

Ep 158: Beaujolais Nouveau Day with Dan Farrell-Wright, Founder of Wickhams Wine Merchants (Part 1)



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine and wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello wine lovers and welcome back to a few days-ish after Beaujolais Nouveau Day. Beaujolais Nouveau Day is always the third Thursday of November, and this year, it was just on the 16th of November. Now, I hope you have grabbed yourself a bottle of Beaujolais Nouveau, because in this episode, we're gonna look at their tradition, their history, what it is, what it tastes like, how to serve it. And I am talking with Dan, the owner of [Wickhams wines](#), which, if you've been listening this season, you will know my absolutely fantastic sponsor. And I love the fact that finally, you're going to be able to listen to Dan himself and you will realise how incredible he is. So, enough of me chatting, pour yourself that glass and enjoy the episode.

Janina Doyle 00:01:25 Okay, sit down. Are you feeling nervous? You have been an avid listener for how many years now?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:01:30 Since the beginning, I've actually listened to the very early episodes.

Janina Doyle 00:01:36 Actually, you have. Which we don't...

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:01:40 We don't talk about.

Janina Doyle 00:01:42 We don't. We don't talk about those episodes. No, no, no. As someone who has actually listened to those original episodes where I had a co-host, would you advise anyone to go back that far?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:01:58 No. Never work with animals or children.

Janina Doyle 00:02:00 Oh, gosh! Anyway, right. Moving on. I can't carry on here. I am so excited to have you here because of course, we're such wonderful friends. Are we wonderful friends? I was just about to say that.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:02:14 I can let you say that. Go on. Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:02:16 Okay, great. Okay, that'll do.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:02:18 I feel as though we have a bond of friendship.

Janina Doyle 00:02:22 I concur. But after working together, knowing each other, it's been so amazing that considering you actually enjoy this podcast that you've sponsored it this year. And what's been brilliant, as well as I'm mentioning it, but you now actually get to be in the hot seat.

So, it's really nice, because it's me saying, look, these wines that Dan brings in are great, but do people believe me? I don't know. So, now the pressure is on you. To prove yourself, you know, these people are listening. So, I need to hand this over to you to show your incredible knowledge. Are you going to let us down?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:03:05 I apologise in advance to all of the listeners. There is a greater expectation from the wonderful guests that you've had in the past. And now they're gonna be subjected to me.

Janina Doyle 00:03:07 Oh you are very kind. No, I am so excited because as you know, many people don't realise that when Dan and I have any normal conversation, the normal conversation which might for any other person take five minutes, takes us an hour.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:03:24 I have to put time in my diary to phone Janina. So I have to block out two hours. I can't just have it. We can't just have a quick phone call. I need to put, "Friday afternoon. I've got two hours free."

Janina Doyle 00:03:38 "Finally, let's make the phone call!" Obviously. Right. Okay. I'm sure people are like, okay, we get it, we get you to talk a lot. Well, okay, but we're gonna talk about wine now. So, I actually don't know this answer. So, I'm intrigued as well. I want you to explain how you even got into the wine industry. I mean, did you grow up drinking some wine?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:03:56 Yeah, in my bottle. So, from a very young age...

Janina Doyle 00:03:59 In your baby bottle?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:04:00 Yeah, I started with that. Actually, I'm gonna digress very, very briefly. I do have a funny story.

Janina Doyle 00:04:05 I'm not surprised.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:04:06 We're talking about Beaujolais today, or there will probably come up a little bit later. And one of the producers that we worked with, Dominic, he did actually tell me so genuinely, he used to be the president of Vin de Beaujolais.

A very, very influential man in Beaujolais. 72 years old now. When he was a child, he actually was given wine and water at school at lunchtime for his drink until it was banned in France in 1956. So, he would be given Morgon with water.

Janina Doyle 00:04:31 Well, first of all, there's a part of me like oh my god, wow. But they also like they watered down wine, right? Seems...

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:04:39 Yes, most people go, "Oh, my God, they were giving children alcohol." And you're going, "They weren't giving them the full strength alcohol?! Like what poor children."

Janina Doyle 00:04:47 It just seems a waste. Oh, if only I lived in the 1950s! Okay, well, obviously you didn't, jokes aside, you sadly, we're not even given any watered down Morgon.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:05:01 Sadly not, no. Actually, I started off in catering. So, that was where it all started. So, I used to be a chef a long, long time ago. And my mother and I had an outside catering company, where we do weddings and christenings and all that sort of thing.

And we did some sort of society weddings, if you like, in Marquees with some, you know, some interesting people. And there was one particular wedding that we catered. And all of the wines for the wedding came from a very well known wine merchant in England, the oldest wine merchant in England. And at the end...

Janina Doyle 00:05:35 Which is..is that Berry Bros?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:05:36 Berry Bros. & Rudd.

Janina Doyle 00:05:37 Okay, good. It already came out of my mouth, but I was like, Oh, God, am I supposed to not? Yeah, good. I proved it.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:05:39 So, at the end of the wedding, it was like, thank you very much for the job well done. And we were given a case of Champagne. And it was Berry Brother's own Champagne produced by Mailly.

And we thought nothing much. It was a nice case of Champagne, nice. Popped a couple in the fridge. Opened one and it was that taste that I got. It was this sort of incredible, linear, clean, green, crunchy apple fruit flavour that I'd never tasted in anything else before. I was like, wow, this is phenomenal. I need to know more about this.

And that's where it started. That's where the interest sort of piqued. It was the moment that piqued my interest. That's the moment that piqued my interest and I was like, I need to learn more about this. And so my journey began.

Janina Doyle 00:06:30 I love that. And then of course, that's taking you to setting up Wickhams Wine. Now, genuinely it's brilliant, because from knowing you for long enough, I actually get to slowly work my way through all your wines, which is brilliant.

It's amazing, because there's no duds. It's so good that every time I taste a bottle, I'm always exciting. And I think that's because of your passion. And you're importing so many of these wines yourself.

Somebody comes to your site or goes online anyway and they're like, I want to buy wine, you don't have a wine merchant, you don't have somebody saying, hey, what's your flavour profile? So, for somebody who wants to buy wine, considering you've put all the effort in putting those wines online, effectively creating lists, what should somebody be doing to try and help them pick the right bottle? I'm just wondering. You know, you're on the other side. Does that help you?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:07:20 I think yeah. So I think that's, that's down to us to sort of how we structure the site, the information we put on there, how easy we find for you to find wines that are similar to link through, you know, so whether that be wines by the same producer, wines made from the same grape or from the same region, or whether it's wines that are a similar profile.

So, that's partly us making sure that the navigation of the site works really well. And then, I think also, the good thing about the internet is that it's convenient. So, you can sit at home, you can flick through our lists, you can find ways that you like you can add them to your basket. But then equally, what we try to do is make sure that you're doing that with as little risk as possible.

So, we do the 100% Satisfaction Guarantee. If you're not happy, you can always send back the wine, we'll replace it or refund it. You know, we're confident, I'm confident that the wines that we've got are good. But if there's any reason why people don't like it, well then just tell us and we'll give you another bottle.

So, you have that confidence to sort of take that leap because yeah, if you go into traditional wine merchants, then there's someone there that you can chat to and you can tell them oh, I like X, Y and Z and they'll find something that's similar. Whereas, obviously, we don't have that. You can phone us up, you can chat to the lovely people on the end of the phone, and they can give you some advice.

Janina Doyle 00:08:28 You have real people!?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:08:30 We have real people answering the telephone. Not even robots. It's like proper real people sitting just waiting to speak to customers.

Janina Doyle 00:08:39 I'm actually genuinely impressed. Nobody has real people anymore. Wow. Okay, question. Could somebody be fortunate enough to get you on the end of the phone?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:08:50 I'm shaking my head. This is the radio so shaking your head doesn't work. Very, very rarely. Because I'm generally actually, you know, sort of travelling, tasting, meeting people.

Janina Doyle 00:09:02 No, you're not. You're normally talking to me!

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:09:06 Or talking to you! This is the problem. If you try to get through to me, I will be engaged because I will be talking to you, Janina, and you'll be waiting for hours for me to hang up. You'll normally talk to lovely Tracy or Laura, who will then help you out.

Janina Doyle 00:09:20 I love that. Okay. Do you know that actually I love the fact that I forgot that you do actually give 100% Confidence Guarantee and that is actually important? Okay, now, let's go to Beaujolais. This is what this episode is about. So, obviously, you had your wow moment with Champagne, but Beaujolais has a very, very special place in your heart. Why?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:09:44 So, just following on from the story. So, that first wine that I tried was from Berry Bros. & Rudd. Berry Bros. & Rudd, that's where my, if you like, my education, my excitement started. And so, I was like, right, I need to learn more about this and I need to find more.

And so, the first place I went was, of course, Berry Bros. & Rudd. And back then, you know, I didn't even think there was a website, this is probably pre-internet, you know, I used to use to get into the shop in St. James, where they had this great big ledger with everything written in and all the wines used to be stored in the cellars underneath St. James. And you'd have your own reserve, and you could go down and look at your own reserve. It's far less romantic now they're all in a warehouse in Basingstoke.

They're very much focused on those traditional regions – Bordeaux, Burgundy. And that's what a lot of their conversation at that time certainly may have moved on now. But that would be about those very serious places.

I've bought wines in Bordeaux, and in Burgundy. And you go to Burgundy, and you go to a producer in Burgundy. And they'll take you into their cellar or their tasting room. And they'll taste their range of wines with you. So, brilliant, right? That one, I love that one. Can I buy this wine? And you can't.

It's so hard. They're so serious. They're so proper. And they've got very little production and they have these very long relationships that go back probably hundreds of years in some instances. It's really hard to buy.

Go to Beaujolais. The thing I love about Beaujolais is it's much more like me, it's much more light hearted, easygoing. You know, there's a charm to it. The winemakers in Beaujolais, they welcome you with open arms. You know, they want you to drink their wines. They want you to buy their wines. They want you to enjoy their wines. It's much more fun. It's much less serious. It's much more easygoing, and it suits me, I think.

Janina Doyle 00:11:41 I love that. I love that. Okay, so this specific episode, because we've just gone past Beaujolais Nouveau Day – Yay! Yeah! You need to make noise. Okay, I need to give you some education. I know I can see you, others can't see you. So, yeah, exactly. Go right.

He's dancing around in front of the camera, everyone. Okay, stop dancing. You have to make noise to make it apparent. Okay. Anyway, so we've just gone past Beaujolais Nouveau Day. I have a bottle of Nouveau. There are some much more serious wines in Beaujolais but Nouveau is the funnest, is the most exciting, easiest, lively wine of them all. So, I'm going to hand it over to you to explain to people what is Beaujolais Nouveau and what is Beaujolais Nouveau Day? When was it?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:12:36 Yeah, so starting with Nouveau wines. So, Nouveau wines, essentially, Vin de primeur, which means the first wine. And it's not just Beaujolais, like they make wines of this style in other places as well. And it's about the speed from the harvest, vinification to bottle, and out for customers.

So, these wines were all picked this year. So, the harvest happened this year, in September. And then it's roughly six weeks from those wines being picked, going into fermentation, being bottled and out for customers.

So, six weeks. It's really really quick. So, it's very light, it's very fresh, it's very fruity. And you also get a similar style of wine made in Bardolino Novello, which is Italian, in which they do this very fast wine in a very similar way.

Even in England, actually, we have a few producers. So, Sharpham, and we're making their new release wine, which is the same principle, where it's very fast. It's not unique to Beaujolais, but Beaujolais is probably the best known. And it goes back actually, so there was a festival, some Martin's Day Festival, which happens on the 11th of November. It's historic, sort of like Saints Day. And that was a celebration of the harvest.

And so, winemakers all over the world, vineyards all over but make wine to drink on St. Martin's festival to celebrate the end of the harvest. And then it was in 1956, so relatively recently, where actually Beaujolais Nouveau started to become a thing. Prior to that, Beaujolais Nouveau wasn't wasn't really anything other than just this early wine that people would drink on some Martin's Day that was made by the winemakers and shared with all the friends in the village. And then this chap, Georges Duboeuf, who you've probably heard of...

Janina Doyle 00:14:17 Well, he is the easiest producer to find around in this moment.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:14:25 Yeah, so Georges Duboeuf, often referred to as the pope of Beaujolais. In 1956, he spotted this opportunity to take this wine that they were drinking and they were making on

St. Martin's Day, and to actually market it and to market it as this special thing called Beaujolais Nouveau.

So, he went around the streets of Lyon, and he started to sell his Beaujolais Nouveau. So, thanks to Georges Duboeuf. That's where Beaujolais Nouveau came about. And at this point, you know, it came out at some point in November, around some Martin's Day festival 11th. But there were no strict rules about it. Following on from that, two people in the 70s. So, Joseph Berkmann, who you may be aware of, Berkmann Wines?

Janina Doyle 00:15:07 Was he from the Berkmann Wine? I was gonna say the wine merchants?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:15:09 And he was also a columnist in the Sunday Times. And he sat down in Paris to have dinner with Clement Freud, who was a columnist for The Sun and the MP and used to be on the radio.

And so, in the 1970s, he sat down. And they saw this hullabaloo about this new wine because, by this point, it sort of spread through Lyon and now it moved to Paris, and they'd race to get the wines from Beaujolais later Paris and get them into the restaurants, the finest restaurants in Paris, where they would then serve them in November as this new wine.

And so, Clement Freud, and Joseph Berkmann basically had a private challenge amongst themselves to get this wine back to England in the fastest possible time. And so, over the next couple of years, they would race, the two of them, just the two of them would race from Paris, they'd collect their Nouveau wine and they'd race back to London, and they'd see who could get back first.

So, on The Sunday Times, there's a writer called Alan Hall. So, he was a colleague of Joseph Berkmann. And then in 1973, Alan basically threw down the gauntlet to all of his readers to bring back the Beaujolais. And it was this challenge to get the Beaujolais from the Beaujolais vineyards, back to his desk at The Times in London, and the first person to get the new wine back to him would win a case of Champagne.

Janina Doyle 00:16:32 I have not heard of this at all. This is not the story I thought you were going to tell. This is impressive. Okay. I like it!

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:16:38 This is where the whole sort of excitement around Beaujolais Nouveau and the race, if you've heard of the Beaujolais run or the Beaujolais race, you know, people racing back in cars and trains and jet planes and everything else to get the Beaujolais. This is where it all came from, from this challenge set by Alan Hall in 1973.

Then over the 70s 80s 90s, it became more and more popular. And in 1985, the French government then actually created the law, which sets Beaujolais Nouveau Day as the third Thursday in November. So, now you're not allowed to buy Beaujolais Nouveau before one minute past midnight on the third Thursday in November. That's a French law.

When we collect our Beaujolais Nouveau wine, we have to sign a waiver to say we're not going to do that. We're not going to sell it before then. You can't see him as he's off camera at the moment but there is a member of the Gendarmerie just stood here in case I open a bottle early and he will then arrest me.

Janina Doyle 00:17:35 Oh, no, I thought that they cut your head off.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:17:38 Yeah, the guillotine. Yeah, absolutely, they'll cut your head off. In 1985, they made the rule. That was Beaujolais Nouveau day, it was set as the third Thursday in November, and that's where it still is now. And it reached its peak, it reached its zenith in 1992, at which point 50% of the production of Beaujolais of the whole region was actually given over to Beaujolais Nouveau.

Janina Doyle 00:18:06 No! Actually?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:18:07 Yeah. 50% of the entire region by 1992 was Beaujolais Nouveau.

Janina Doyle 00:18:12 Oh my gosh, what is it now?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:18:19 You're getting ahead of yourself!

Janina Doyle 00:18:19 Okay. Oh, sorry. Okay, I'll keep quiet. Carry on, Dan.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:18:25 The problem with 50% of your production created was quantity versus quality. Listeners of a certain age, you know, who have these memories of Beaujolais breakfasts in the 1980s of the race happening, of parties going on, may have somewhere in their mind the fact that you know, actually it was a bit naff, because sort of as the quantity increased and the quality decreased, it did become a bit naff, and it sort of fell out of favour a little bit.

And actually, it's quite it's quite sad because in the 2000s, there were a series of suicides in and around the region of Beaujolais because people had invested so much in Nouveau, because it was this trend that was growing and growing and growing. And then the bottom sort of fell out of it as the quality reduced and then people lost everything. Yeah, they lost everything, some of them.

Janina Doyle 00:19:11 This is so sad. God, you don't have to bring us all down, Dan. It's supposed to be a fun podcast. Right? Hopefully, you can bring it back up.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:19:25 You know, the bottle fell out. It was a bit naff. It was a bit rubbish. People stopped buying it. But what that did then was actually allow people to focus a little bit more on the other things that Beaujolais is known about, which we'll come on to later, which is the Crus, the serious wines.

But equally, probably in the last 10 years, there has been a real sort of focus back onto quality both, for the Crus but also for Nouveau. And what we've seen is the series of successively good vintages that have happened, sort of '18, '20, '22 have all been very good, very warm. very ripe years. And it produced this incredible quality.

And so, the quality of Nouveau since about 2010 has been increasing again. And also, I think people have started to rediscover it. Those people that drank it in the 80s and 90s, and then went off it a little bit coming back to it going, "Oh, this is better than I remembered." And then you've got a whole new generation coming through who never heard of it before, who are discovering it and going, "Oh, yeah, we'll have some of this."

And it's a great opportunity to celebrate the harvest. It's the first chance we get to taste this harvest, and it's our first chance to taste what 2023 will be like as a year. And so, it creates this real moment of what we can get right. Yeah, let's taste 2023. What's it like? Oh, yeah, this is gonna be a good year!

Janina Doyle 00:20:54 Yeah. I have got, as you have, I believe as well. So, this is Domaine Bel Avenir. So, this is the wine that's available on your site. Also the name of this wine is Cécile Dardenelli. Is that the name of the wine?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:21:10 Cécile Dardenelli. She is a fourth generation winemaker. So, she's based in the village of La Chapelle De Guinchay, which is, if I explained very quickly, the geography of Beaujolais.

So, the Crus, all tend to be in the north, the villages sort of tend to be in the middle. So, Beaujolais Villages. And then, the AOC usually tends to be in the south. So, it sort of goes from being quite hilly in the north to being quite flat river plains in the south. And Chapelle De Guinchay sits sort of just between where the Crus and the villages sort of cross over. So, she's very close to Juliéna, as the Cru, is the closest Cru.

Janina Doyle 00:21:45 Okay, and everyone, we will talk in far more detail about what Juliéna and the other Crus gives to the wines. So, wait for part two, but actually, that's quite nice because when you get Beaujolais Nouveau, it could just be from the typical south of Beaujolais, somewhere in Beaujolais.

This happens to be Beaujolais Villages so we are in better soil territory, slightly better terroir. So, you're gonna get a bit more concentration as well even though this is a really fun fruity style. You know, we're not after anything complex.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:22:15 And they can make Beaujolais Nouveau anywhere and within the appellation. Obviously, here, as you mentioned, it is labelled on the bottle, "Villages" because it is a AOC Beaujolais Villages, or albeit a new version.

So, yeah, when you're buying, if you go into a shop and you look you can see if it just says Beaujolais then that's just AOC Beaujolais which is a very broad area. If it says both Beaujolais Villages, then it's coming from this slightly better terroir, this is slightly better ground. So, it'll be, you know, potentially a little bit more expensive but, in my opinion, worth paying the extra price for.

Janina Doyle 00:22:49 How much is a bottle?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:22:50 So, it's 12 pounds 60 on a Mix six deal.

Janina Doyle 00:22:51 And everyone should be doing Mix six, let's be honest. Obviously, drink responsibly. But what's the point?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:23:00 And there's probably some benefits for the environment, aren't there in doing less shipping and stuff like that?

Janina Doyle 00:23:04 I love how you're saying that as a way to encourage people to buy six bottles, but actually, that is genuinely true. You are gonna drink six wines in your lifetime so just buy six at one point.

Let's get back to this wine. For me, it's like taking a whole load of strawberries that have just got, like a Punnett strawberries that have been squished up though, you know, when you've put way too much stuff in your picnic bag or whatever and it's all just gone everywhere.

It's got that real huge bouquet smell of that, but also some kind of cassis and blackcurrant, which I was quite surprised about. Yeah, tell me.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:23:39 I was gonna say I think there's a depth to it that you maybe don't expect. If you remember Beaujolais Nouveau from the old days and you haven't had it for a while. I think your memory of it is much lighter than it actually is now because you get this ripeness, you get this concentration.

So, yeah, you get those wild strawberries you know you get those really fun red fruits at the front. But then there is that concentration and depth which is blackcurrants, blackberries maybe somewhere in there.

Janina Doyle 00:24:05 Yeah, do you know what? It's bright, it's smooth. It's really lively. It's not complex, but what I really like as well, Beaujolais Nouveau tends to have no tannins, it's so smooth and chill it down. It's great. But even this wine has a tickle. It has a tickle. It has a tickler tannin. But you know, it's a suggestion.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:24:29 I'm going to the website later to update my tasting note. "This just has a little tickle of tannin."

Janina Doyle 00:24:35 It's a tickle of tannin. You know, it's like when you have apricot or peach and that's like furriness. That's just a bit. It's lovely and ripe. So, it's a tickle. It has a tickle of tannin. That's what you're left with, right? So, I like it. It isn't complicated, but this is an adult's Ribena with style and finesse. That is what this is.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:24:58 Yeah, I think with any of the Nouveau wines, they are about fun. We don't want to intellectualise it too much. We don't want to be too with our tasting notes. I mentioned earlier, Sharpham's new release, which is like the English Nouveau version.

And Duncan, who's the winemaker there, when I asked him, since 25 years they've been making new releases now. And I asked him about the whole process of how they find it? And he said, "Basically, it's after the harvest, we have all of the grapes in the vats fermenting," he said, "And then a couple of weeks before we need to bottle I go around, and I taste every tank. And when I find the tank, and I think I could drink a bucket of that, that's the one that I'm bottling as a new release."

Janina Doyle 00:25:43 I love it. It makes sense. Do you know what? It's like this wine and the good versions of Beaujolais Nouveau, it's just grape juice HD. That's what it is. Because when you're in a winery, and everything's fermenting and getting towards the end, that absolute intense smell of just primary fruits. This is what you have here. This is a young wine.

And we should talk about how it's made as well, because well, actually, before we talk about how it's made, which helps with the idea of no tannins or tickle of tannins, but actually, let's talk about the grape for a second because in terms of making read Beaujolais it's one grape variety, Gamay. So, what is Gamay? How would you describe it to people.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:26:25 To give it its full name, I mean, we're saying we're being fun, and we're being simple and we're not being...

Janina Doyle 00:26:29 Ugh!!!

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:26:29 Yeah, we're gonna be a bit pretentious. We're gonna be it's actually called Gamay Noir á Jus Blanc.

Janina Doyle 00:26:35 I thought you were gonna say Gamay Noir. I was very comfortable with the fact that officially it should be Gamay Noir. What the hell? Can you say this slowly?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:26:44 Yeah, so Gamay Noir á Jus Blanc is its full title.

Janina Doyle 00:26:49 I also knew the Blanc part. Oh, with white juice?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:26:50 Yes. And it is a grape variety. So, it's got Pinot Noir on one side, and Gouais Blanc on the other side. So, everyone will know Pinot Noir, a very, very well known grape. Gouais Blanc, incredibly promiscuous, doesn't really grow very much anymore, but has produced so many children. Do you know another famous grape whose parents are Pinot Noir and Gouais Blanc?

Janina Doyle 00:27:20 Isn't it Chardonnay?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:27:20 It is Chardonnay. Yes. So, the other grape that you're allowed to grow in Beaujolais, Chardonnay, is also made from the same two parents, which I think is pretty crazy, the fact that on one side, you've got a red grape, and on the other side, you've got a white grape, but yet, the parents are the same.

Janina Doyle 00:27:38 But then that just goes to show, isn't it, when you have these natural crossings that have happened over time, it's weird. I always say as well, you know, when you look at mutations of Pinot Noir, that's how we got Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, and all these other things and you're just like "How?"

But it's really, it's quite exciting actually to kind of go back in history just a little of it and see what's happened. See, everybody, I told you, he bloody well knows stuff. He's rather interesting, honestly. Right, so yes, Gamay. Oh, no, sorry. Gamay Noir ss, ss, ss Blanc.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:28:10 Yeah, that's it. Yeah, it's spot on. Yeah. So, it was discovered around about 1385, sometime around there and then was quite sure. It just popped up in some vineyards in Burgundy. And actually it was reckoned that it was found in the village of Saint-Aubin Sur Gamay, which is in Burgundy.

And at the time, Philip the Bold, the Duke of Burgundy, was putting a lot of effort into diplomacy using wine. He was sending his very good quality red Pinot Noir wines all around Europe to build his sort of diplomacy, his position in the continent. And he discovered his farmers were actually really struggling and his farms are struggling because Pinot Noir is an absolute rotter. Like, it is a really difficult grape to grow.

I think you've said it before. It's like the girl in the nursery rhyme. When she's good, she's very, very good. And when she's bad, she's rotten. She is a real pig to work with. And this new variety, this Gamay, popped up in these vineyards in Burgundy. It was a dream. You know, it was so easy to work with. It produced high yields, it wasn't fickle. It just got on with the job and did it.

And so, the winemakers of Burgundy all started to sneak gammy into their vineyards because it was a hell of a lot easier than making Pinot Noir but Philip the Bold, the Duke of Burgundy discovered this and got very very upset and laid down a decree in 1395 saying you must rip up all the disloyal Gamay. He said it must all go since everything got ripped up. He didn't care about what happened in Beaujolais because he was the Duke of Burgundy. He wasn't the Duke of Beaujolais. It was back water. They were only making table wines.

And so, Gamay found it sort of a natural home in Beaujolais. And one of the wonderful things about that was the fact that most of Beaujolais sits on granite and granite and Gamay are like perfect bedfellows. It just helps Gamay.

Firstly, it tames its its vigour, a little bit, you know, so it stops it being quite so vigorous and over producing, but it also, that when it takes up, you know, some sense of that place of the granite, it just gives it more it gives it more more depth, more body more structure.

And so, it found the perfect place in Beaujolais. And so, that's why, sort of throughout Beaujolais, you have pretty much all the vineyards planted with Gamay. There's two grapes. We mentioned Chardonnay earlier. So, Gamay for red. Chardonnay for white. But only about 2% of the overall vineyard area of Beaujolais is planted with Chardonnay. The rest of it is Gamay.

Janina Doyle 00:31:00 Which is really bloody good. I know this episode, we're going to focus on Gamay. But actually, Beaujolais Blanc is a best kept secret of the wine industry.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:31:08 Yeah, right. Oh, yeah, definitely.

Janina Doyle 00:31:05 Such good value.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:31:05 Amazing, amazing value. If you think about, again, about the geography. I talked a little bit earlier about the geography of Beaujolais. Beaujolais is just very slightly south of Burgundy.

You know, actually, in the northern parts of Beaujolais, you can grow grapes in the Burgundy classifications, because there is this sort of crossover. So if you think about that, if you buy wine, this labelled Beaujolais Blanc, which is 100% Chardonnay, you could buy Macon Chardonnay from only a few miles away, possibly even the same villages in some instances, but you'll pay a lot more because it says Burgundy on the label.

Janina Doyle 00:31:43 Yeah, I mean, obviously Burgundy is north of Beaujolais, just in case anyone hasn't realised. Macon on is the last part of Burgundy. And actually, when you look at Mecon, it's not just north of Beaujolais. It even wraps around. That first section goes even to the east.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:32:02 It's like intertwined, isn't it?

Janina Doyle 00:32:02 Absolutely.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:32:04 And so, you can find some amazing value. If you're happy to have Beaujolais on the label, which I always am. And everyone should be.

Janina Doyle 00:32:12 They should. But anyway, Chardonnay, you can have another episode another day. Back to Gamay. I love it. So, yes, actually, you've mentioned the granite soils. We've mentioned Gamay. When I was learning about this region, I remembered the three G's. So when I was learning my WSETs, you had Gamay, you had granite and you had a goblet. And goblet being one of the other words for bush vines. And so, that always really helped me, the three G's and that's something as well that this region is famous for. Things change as well now.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:32:482 I don't know in terms of the listenership, sort of how familiar people are with vineyards. But when people think of a vineyard, a lot of people that I speak to, think of a field in

England basically bounded by a fence or hedge with vines growing in it on trellises, where you've probably got two rows growing on wires, slightly up a hill.

And everything in that field will be owned by the farmer, the winemaker, whoever. And that is what a lot of people that I speak to have in their head as being a vineyard. We're not talking that here. In Beaujolais, it doesn't look like that at all. A bit like Burgundy, what you have are these sort of just swathes of vines. They're goblet trained, so they're low. They have no leaves on them. They'd look a little bit like a goblet in shape.

There's no fences. There's no hedgerows. And what you have is a very small plot that belongs to one winemaker, and then a little sort of dirt path, and then another plot the same size. And we're talking about, maybe 100 metres by 100 metres as each plot. And that belongs to another winemaker. And then another plot next...

And you'll have, you know, maybe 100 plots in one area, and each one of those 100 plots, three of those might be owned by one winemaker. They might be next to each other. There'll be one in one corner, one in the corner, one somewhere else. There's no signs to tell you who owns any of these. They just know from hundreds of years of owning them, of knowledge.

When you go and you see it, first of all, you see them like, "How much people know which is there. How do they know which of their vines," but they do and then you look at these goblets and go, "How on earth do they pick the vines? I mean, they must be midgets otherwise they'll all have bad backs," because they are so low to the ground.

And then, you go to, if we will talk a bit more about this later on, but you go to some of the Crus Vineyard and they run these incredibly steep slopes. It's 30 degree inclines or 30% inclines, which my God, this is hard back breaking work but that's how they grow the Gamays in these sort of low goblets.

Janina Doyle 00:35:03 But if I'm correct in some of the other parts of Beaujolais, like in the further south where they're not in the villages, actually, now they are turning to doing trellising and being a little bit more, modern aren't they?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:35:03 Of course, if you go to AOC Beaujolais, which is the lowest classification in the system, then yes, there will be mechanization and there will be much more efficient vineyard systems.

Janina Doyle 00:35:28 But then, equally, that's when you get much more of the kind of the claim all soils. You don't get that wonderful granite and even the schist. So, the three G's, the best wines, Gamay, Granite, Goblet. Yeah, anyway, it worked for me.

Okay. So, Gamay, it's a lovely red fruit. It is a light wine. It doesn't have so many tannins in general, but specifically going back to Beaujolais Nouveau, they have a winemaking technique called Carbonic Maceration, don't they? And that is what really helps the wine become super smooth, super fruity. So, I feel like you're gonna be the man that's gonna explain this to us.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:36:07 Yeah. So, if you go into a winery in Beaujolais, the first thing you notice is concrete tanks. So, concrete tanks are the typical way of making wine in Beaujolais. So, they're big...

Janina Doyle 00:36:17 I'd say not really? Not stainless steel?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:36:18 Not. Really no. So, what you see traditionally, are concrete tanks. Big square concrete tanks. And in harvest, they'll come and everything will go into the concrete tank, whole bunches, including stems, everything will go in.

And what happens is the first lot sort of falls into the bottom. And as more of the grapes fall on top of those, the weight of that starts to crush the grapes at the bottom. So, that is a traditional yeast based fermentation that starts to happen just naturally, just from the whole weight of everything pressing down on those grapes that first went in.

As they start to ferment, they release co2. And the co2 rises up the tank and fills the tank. And as it fills the tank and basically removes all the oxygen, you then end up with an anaerobic process happening in the bunches at the top.

So, you increase the amount of lactic acid that goes into the top of the grapes. And what they then start to do is they actually start to ferment from the inside of the grape out. So, they then start to burst and release their juice in that way.

This is the semi-carbonic maceration. In doing that, what you end up with is much brighter fruit flavours and much lower tannins. So, you still get the colour from the skins. You still get the flavours, but you don't get the tannins. So, it makes for this much lighter, much more approachable style of wine.

And it can in some instances, and it partly depends on how you're doing, this is where also things like the sort of bubblegum notes that you get can come from if you're familiar with that from Beaujolais, or sometimes you pick up bananas, which some people think is a negative thing if you get the banana flavour, but again, that's because of the carbonic maceration that you're getting those.

Janina Doyle 00:38:17 But it's a really cool fermentation process. It's not just, it's famous in this region, even more famous for the Nouveau. But it is used around the world. I mean, even young Rioja use this technique. It's a really cool type of fermentation process, carbonic maceration. It's quite cool to understand it.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:38:37 We've actually got a Pinotage from South Africa that's made with carbonic maceration. So, you can use it. And again, because Pinotage can be incredibly tannic as a wine and actually, what has been produced in that instance is a wine that's really nice, chilled, a red Pinotage that's really nice.

And you mentioned Joven Rioja. Again, if you're using carbonate maturation there, these are wines that actually then work quite nicely chilled because you don't have the tannin in them. And so, if you have them, not very, very chilled, but if you were to have them at say 10-11 degrees, something like that, then you end up with a really nice wine to drink on a slightly warmer day, a little bit cooler. Delicious.

Janina Doyle 00:39:20 So, would you say that this Beaujolais Nouveau is pretty good around the 10-11 degrees if somebody wants to have a really fresh fruity style?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:39:27 Yeah, I would normally chill Beaujolais Nouveau very, very slightly. Maybe pop it in the fridge for 30 minutes before you open it just to give it a little bit of a chill and I think it's better, very refreshing then.

Janina Doyle 00:39:41 Would you ever age Beaujolais Nouveau? Because, I mean, it doesn't have tannins. Tannins are one of the natural preservatives in wine. That is what helps a wine age as well. So, my answer would always be buy it, drink it, done. But, I mean, you are a merchant. You will have got

other bottles lying around probably from previous years that you may have been able to try. Is it positive holding back?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:40:10 Well, a couple of weeks ago, I was doing an event, a consumer event. I was presenting wines to the general public pre-Beaujolais Nouveau Day. And so, I wanted to make a pitch for people to buy Beaujolais Nouveau.

So, I took a few bottles of last year's Beaujolais Nouveau with me just to use as a prop, basically. Isn't this nice? Would you like this year's? It's very exciting. And I sold a dozen bottles because people actually enjoyed it because it's still drinking perfectly well.

I wouldn't want to keep it for a long time. But certainly, 12 to 18 months, it's gonna be drinkable. I think in the 90s when the quality was low, you wouldn't have wanted to keep it past January. It wasn't improving. Whereas now because there is more of a focus on quality actually, and there is a tickle of tannin, then you can keep it. And I always find it quite an interesting thing to compare.

So, we're doing a tasting with our customers for Beaujolais Nouveau Day in which we've actually sent them a bottle of last year's Nouveau to taste alongside this year's Nouveau, so they can see how it develops. And it will of course, it will depend on the year. It will depend on what the resulting wine is as to how long it will keep as it always does.

Janina Doyle 00:41:35 And what would you pair this wine with? For me, again, I love a bit of piggies in a blanket with Beaujolais Nouveau. Why's that funny!

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:41:45 Piggies!

Janina Doyle 00:41:45 Piggies in the blanket!

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:41:50 I suppose it's almost Christmas, isn't it? You know, I haven't even thought about pigs in a blanket. It's much too early to consider what I'm going to be eating for Christmas.

Janina Doyle 00:41:58 No, it's not.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:41:58 So, Katie, my wife, loves cheese wrapped in bacon on Christmas Day.

Janina Doyle 00:42:03 Yep, that could work. This is a wine I think that goes really well with Gammon, it goes well with ham and it goes well with pork. I don't know. And again...

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:42:15 The classic is always Coq au vin. Coq au vin is the classic combination to have with Beaujolais Nouveau. And then, pears poached in Beaujolais Nouveau is the desert to have. So, if you were in the region for Beaujolais Nouveau or around Beaujolais Nouveau, you're going to be served pears poached in Beaujolais Nouveau at some point.

Janina Doyle 00:42:33 Love that.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:42:34 So, that is what they always do. Cold cuts on Boxing Day is another really good pairing with it.

Janina Doyle 00:42:40 Yes, well, I was just gonna say Thanksgiving in America. We don't do Thanksgiving. But for those people who do Thanksgiving or again with all the meats and all the

trimmings, and all that kind of stuff and just the same way what we might do as well with Boxing Day, all those kinds of those meats and stuff I think work very nicely.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:43:00 Yeah. So yeah, if you've just got lots of leftovers on Boxing Day and you're having a bit of a cold turkey, a bit of cold ham, a few bits of leftovers...

Janina Doyle 00:43:05 Piggies in the blanket!

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:43:06 Piggies in the blanket! But yeah, that would be a good time to crack open a Beaujolais Nouveau.

Janina Doyle 00:43:16 I love it.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:43:17 Equally, I think, because it's a fun wine, you don't have to be too serious with it. You don't have to think too hard about it. You just crack open a bottle, have it on the sofa whilst listening to this podcast.

Janina Doyle 00:43:30 I think that's a fabulous idea. Now, I think that you have definitely inspired a few people to probably be interested in this region as a whole. You have been to Beaujolais, how many times? A few?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:43:44 Yeah, a few times.

Janina Doyle 00:43:47 Regularly. So, if somebody wanted to go and visit because we talked about it, Burgundy is in the north. But Lyon is just to the south. Isn't Lyon, and again, I've never been there, this is a place amazing for food, right?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:44:02 Yes. Yeah, it's so well-known for the food that you get, the Bistros of Lyon. As I said early, like in 1956, this is where Georges Duboeuf started with the Beaujolais Nouveau, to the Bistros of Lyon.

And so, you can go there, you would have your Beaujolais Nouveau with the food of the region. And the whole of France, I mean, the food wherever you go in France, I think is wonderful. And it's always an event, isn't it?

I know, I just said you could just sit on the sofa and open up a bottle. In France, no one would ever do that. Like, no one ever just opens a bottle of wine on the sofa but there's always food to go with it, even if that's just a little bit of Saucisson and some cheese.

Janina Doyle 00:44:38 Yum. Yeah.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:44:40 There's always food. There's always nibbles to go with the wine. But yes, flying into Lyon is the way to go.

Janina Doyle 00:44:46 That's the way to go.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:44:48 Yeah, so you could fly into Lyon and then easily explore the region. Now, you are in the south of the region in Lyon and you really want to get up to the north because the Crus is the place that you really want to say, that said, the Pierres Dorees, which is translated with the golden stones, which is further south. And that's part of the Beaujolais Villages region. Beautiful. If you like Tuscany, it's like being in Tuscany.

Janina Doyle 00:45:16 Really?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:45:16 Yeah. All these wonderful golden stone buildings are all made out of, I guess some kind of sandstone, I should know. All the buildings are so pretty, you know in the little sort of windy roads going through villages with old churches and town halls and it's really very, very pretty. If you want to learn more about it, there's a book called ClocheMerle, which is set in this region and was made into a BBC drama in the 70s and 80s. It's good. That's all set in that area.

Janina Doyle 00:45:44 Interesting. So, if you could ever find the BBC drama, I don't know whether it's on the internet.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:45:49 Probably on YouTube.

Janina Doyle 00:45:50 Have you seen it? By the way, have you seen the drama?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:45:53 No. I've seen clips of the drama. It is older than me.

Janina Doyle 00:45:58 Did they record it in Beaujolais?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:45:59 They did. Yes. Yeah. In the village of Clochemerle. Yeah. So, you can get a sense of it. But you can buy the book. You can buy an English translation of it. It's quite an interesting book. Basically, it's the story of a urinal being built in a village, which the village don't want.

Janina Doyle 00:46:17 Okay.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:46:18 I mean, it's sort of a satire on French bureaucracy, which we all love. We always love to look at the French bureaucracy and laugh at it.

Janina Doyle 00:46:28 Okay. All right. Well, there you go, everybody, a suggestion for whilst you're drinking your bottle of Beaujolais Nouveau, you can open up this book and just snuggle up on the couch and get really into things.

So, if you flew into Lyon, and yeah, like you said, and people do want to go up to the Crus, how long, because to be honest, this is not a very big area, isn't it like 34 Miles, like, the whole of Beaujolais?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:46:51 Yeah, 55 kilometres from top to bottom. And about 15 kilometres from east to west. So, north to south 55 kilometres. 15 kilometres east to west. So, not a very big area. So, you're talking about maybe an hour, an hour and a half to get from one end to the other.

Janina Doyle 00:47:06 Perfect. And then, you said about winding roads though, but is it quite easy to drive around this area?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:47:15 Yeah, it's easy to drive around, but it is small villages, slightly hilly, sort of hills tucked into valleys and on hills. So, it is windy roads. And like I say it reminds me a lot of say Tuscany or even Piemonte. They're very similar sorts of areas, I find both, in the style of the wines that they make, actually in a lot of ways, but also in the geography and the layout. But then they're also very close, actually, if you look at where they are, so it's not surprising.

Janina Doyle 00:47:44 How many days would you recommend is a good amount of time to kind of just get yourself around this area and enjoy it? Just a long weekend is good enough?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:47:51 A long weekend would be okay. But then if you want to spend time in Lyon, you probably want a bit longer because you probably want a couple of days in Lyon just to explore the city and then a few days to actually go and have a drive around and visit a few vineyards.

One of the great things you have actually in a lot of the villages is you have Caveau. So, for example where the Crus are, so Caveau Morgon. And so, in the centre of Villie-Morgon, you have this building, and then downstairs you have Caveau Morgan. And in there, they have basically all of the wines that are made in Morgon.

So, you can go into there and you can buy a glass of any of the wines that are made in the area and you can taste them. So, you can buy like a flight of say, six wines and say, right, I want to try these six producers from Morgon, but only have Morgon in Caveau Morgon. They only have say Fleurie in Caveau Fleurie. But you can go in and try them all. So, it's a really great way of sort of getting familiar with that Cru village.

Janina Doyle 00:48:47 Fantastic. Without having to dedicate several hours to do one tour, or one visit to a winery.

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:48:52 Yes. And then, you might go there, you might say, well, actually, I really loved this one. I will now go and visit the winery. I want to go and see the vineyard. But it gives you that opportunity to sort of get a real sense of understanding of the Cru and the style and the way that the wines are made.

Janina Doyle 00:49:-9 Now, is Beaujolais a bit of a still kind of just, you said villages, we know there's vines. Are there any other activities going on? Or is it really sleepy, chilled, go for nice walks, drink nice wine and eat good food, is that the vibe of Beaujolais?

Dan Farrell-Wright 00:49:26 That is the vibe to me. I mean, for other people listening, may have been and done something really crazy. I've never seen anything like that. So, normally it is you go, you taste wine, you eat amazing food, you chat to wonderful people, go for long walks on the hills. Beautiful.

Janina Doyle 00:49:47 So, we'll be back next week continuing with Beaujolais but focusing on the 10 Crus. So, the top 10 villages, the villages that produce the best quality. And don't forget you're in safe hands with Wickhams Wines, especially when in Beaujolais as they won the Best Specialist Retailer, South and Regional France with the Decanter Retail Awards this year. So, don't forget to use my code, EatSleep10 to get yourself 10% off your next order.

And as Beaujolais Nouveau is quite an easy wine to drink, here is a quote for you. And it is, "I'm not having a glass of wine. I'm having six. It's called a tasting. And it's classy." So keep that in mind when you open up your next bottle of Beaujolais. So, that's it for today. Share the podcast, rate the podcast, leave a review, and until next week, wine friends, cheers to you!