

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

by John Gilman

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Maison Ilan (Nuits St. Georges) Ray Walker is a young, transplanted American who has set up a small négociant business in Nuits St. Georges. Ray had been following a career in finance when he was bitten by the wine bug, and followed his heart from the bank offices to a stage or two in California wine country and eventually on to Nuits St. Georges to make his own wines here in the heart of the Côte d'Or. Ray is no fan of new wood and intends to use little or no new wood down the line, but as he is just starting out, a few barrels have had to be new wood in 2009.

The goal is produce very elegant wines that allow their terroirs to shine front and center, and so the cellar regimen is very gentle, only indigenous yeasts are used and the wines are fermented in open top wood fermenters. The quantities here are very small (only eleven and a half barrels total in 2009), but the wines are very, very good and given that this is still early days in his winemaking career, one can easily appreciate that there are even better things to come as Ray settles into the Burgundian landscape and adds a few more vineyards to his lineup.

But he has certainly started things out on the right foot in his inaugural vintage of 2009, with a parcel of the fine Morey St. Denis premier cru of Les Chaffots (fans of Hubert Lignier's wines will no doubt be familiar with this lovely vineyard), Charmes-Chambertin and a small slice of Chambertin itself. Pretty good dirt to work with right out of the blocks, and Ray has produced excellent wines from this lovely vineyard sources. His 2010 lineup of vineyards will expand a bit as well, as he has added a pair of additional premier crus to the portfolio- Morey St. Denis "Monts Luisants" and Gevrey-Chambertin "Corbeaux". Maison Ilan is a fine new addition to the Burgundian constellation and his 2009s will be worth a special search to find.

2009 Maison Ilan Le Chambertin Grand Cru (93+)

The 2009 Maison Ilan Chambertin is also excellent. The bouquet is deep, fresh and complex, as it offers up a mix of red and black cherries, a touch of plum, woodsmoke,, cocoa, lovely soil tones, spices and a bit of venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and long, with a slightly more open personality than the Charmes-Chambertin, but also plenty of underlying structure. The wine exudes a sappy core of fruit, and offers up fine length and grip on the complex and ripely tannic finish. This too is a very fine example of the vintage, and may well drink just a tad sooner than the lovely Charmes.

**2009 Maison Ilan Charmes-Chambertin Grand Cru “Aux Charmes”
(93)**

The Charmes-Chambertin is made from fifty year-old vines and was raised in one-third new oak in 2009, as Ray needed a third barrel in this vintage and his only option was a new one at the time he decided his production was going to be sufficient to support another full barrel. The wine is really a fine example of the vintage, as it jumps from the glass in blend of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, a touch of background meatiness, fresh herb tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and youthful, with fine-grained tannins, sound acids and really lovely length and grip on the focused and still fairly primary finish. Fine juice.

**2009 Maison Ilan Morey Saint Denis 1er Cru “Les Chaffots”
(90+)**

The 2009 Les Chaffots from Ray Walker is really a lovely bottle in the making. The nose offers up a complex and classy mélange of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil, coffee and just a hint of wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with lovely nascent complexity, suave tannins and fine length and grip. Really a lovely example.