



Stephen Tanzer's
International Wine Cellar

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Winemaker Denis de la Bourdonnaye told me that he warned a number of his fellow growers in 2006 that the yeasts were working extremely efficiently, and that grapes picked with potential alcohol of 12.5% could easily end up over 13% without chaptalization. (In contrast, he said, the sugar fermentations were much more difficult in 2005.)

He insisted that most Chablis estates brought in their fruit with grape sugars between 11.5% and 12%, with the exceptions a bit higher, and that the overwhelming majority of '06s that finished over 13% were due to chaptalization.

In my travels, most of the domains I visited took issue with this assertion, telling me that grape sugars were often very high in '06, and that wines that finished at 13% were rarely chaptalized. Wherever the truth lies, the Laroche '06s are wines with compelling freshness and plenty of Chablis character.

They have largely avoided the exotic, superripe side of the vintage. As acid levels in the grapes were low, Bourdonnaye generally blocked about 40% of the malolactic fermentations to preserve freshness (he began taking this approach in 2000, and only the 2004 since then went through full malo). "Two thousand six is a tender vintage, perhaps less complex than 2005 but with more typical Chablis character," Bourdonnaye summarizes. "I compare it to the 2002, with maybe less aging potential." (Remy Amérique, New York, NY)

Previously recommended: 2005 Chablis (86), 2005 Chablis Saint-Martin (86+?), 2005 Chablis Les Vaudevey (88+?), 2005 Chablis Les Vaillons Vieilles Vignes (89), 2005 Chablis Les Fourchaumes Vieilles Vignes (89+?), 2005 Chablis Les Blanchots (90+?), 2005 Chablis Les Clos (92+?). 2005 Chablis Réserve de l'Obédience (91+?).

- [2006 Domaine Laroche Chablis](#) **86**
(\$20; a negociant bottling) Fruit-driven aromas of pear, apple and stone fruits, complicated by a spicy nuance. Ripe, round and easygoing, with a slightly exotic quality. Very supple in texture.
- [2006 Domaine Laroche Chablis Saint Martin](#) **88-90**
(\$25) Bright, pale yellow. Brisk aromas of nectarine and minerals. Juicy and energetic, with complex flavors of grapefruit, peach and brown spices nicely framed by good mineral cut. This displays lovely freshness of fruit. Finishes with a positive hint of youthful bitterness. Seems better balanced and more accessible than the '05 version. An excellent village wine in the making.
- [2006 Domaine Laroche Chablis Les Vaudevey](#) **89-91**
(\$33; about 10% done in barriques, one-quarter of which were new) Pale yellow. Musky nose combines quinine, ginger and fresh herbs. Very rich, pure flavors of nectarine and brown spices. The gingery quality gives definition to the fruit. These vines are always picked at the end of the harvest, according to Bourdonnaye, sometimes as long as two weeks after the first grapes come in.
- [2006 Domaine Laroche Chablis Les Vaillons](#) **90-92**
(\$37; 14% oak) Pale yellow. Highly perfumed aromas of fresh peach, stone and quinine. Rich, creamy and sweet, but with excellent energy and an impression of spicy acidity to the fruit-driven peach and nectarine flavors. Finishes ripe, pure, suave and long. More expressive at this stage than the '05 bottling.
- [2006 Domaine Laroche Chablis Les Fourchaumes](#) **89-91**
(\$40; 15% oak) Bright, pale yellow. Fresh, perfumed nose of lemon, ripe stone fruits and spices. Broad, rich and spicy but more austere than the Vaillons. There's sweetness of fruit here but no sugary impression and no heaviness. The alcohol here is just below 12.5%, notes Bourdonnaye, which is quite low for a 2006 from this normally warm premier cru. The lingering finish shows brown spices and a slight dry edge. Bourdonnaye noted that my sample probably featured a somewhat higher percentage of juice from barrel than the final blend would include.
- [2006 Domaine Laroche Chablis Les Clos](#) **91-94**
(\$75) Pale color with a bit of green. Highly aromatic but subtle nose offers lime, mint, minerals and nutmeg. Dense, suave and classically dry; supple but sappy. This conveys an impression of stony austerity but is ultimately more tender and fruit-driven than the spicier '05. Finishes very long and pure, with a captivating amalgam of fruits, brown spices and minerals. (Bourdonnaye was not willing to show the Blanchots, as he had not yet made the final blend.)
- [2006 Domaine Laroche Chablis Réserve de l'Obédience](#) **91-93**