Domaine Pierre Gelin is a family estate in the villages of Fixin and Gevrey-Chambertin. Founded in 1925 by Pierre Gelin, it is devoted to red Burgundy wine. Pierre’s grandson, Pierre-Emmanuel, is making many positive changes as he takes the reins. Pierre-Emmanuel belongs to the new generation of young winemakers and is a member of the Groupement des Jeunes Professionnels de la Vigne, which was formed in 1959. He has an intense interest in organic production and wants to produce “pure, honest wines.” Domaine Pierre Gelin wines offer excellent quality and value from a lesser known region.

**HISTORY**

In 1925, Pierre Gelin began to buy vineyards in Fixin, where his family owned vineyards. Fixin is a small appellation of only 100 hectares that has heavier clay soils than surrounding regions. “Some people at the time thought that wasn’t a smart move,” says Pierre-Emmanuel. “However, we have proven that Fixin yields very high-quality Pinot Noir. The wines have very good flavor expression and tannin structure; the premier cru Clos Napoleon is a good example of the region’s masculine-structured wines. There are some stony areas suitable for Chardonnay, but they’re rare.” In 1961 Pierre also purchased vineyards in Gevrey-Chambertin. Pierre-Emmanuel’s father, Stéphen Gelin, oversaw the estate from 1969 to 2000. He, along with his wife, Marie-Odile, is still involved, although he has transferred much of the responsibility to his son. As an only child, Pierre-Emmanuel feels a great sense of responsibility and commitment to running the estate. Pierre-Emmanuel's young daughter, Ines, voices youthful excitement that she may someday be the winemaker, carrying on the family tradition.

The close-knit Gelin family has recently invested in a larger, more efficient winery, which was ready for the 2011 harvest. “We want the estate to stay small enough to maintain its personality,” says Pierre-Emmanuel.
Pierre-Emmanuel. “The new winery allows us more flexibility during harvest, as well as the technology to increase wine quality.”

**GRAPEGROWING**

With the goal of continuing to improve on his father’s rich, full-bodied wine style, Pierre-Emmanuel is focusing on changes in the vineyard. The family owns 11.5 hectares in Fixin and Gevrey-Chambertin, which Pierre-Emmanuel farms lutte raisonnée (with reasonable, earth-friendly practices). He plows the vineyards for weed control rather than using herbicides, and judiciously applies only natural fertilizers, including algae and manure from organic farms.

To control yields and improve ripening, Pierre-Emmanuel leaves a long cane on the single Guyot-trained vines and removes half the buds to space out the leaves and fruit for better sun exposure. His goal is to retain eight buds per vine or 80,000 buds per hectare.

In July, he drops some of the clusters to force more of the vine’s energy into a smaller amount of fruit, as well as manually removing leaves to improve both air and sun exposure. Increasing the fruit’s ability to fully ripen is especially important because many of Fixin’s vineyards face north or northeast, so the fruit ripens late and is at risk from fall rains.

The Gelins like to pick as late as possible for full maturity, and improved vineyard management has helped them achieve this goal. “We haven’t needed to add sugar in recent years, which I credit to improved practices in the vineyards,” says Pierre-Emmanuel.

**WINEMAKING**

Domaine Pierre Gelin’s winemaking practice has always included destemming the clusters, which continues. However, Pierre-Emmanuel has added an eight- to ten-day cold soak (pre-fermentation maceration) for gentle extraction. During the cold soak, the cap is punched down two to three times a day. Only indigenous yeasts are used for the fermentation, which takes place in a combination of stainless steel and oak tanks. During fermentation three pneumatic punch-downs (pigeages) or pump-overs (remontages) are performed each day for optimal development of aromas, flavors, structure, balance and texture.

Following pressing, the wines are transferred by gravity flow to barrels for malolactic fermentation and 20 to 24 months of aging. The wines are racked once midway through barrel aging.

“We like to smell all the character of the vineyard, so we don’t want heavy oak,” Pierre-Emmanuel explains. He prefers barrels made from oak harvested from the Chatillon and Vosges forests and coopered with medium-toast levels. The percentages of new oak are matched to the wines: 80 percent for the grand cru Clos de Bèze and 25 percent for the Fixin premier cru. Older barrels are selected for the villages wines. The wines are domaine bottled and then bottle aged for one to two years before release.
**THE WINES**

**Bourgogne Rouge**
The Bourgogne Rouge is sourced from vineyards in Fixin and Gevrey-Chambertin, and is matured for 18 months, partially in oak barrels and partially in stainless-steel tanks. Wines from Fixin are typified by their robust, tannic, and sometimes “sauvage” character. Soils towards the bottom of the hill tend to be a deeper and heavier mixture of limestone mixed with clay, yielding wines that are beefy and a bit rougher. The premier crus sit further up the hill on homogenous brown limestone and often display more minerality and finesse.

**Fixin**
Fixin is a quiet village sitting at the northern end of the Côte de Nuits, just a short half hour drive from the center of Dijon. This Fixin rouge comes from vines planted between 1968 and 1984. Grapes are completely de-stemmed and only indigenous yeasts are used for fermentation. The wine was matured for 20 to 24 months in used Burgundian pièces. Though Fixin tends to be upstaged by the Chambertin vineyards to the south and the Dijon vineyards to the north, it is especially rich in history. Fixin’s viticultural story began with the Romans and it was a notably important area throughout the Middle Ages.
Gevrey-Chambertin Clos de Meixvelle

Clos de Meixvelle is a monopole of Domaine Pierre Gelin. The vineyard was purchased by Pierre Gelin in 1952 who began farming it in the mid-1940s. The vines were planted by Pierre and are over 70 years old. The vineyard sits near the heart of the village on a shallow slope of alluvial soil over a base of limestone. Grapes are completely de-stemmed and only indigenous yeasts are used for fermentation. The wine was matured for 20 – 24 months in used Burgundian pièce. Clos de Meixvelle shows classic Gevrey-Chambertin typicity with black fruit, structure, and assertiveness. Aromas and flavors of black berries, black cherries, herbs, and flowers are supported by medium weight and sturdy tannins.

Fixin 1er Cru Clos Napoléon

Clos Napoléon is a 4.5 acre monopole of Domaine Pierre Gelin and is the flagship wine of the estate. This premier cru was uncultivated at the time it was purchased by Pierre Gelin in 1950. The vines are now over 60 years old. The vineyard was originally owned by Claude Noisot, the surgeon to Emperor Napoléon, and was known as Aux Cheusots. Claude rechristened the vineyard Clos Napoléon in honor of the emperor. The old vines of Clos Napoléon yield pure, well-balanced wine with high-toned notes of cherry, earth, and wood spice, combined with depth and length on the palate. This is one of the richer, more structured wines of the Fixin appellation.

Chambertin Clos de Bèze Grand Cru

Chambertin-Clos de Bèze is said to have been named in 630 CE after it became the property of the Abbey of Bèze. It is, in effect, an extension of Chambertin. Clos de Bèze may be sold as Chambertin but wine from Chambertin proper may not be sold as Clos de Bèze. The differences between the two vineyards is subtle. Clos de Bèze is exposed a bit more to the east and receives slightly more sun and ripens slightly earlier. Both Grand Crus drain well and sit on a bed of limestone. Chambertin-Clos de Bèze is one of Burgundy’s great wines. Ripe, fleshy, full-flavored, and intense, the wine tends to have deep color, sturdy but beautifully integrated tannins, and can age for many years in a cool cellar. The wine was completely de-stemmed, fermented with indigenous yeasts, and aged in 80% new Burgundian pièce.

Fixin 1er Cru Les Hervelets

Les Hervelets is one of two premier crus in Fixin that are not monopoles, the other being Les Arvelets. The two vineyards lie side by side at the top of the slope with a bit higher content of marl in the soil. Les Arvelets may be sold as Les Hervelets, but not vice versa. The name Les Hervelets in local dialect means “the place where maple trees grow.” Sometimes described as rustic and austere, Fixin wines are also known to achieve richness and power with aging. This Fixin 1er cru was completely de-stemmed and aged for 20 – 24 months in 25% new Burgundian pièce. Les Hervelets often shows a bit more nuance and finesse than a typical Fixin wine.