

Tastings | Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher

The Wine of the Moment, Year After Year

How Beaujolais Nouveau Survived Some Higher Prices And a Temporary Downslide

OUR DAUGHTER MEDIA just started college, so she couldn't understand why she was standing in line at 5 a.m. last week to register for next semester. Our daughter Zoe is putting the finishing touches on her applications to colleges, which will respond in April. We need to call Disney World next month to make dinner reservations for the fanciest restaurants next June. We haven't gotten around to finalizing any plans for spring break, which means we've probably missed the boat, quite literally. Does it sometimes seem to you, like us, that you're always living in the future? That's why Beaujolais Nouveau is such a treat. It's the ultimate *carpe diem* wine, meant to remind all of us to enjoy the moment.

We have been rushing out to buy Nouveau on the third Thursday of November every year for more than three decades now. It's a special way to celebrate the new harvest, welcome the holiday season and consider the blessings of today. Over those years, Nouveau became a big deal for a while and more recently has been on a downslide. Partly that's because wine geeks love to sniff at Nouveau because it isn't serious wine—as though wine has to be serious—and too many merchants have picked up that attitude. When we were calling shops to see which Nouveau they carried, we were greeted less than warmly at most, with the nadir coming from an exceptionally chilly merchant in Manhattan:

Us: Can you please tell me which Nouveau you have in the store?

Clerk: The 2007.

Nouveau also is probably less popular because it's no longer the first wine of the vintage that you're likely to see. With wines from the Southern Hemisphere so popular now, and the harvests there taking place early in the year, we've been seeing 2007 wines for months. Other countries have gotten in on the act, too, with harvest wines like Milonetto's charming Novello from Italy (which is particularly exuberant and tangy this year and a good buy at about \$9.95). But the biggest reason for Nouveau's slipping popularity, we'd guess, is that prices have gone up while quality has gone down. Nouveau used to be a consistently drinkable joy at reasonable prices. In the past few years, though, prices on some Nouveaux have risen to as high as \$16.99, which is ridiculous, while far too many of the wines have tasted insipid or worse. When Nouveau is bad, it can have flavors of anchovies, metal, salt or bananas, and too many we've had over the past few years have been bad. We understand that Nouveau is a cash cow for winemakers, but even cash cows have to be fed from time to time, and it has been clear for a while that many vintners were taking Nouveau—and its customers—for granted.

As usual, we bought every Nouveau we could find for a quick blind tasting. We feared the worst, since, as a rule, we don't much enjoy drinking anchovies, metal, salt or bananas. But we are back with very good news: The 2007 Nouveau is excellent, the best since at least 1995. Wine after wine was charming and fun, with none of the negatives



Stan Fellows

The Dow Jones 2007 Beaujolais Nouveau Index
In a tasting of 2007 Beaujolais Nouveau, these were our favorites. We prefer to serve these straight out of the refrigerator, and then let them warm on the table while we drink them. We have listed the prices we paid, but prices are wild on these and tend to start going down quickly after release. Nouveau should be drunk before the end of the year in which it is made. We didn't see some of our previous favorites this year, including Bouchard, which was last year's best of tasting and a reliable name. Nouveau goes well with Thanksgiving leftovers, giving them the zesty lift they need.

VINEYARD	PRICE	RATING	TASTERS' COMMENTS
Antonin Rodet Beaujolais Nouveau	\$12.99	Very Good	Best of tasting. Extremely lively, with true, fun tastes. A throwback, in a good way, to the just-made, drink-this-minute Nouveau of our youth that was proud to be a little rough and unfinished. Tastes like fall at the winery.
Georges Duboeuf Beaujolais Nouveau	\$10.99	Good/ Very Good	Best value. Always reliable. Jammy, easy and friendly, with a long, strawberry-raspberry finish. Smooth and pleasant.
Labour-Roi Beaujolais Nouveau	\$13	Good/ Very Good	Nose is like a bowl of cranberries and raspberries and the taste is like good fruit, left alone. More acidic and restrained than most, more concentrated and grown-up. Especially good with food.
Domaine de Bel-Air Beaujolais-Villages Nouveau	\$14.99	Good	Darker fruit than most, with a little hint of herbs to add interest. Jammy, easy-to-drink tastes, but the finish is a bit watery and disappears too quickly.
Domaine des Cèpes de la Motte (Isabelle et Bruno Perraud) Beau- jolais-Villages Nouveau	\$13.95	Good	Enchanting nose of fresh fruit and violets, with pure raspberry fruit, a bit of pepper and even a hint of richness. As it warms, there's a hint of salt that detracts, so keep it cool.

NOTE: Wines are rated on a scale that ranges: Vetch, OK, Good, Very Good, Delicious, and Delicious! These are the prices we paid for wine stores in Massachusetts and New York. Prices vary widely.

we feared. And while the prices are still too high, they appear to have moderated a bit this year. It's almost as if the Nouveau producers listened to consumers, realized that they were hurting themselves and acted positively. Imagine that.

The Nouveau you are most likely to see is Georges Duboeuf, which is fine because, once again this year, it was jammy and charming. We

often find Duboeuf Nouveau a bit too smooth and round, without the just-from-the-field tastes that we like. But it's certainly always pleasant and a real crowd pleaser.

Our best of tasting this year, Antonin Rodet, is the most spot-on Nouveau we have tasted in some years. It took us back to why we became Nouveau fans in the first place, with the kind of

super-fresh, just-the-fruit-ma'am tastes that we love. Over the years, we've visited many wineries during or just after the harvest and have tasted their fresh juice, and this wine reminded us of those visits. What could be better? (The importer, Baron Francois of New York City, says Rodet made 3,000 cases of this, of which 800 were imported and distributed in Maryland, New Jersey and New York.)

So if you have been turned off by Nouveau, or if you have never tried it, now is a good time to pick up a bottle. Nouveau is great with Thanksgiving leftovers. Remember that you shouldn't drink Nouveau after the end of the year in which it is released—not that it will suddenly turn to vinegar, of course, but the whole purpose of this wine is to celebrate the season. For the rest of the year, stick with "real" Beaujolais, which remains one of the most versatile, best-value wines on store shelves.

IT'S TIME FOR OUR semiannual reminder of who we are and what this column is about. We have been studying wine and drinking it together since 1973. Longtime hard-news journalists, we began writing this column in 1998 and became full-time wine writers in 2000. We have also written four books about wine.

We buy the wines we taste for this column at retail stores all over the U.S. The Journal pays for the wine. We don't accept free wine, meals or trips. We don't meet with winemakers when they visit New York City and we attend only those events that are open to the public.

The index that often appears with this column isn't a "buying guide." We don't think you should have to go into a wine store with long lists of what to buy and what to avoid—and, in any case, just because we liked a specific wine doesn't mean you will. Rather, by tasting large samplings of various kinds of wine, we hope to give more-general advice. For instance, you really should try a Ribera del Duero from Spain and a Muscat Canelli from the U.S., but we'd urge caution with lower-priced Shiraz from Australia and Chardonnay from the U.S. If you make the mistake of focusing too narrowly on specific labels that have been reviewed by us or by others, you are likely to pass right by some of the small-production, under-the-radar wines—perhaps unusual varietals from unusual regions—that are often some of the best, most interesting wines in the store.

We provide an index of our favorites merely to give you some idea what various kinds of wine can taste like at their best and approximately how much they cost. If the wines we describe sound good to you, ask a wine merchant for a similar wine. Establishing a relationship of candor and trust with a merchant is fundamental to an enjoyable journey along the road of wine. There are undiscovered gems at every good wine store; let a good merchant be your guide to them.

You can contact us at wine@wsj.com. Be sure to include your full name and where you're from. We cannot respond to all questions and comments, but we do our best.

Melanie Grayce West contributed to this column.

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Watch John and Dottie taste and talk about this year's Beaujolais Nouveau, at WSJ.com/Tastings.