

---

## BRUCE SANDERSON DECANTED

### A Different Take on 2018 in Burgundy

Mounir Saouma of Lucien Le Moine often goes against the prevailing wisdom in Burgundy; a tasting of his 2018s reveals a bevy of potentially classic-rated Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays



The couple behind Lucien Le Moine: Rotem Brakin and Mounir Saouma (Courtesy of Lucien Le Moine)



**By Bruce Sanderson**

Feb 26, 2020

*Senior editor Bruce Sanderson, Wine Spectator's lead taster for the wines of Burgundy, has just returned from France, where he visited numerous top domaines and other noteworthy properties while checking out the latest vintage.*

Mounir Saouma, [proprietor of the boutique négociant Lucien Le Moine](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/burgundys-new-monk-514211) [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/burgundys-new-monk-514211>] in Beaune, typically interprets vintages differently than many other domaines and merchants in Burgundy. The 2018 vintage is a case in point. While many 2018s are already in bottle and some can already be found on local wine lists, the [Lucien Le Moine](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/wine) [[http://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search\\_by/exact/text\\_search\\_flag/winery/wine](http://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/wine)

cuvées are still resting in barrel, [unracked](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/racking) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/racking\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/racking) and without any sulfur.

Saouma likes to disrupt the [malolactic conversion](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/malolactic%20fermentation) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/malolactic fermentation %28ml%29\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/malolactic%20fermentation) to prolong the fermentation process and slow down the aging of the wines. He also likes to have plenty of [lees](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/lees) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/lees\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary/show/id/lees), about 6 liters' worth in each barrel to nourish the nascent wines. While his 2018 Pinot Noirs are now clear and reflecting their *terroirs*, his Chardonnays are still cloudy, full of carbonic gas and relatively unformed.

"I don't care about the fruit; we are building the aftertaste and the texture," he explains, referring to his whites. "It's very easy to make good white wines, but very complicated to make *great* white wines. They are born with nothing, so it takes a long time to build them."

He describes 2018 as having a hot summer, but with "fake" heat. "There was a lot of freshness inside the grapes, and the acidity wasn't high, but beautiful," he says. He thinks the new generation of successful vintages is the fresh years. "Since 2000, the warm vintages are no longer the classical vintages," he adds, preferring the cooler harvests of 2002, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2013.

Saouma goes on to say that the fresh vintages have a lot of rain in the spring. He also notes that whereas 2018 had warm days in August, there were also cold nights. In addition, the harvest, which normally takes about a week on the Côte d'Or, was drawn out over a month. Though it started early, Aug. 20, for the parcels Lucien Le Moine purchases (as finished wine), it was spread out as different vineyards and even parcels within the same vineyard, ripened unevenly. The last picking, in the same vineyards that the harvest began, was Sept. 18.

At pressing, in October, the wines reflected their *terroirs*; by March the following year, they all tasted the same, notes Saouma. And finally, almost a year later, they are expressing purity of place again.

We tasted the wines in pairs, non-blind, usually clay vs. limestone, to see the differences. For example, the **2018 Lucien Le Moine Volnay Les Pitures Dessus** (89–92 points, non-blind) is delicate, offering rose and strawberry notes and a fresh, elegant profile. By contrast, the **2018 Pommard Les Grands Epenots** (90–93, non-blind) is earthy, with black cherry and iron matched to a dense, almost chunky frame.

**Lavaut St Jacques** (91–94, non-blind) has a dark, brooding, feral personality, while the **Les Cazetiers** (90–93, non-blind) is very pure, expressive, displaying cherry, plum, tobacco and toasty vanilla-tinged flavors.

We followed a line from Chambolle-Musigny Les Charmes, through Les Hauts Doix to Les Amoureuses, "a 30-second walk" according to Saouma. The **Les Charmes** (92–95, non-blind) is a rich, broad mix of red and black fruits, floral hints and dense; the **Les Hauts Doix** (92–95, non-blind) a linear picture of purity and finesse, bursting with violet, raspberry and wild cherry flavors; **Les Amoureuses** (93–96, non-blind) similar in aromas and flavors, but more discreet, silky and refined.

The **Mazis-Chambertin** reveals black currant and smoky, flinty, animal aromas. It's intense, direct and powerful, yet with class and a long finish (94-97, *non-blind*). Neighboring **Chambertin-Clos de Bèze** shows a different character, delivering pure, expressive rose, cherry and wild strawberry flavors with great energy (95-98, *non-blind*).

Moving south to Vosne-Romanée, **Romanée-St.-Vivant** is spicy, a touch vegetal and floral, evoking small red berries on a delicate, harmonious profile (94-97, *non-blind*). Crossing the path to **Richebourg** I find mint, strawberry and cherry notes matched to explosive, fleshy and flattering features (93-96, *non-blind*).

Anchoring either end of Chambolle-Musigny are **Bonnes Mares** and Musigny. The former reveals effusive floral, raspberry and currant aromas and flavors. It's airy and elegant, very Chambolle, yet with power (95-98, *non-blind*). Its counterpart **Musigny** changes constantly in the glass, featuring bergamot, floral, cherry, currant and spice notes, yet it's intense, elegant and very long (94-97, *non-blind*).

The Chardonnays were more difficult to assess due to less evolution than the Pinot Noirs. Nonetheless, there is a creamy **Chassagne-Montrachet Les Caillerets**, offering vanilla, butter, pastry, lemon and a touch of orange blossom flavors with terrific balance and length (92-95, *non-blind*). The **Meursault Perrières** delivers precise, lemon and stone notes, very racy and pure, with a long, salty finish (92-95, *non-blind*). Upping the ante, the **Chevalier Montrachet** is still marked by the new oak, with floral, lemon, peach aromas and flavors. Salty, it's vibrant, pure and long on the palate (94-97, *non-blind*).