bottling. The bottling process is crucial to wines and can affect the final quality.



Alex Gambal

"The trick in 2004 was intensifying the fruit and diminishing the less-ripe tannins," said Alex Gambal, a U.S.-born négociant.

Gambal also pointed out that it was important to control the oidium problem early. "If you treated the vines early on, you stood a chance of getting them ripe, without any oidium flavors in the wines," he said. "Chassagne was very successful in 2004. The least amount of oidium I saw was in Chassagne."

Among the whites, the **Chassagne-Montrachet Clos St.-Jean** was opulent and tasted of peach, a contrast to the mineral austerity of the **Chassagne-Montrachet La Maltroie**. The **Corton-Charlemagne** was packed tight with citrus and mineral notes on a racy structure; it will need 10 years.

Gambal's **Echézeaux** and **Clos Vougeot** had just been fined that morning (I tasted them at about 7:30 p.m.), yet the former was very open, with spicy, black cherry flavors and fine length. The latter revealed pure black cherry and an elegant profile, but seemed to be suffering from the fining. They will both be excellent in time.