



Domaine Samuel Billaud

As reviewed by Neal Martin

The Wine Advocate #226 – August, 2016

There's a new guy in town. That guy is Samuel Billaud and more accurately, he is returning to the town of Chablis after being embroiled in a family dispute with his uncle Bernard Billaud, when he sold the domaine to Faiveley (still under the Domaine Billaud-Simon name, incidentally). As a consequence, there was an interregnum whereby Samuel occupied a temporary facility outside Chablis in the village of La Chapelle-Vaupelteigne. Since I have been visiting Samuel, it was clear that he was itching to lay foundations more permanently and as luck would have it, he was able to move into the building previously occupied by Domaine Moreau-Naudet--located in the heart of the village, just down from Domaine Droin.

Before tasting his recent releases, Samuel gave me a quick tour of the winery that was bustling with handymen drilling together what looked to be the bar in a tasting room. Stepping over electrical wire, he showed me a dilapidated but grand old maison that once belonged to one of his ancestors. The plan is to do it up, but that is clearly a long-term project and the priority is naturally focused upon the winemaking. Fortunately, the vat-room is fully functional with its fleet of spanking new stainless steel vats and there is room to store barrels underground, although he plans to expand this by knocking down a wall in the near future. Of course, with all of this investment, a difficult vintage like 2016 is not what you need and let's not even discuss the impact that Brexit might have on UK sales. Still, at least he has 2014 and 2015 as his first alumni at his winery.

“The 2014 was a dream-like vintage,” he told me. “There was beautiful weather and sanitary conditions were great, there was no rot. There was very good concentration in the berries and this was a vintage where we had the time to pick. We started on September 17 or 18. In 2015, we picked from September 2 just after the hail, and rested for three days before completing the rest of the harvest. In 2015, it was not easy to find the minerality.” Like other growers such as Benoît Droin, Samuel Billaud is coming around to the use of DIAM closures and currently it is used for Petit Chablis, Chablis, Les Vaillons and Fourneaux, though at the moment he has no plans to expand its use to his Grand Crus. I tasted through all of his bottled 2014s and most of the 2015s, since one or two or the other were still going through their malolactic fermentation. These are well-crafted wines from a talented winemaker with a great deal of experience. As I expected, the 2014s are clearly more tensile, steely and mineral-driven, the nascent 2015s richer and more flamboyant, perhaps earlier drinking than the 2014s. Now that Samuel finally has a sense of permanence upon which he can build upon, literally, I think he can finally see the end of the tunnel after all the tumult in recent years. Look out for this domaine to become even more well known in the future.

2014 Domaine Samuel Billaud Grand Cru “Les Clos”

The 2014 Chablis Grand Cru les Clos comes, from vines located on the higher sector of the vineyard, fermented in barrel and was then raised in stainless steel vat. It was actually difficult for this Les Clos to follow the Vaudésir and Les Preuses, since both are much more open and display more mineralité. There is a touch of reduction here, as one often finds with Les Clos. The palate is very well balanced with crisp acidity, tightly wound and saline in the mouth, quite strict for a Les Clos, but with fine tension and a hint of ginger right on the finish. It will need 4-5 years in bottle to really find its groove, but it will be worth the weight. (94 points)

2014 Domaine Samuel Billaud Grand Cru “Les Preuses”

The 2014 Chablis Grand Cru les Preuses is matured in three-year-old, 450-liter wooden barrels until racking, and then undergoes another six months in stainless

steel vats on the fine lees. It has a very refined and precise bouquet, the fruit succinctly assimilated with the oak and allowing the mineralité to shine through. The palate is crisp and harmonious, subtle hints of white peach and nectarine complementing the chalky texture; the acidity is beautifully judged and exudes harmony and precision on the persistent finish. I would have liked a little more spiciness to come through, but give this 3-4 years in bottle and I am certain it will develop even more terroir expression.

(94 points)

2014 Domaine Samuel Billaud Chablis 1er Cru "Montée de Tonnerre"

The 2014 Chablis 1er Cru Montée de Tonnerre saw 5% maturation in barrel, like the Mont de Milieu. This has a subtle and precise bouquet of fresh pear, Granny Smith apples and sea spray--more mineralité coming through with each swirl of the glass. The palate is very well balanced with a fine bead of acidity, harmonious with a hint of lemongrass that lends spiciness to the finish. This is one of the picks from Samuel Billaud this year, thanks to the tension on the finish. **(93 points)**

2015 Domaine Samuel Billaud Chablis 1er Cru "Montée de Tonnerre"

The 2015 Chablis 1er Cru Montee de Tonnerre comes from two parcels in the lieux-dits of Haut Chapelot and Montée de Tonnerre itself (in a part known as the "triangle" due to its shape). It has a very refined bouquet with scents of white peach and a hint of nectarine developing alongside chalky aromas. The palate is very crisp on the entry with notes of Granny Smith apple, that white peach again and a touch of spice that lends tension and energy towards the finish; there is a dab of lemongrass that seems to fizz on the tip of the tongue after the wine has departed. This is a one of Samuel Ballad's most impressive releases in 2015. **(91-93 points)**

2014 Domaine Samuel Billaud Chablis 1er Cru "Séchet"

The 2014 Chablis 1er Cru Sechet has a very pure bouquet, one of the best from the domaine this year, with gorgeous white peach, fresh pear and gooseberry combined with subtle white flower scents that emerge with time in the glass. The palate is very well balanced with a crisp line of acidity. Tensile and saline, it closes in towards the finish, offloads some of the weight you might have expected to

obtain more nervosité and mineralité. This discrete Chablis will blossom as its matures. **(92 points)**

2014 Domaine Samuel Billaud Chablis 1er Cru “Mont de Milieu”

The 2014 Chablis 1er Cru Mont de Milieu, of which 5% is matured in barrel and the remainder in stainless steel vat, has a crisp orange blossom scented bouquet with hints of granite underneath. But this is a pretty and feminine bouquet. The palate is crisp and pure with just a faint touch of lychee complemented by white peach and Conference pear, tapering in a little towards a strict and slightly resinous, but compelling finish. This appears to have built on its promise from last year and deserves a higher score. **(91 points)**

2015 Domaine Samuel Billaud Chablis 1er Cru “Mont de Milieu”

The 2015 Chablis 1er Cru Mont de Milieu comes from three different ages of vine that are blended together just after the harvest, the oldest vines up to 60 years old. It has a seductive bouquet with touches of apple blossom, wet limestone (again) and a hint of shaved almond that lends it a little more sweetness than the Vaillons at the moment. The palate is well balanced with a crisp line of acidity. I appreciate the briskness and vigor here, quite intense, but it manages to retain admirable finesse on the finish. It has the substance to repay cellaring if so inclined, although it will be difficult to resist in its youth. **(90-92 points)**

2015 Domaine Samuel Billaud Chablis 1er Cru “Vaillons” Vieilles Vignes

The 2015 Chablis 1er Cru Les Vaillons Vieilles Vignes comes from a parcel of 70-year-old vines adjacent to Sécher. Samuel Billaud commented he has found that this particular cuvée has become more saline and minerally in barrel. It has a very complex bouquet with scents of wet limestone, yellow plum and a touch of white peach. The palate is fresh on the entry with a touch of orange rind, steely and linear; it is strict for a Vaillons, with a precise and stony finish that lingers nicely in the mouth. This should represent an enticing Chablis once in bottle. **(90-92 points)**

2015 Domaine Samuel Billaud Chablis 1er Cru “Fourneaux”

The 2014 Chablis 1er Cru Fourneaux comes from a single parcel of 40-year-old vines that are cultivated organically. It has a clean and precise bouquet with chalk dust and a subtle white mushroom-like aroma. The palate is fresh on the entry with crisp acidity, a dash of spice on the entry with a fine saline component that is expressed towards the slightly truncated finish. This wine has good potential and I would give it 12-18 months in bottle. **(90+ points)**

2015 Domaine Samuel Billaud Chablis “Les Grandes Terroirs”

The 2015 Chablis Les Grandes Terroirs is a blend of vines from lieux-dits Les Parges, Chapelot and Les Cartes (which I also tasted separately). It has a clean and mineral-driven bouquet, perhaps more akin to a 2014 than a 2015. The palate is clean and fresh with a hint of lychee (coming from Les Cartes), counterbalanced by crisp acidity from Chapelot and a fine, mineral finish that already displays fine tension and salinity. Worth looking out for this once released next year. **(89-91 points)**

2015 Domaine Samuel Billaud Chablis “Les Grandes Terroirs”

The 2015 Petit Chablis Sur les Clos, from vines located on the plateau just above Les Clos, sees no wood contact and my sample was taken from the wine on the lees. It has a very pretty bouquet with lemon zest and a hint of fresh pineapple. The palate is quite taut for a 2015, a subtle oyster shell influence here with fine precision on the finish. This bodes well. **(87-89 points)**



Langdon
Shiverick
Imports