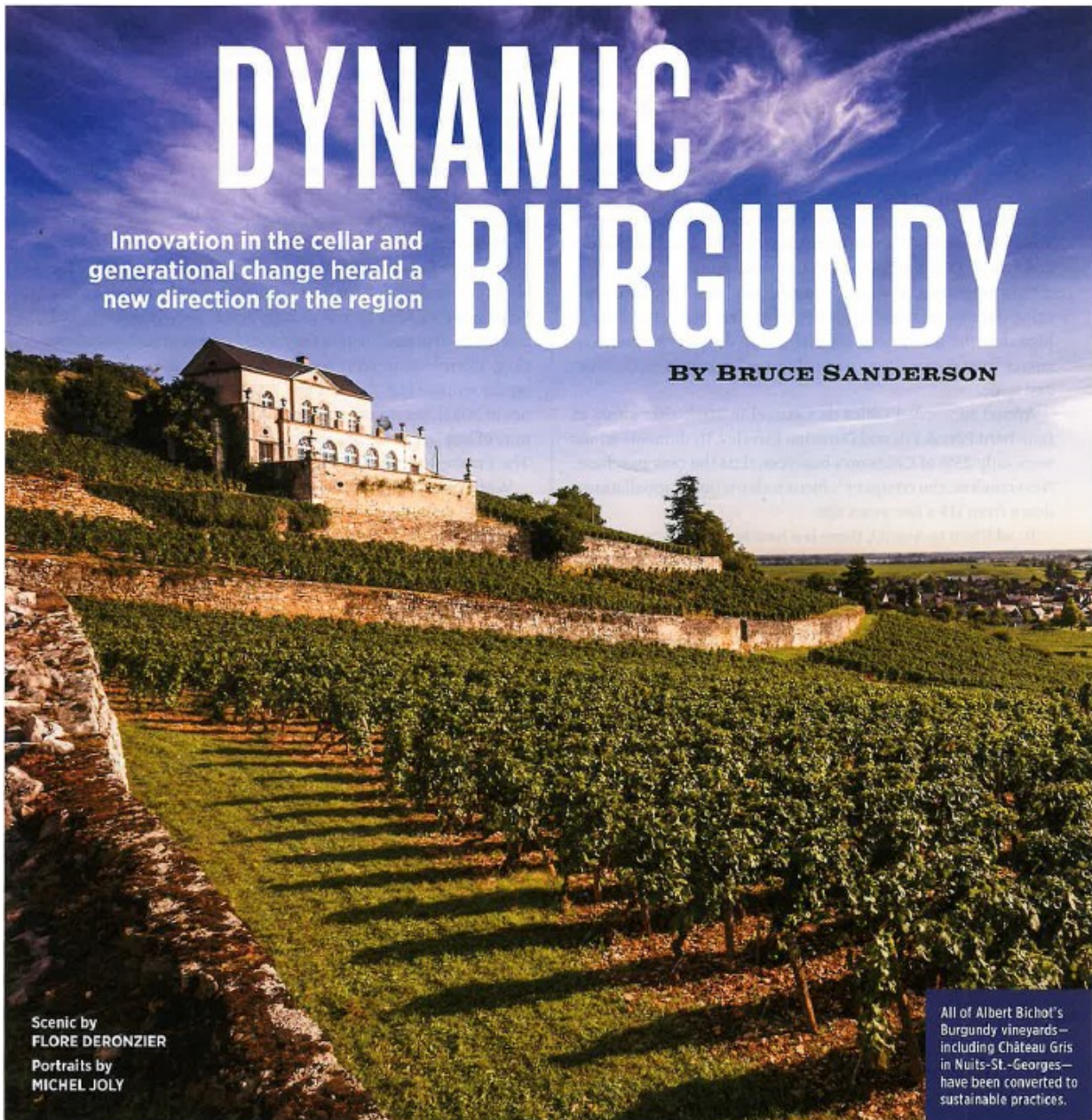


April 30, 2025



# DYNAMIC BURGUNDY

Innovation in the cellar and generational change herald a new direction for the region

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All of Albert Bichot's Burgundy vineyards—including Château Gris in Nuits-St.-Georges—have been converted to sustainable practices.

**A**s you drive through Burgundy some days, passing by villages and vineyards, the famed wine region can appear more like a sleepy agricultural area. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Burgundy is dynamic and evolving, with new growers and producers appearing on the scene, while historic estates make changes in leadership and refresh their wine-making practices.

Some of the most intensive developments have occurred in the vineyards. In addition to converting to organic and biodynamic farming, producers are adapting to warmer growing

seasons using new strategies to protect their vines and grapes from sun, heat and drought, not to mention the advent of spring frosts.

On the commercial side, there's been a reversal of a trend that began in the 1990s: purchasing grapes and wine to augment production. Instead, some of Burgundy's historic houses are discontinuing these *négociant* activities to focus solely on making wine from domaine vineyards.

Here are profiles of four Burgundy producers who embody these changes. These domaines are making innovations that will lay the foundation for future generations.

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Albéric Bichot

## Albert Bichot

### SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES ELEVATE QUALITY

Although it's not the oldest house in Burgundy, Albert Bichot is one of the region's historic wine merchants, dating to 1831. The business was first established in Monthélie, then moved to Beaune in 1912 under the third generation and the first Albert, who gave his name to the company.

Albéric Bichot, representing the sixth generation of the business, became the company's director in 1996. He is adamant that Bichot's success is a team effort: A tasting of the 2022 vintage at Domaine Clos Frantin during my annual visit to Burgundy last year included enologist and deputy technical director Cyrille Jacquelin and Domaine Clos Frantin vineyard manager Martial Beauvais.

Albert Bichot continues its négociant business, yet like many of Burgundy's successful houses, it owns vineyards as well—in Bichot's case, 256 acres spread across six domaines. These include Long-Depaquit in Chablis, Clos Frantin in Nuits-St.-Georges, Château Gris in Nuits-St.-Georges, Domaine du Pavillon in Pommard, Domaine Adélie in Mercurey and Domaine de Rochegrès in Moulin-à-Vent in Beaujolais.

"Overall, our global quest is the best respect of each *terroir* or *climat* in order to produce wines with personality, living wines, like the soil where the vines are growing," Bichot states.

Under his direction, the team began exploring and converting to organic viticulture in the early 2000s. With the exception

of Long-Depaquit, all the Bichot estates have been farming organically for 10 years. Being the largest, Long-Depaquit required more time for the conversion process, which began eight years ago; the property will be certified organic with the 2025 vintage. Most recently, a flock of 20 sheep have taken up residence at Domaine Pavillon's Clos des Ursulines in Pommard, embodying another step toward biodiversity.

Working sustainably and without fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides in the vineyards has been an important step toward improving the quality of the wines. Root depth has improved, there is more organic matter in the soils, and the wines now show greater precision and finesse. To ensure full phenolic ripeness while retaining acidity, parcels are sometimes harvested in multiple passes, particularly in Bichot's 64 acres of vines in Chablis.

Selection during harvest is made first in the vineyards and then on the sorting table. The improved grape quality allows the winemaking team to experi-

ment more with whole-cluster fermentations, gaining "year after year, a better energy in our red wines," according to Bichot.

In the cellar, vinifications are done separately in the case of larger volumes of wine. Attention to temperature control has improved freshness and fruitiness in the wines, particularly in the earlier, warmer harvests. Investment in a new vertical press has paid off with better quality and softer tannins.

The finished wines are moved by gravity into barrels for aging over a 12- to 18-month period. Bichot has done a lot of research into finding the right oak, cooper and toast for both its red and white wines in the different appellation levels. Fining and filtration is no longer systematic, but done gently depending on the needs of each bottling.

The facility in the center of Beaune was fully renovated in 2008, a new winery was built at Long-Depaquit in 2014 and Domaine du Pavillon was modernized in 2016.

As for most producers in Burgundy, climate change has been a significant issue. Bichot's response has been experimentation with new types of pruning, as well as pruning later during the season to prevent damage from spring frost. To combat heat, decreased leaf-stripping provides better coverage of the grapes against sunburn, in addition to raising the trellis height by 4 to 8 inches to achieve more efficient sun protection.

Bichot has invested heavily in the United States, creating its own import and distribution, Albert Bichot USA. As a result, the wines are widely distributed and can be found in most states around the country. These are excellent examples of red and white Burgundy from all of the region's main areas and at all levels, from regional appellations to *grands crus*.