

# Big Burgundy's fine wine history

The walkable town of Dijon is the best place to begin an exploration of the world's most historic and premium wine region, Burgundy

Ruma Singh  
feedback@livermint.com

At Rich Haine, there will always be Paris. But for many others, there is so much to explore in the rest of France. Take Dijon, for instance. The cultural capital of Burgundy is just over two hours from Paris. Expected for food and wine aficionados, Dijon is projected as a 'city with wine running through its veins'. Where better to begin exploration of that arguably the world's most historic and premium wine region?

Dijon itself is small, a walkable town. A good way to grasp Dijon's contribution to gastronomy and culture is with a visit to the all-new Cité de la Gastronomie et du Vin International City of Gastronomy and Wine, located adjacent to the French culinary arts and hospitality management school Terracotta. The museum is a tip to all things gastronomic in the region, it features exhibitions, displays, a multimedia village, an expansive wine shop and tasting room. It offers sessions to understand the complex wines of the 19th century Burgundy and also the more knowledgeable wine lover by the Burgundy School of Wine. For the history lover, the 15th-century chapels are located within the grounds. Chapelle des Climates and Chapelle Sainte-Croix-Joseph.

I visited the exhibition on the Art of the Table, which the French have indeed dedicated to a fine art of dining. From food to gastronomy made it to the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2010. The exhibition, located in the museum, the concept of the menu meant of eating together and drinking well. This included table settings, complete with antique crockery and silverware from centuries past to the modern era, a wall of clever food and wine related cartoons and art devoted to gastronomy, multimedia installations including life-size photographs by highly-awarded portrait photographer Denis Fouhy.

## BURGUNDY DINING

In a city where food is revered, Dijon has several notable outlets. The Cité itself allows us to choose from. The Cité's high-end gourmet restaurant, La Table des Climates is the spot to lose your purse strings and indulge in the ultimate pairing of Grand Cru wines with renowned classic Burgundy food. Or to 'cheer you blood? The more walk-friendly Le Comptoir des Vins is a casual dining experience associated by three-star Michelin chef Eric Laroche.

The quaint French-style 'Village' located within the courtyard features a menu of specialty food spots, selling Burgundy mustard, pastries, meats like the regional specialty Porc aux Herbes and Burgundy cheese - from the famous Epoisses included. The giant wine Cave de la Côte is built to impress, it is easy to get lost in its array of 1,000 wines covering everything from regional and village level to the super-premium Premier and Grand Cru. Fans of a taste? There are 250 wines by the glass to pick from. In La Fine Heure, a 13-year-old restaurant in the heart of Dijon is where both locals and visitors



Wine tasting in Dijon; (top) Philippe le Bon Tower

stop for a taste of the region's specialities. For the wine curious, it has recently added a 350-litre wine shop. We stopped there for a tasting with the sommelier Sullivan Ravat, and he explained the intricate geography and its impact on Burgundy wines. 'Ninety-nine per cent of Burgundy wines are made from a single grape variety', he said, as we tasted our way through a range of wines including the one - the as-cendence Bourgogne Aligoté, the 'second' white grape of Burgundy after its emblematic Chardonnay, accompanied with small glasses, the artsy local cheese-filled pastry.

That makes La Fine Heure unique in that it houses Dijon's only urban winery. La Cave en Ville, in the restaurant's small cellar, a project conceptualised by the restaurant's owner, Jonathan Molton who teamed up with Chaldelien winemaker Anais Bouchard. Bouchard handles production, with grapes sourced from reputable growers around Burgundy. The restaurant menu encompasses traditional favourites such as beef Bourgogne bourguignon, the creamy poulet Gaston Carter, and oysters en mer. The emphasis is on local produce and the wine list includes a range of Burgundy wine from affordable options to top-end labels, along with some from other French regions.

The expansive circular historic central square of Dijon, Place de la Liberation, offers a stunning view of the Grand Palace of the dukes of Burgundy and an open space to breathe in the city's soul, sip wine at open-air cafes or enjoy a meal. I did just that. Cave Yvonne to brand new wine cave or shop strategically located in La Place, serving shareable small plates of seasonal local dishes and an extensive wine list. You can schedule a wine tasting with sommelier Evren Point at the cave with its 650 labels.

Also worth a visit is Le P'tit Cerve, an upstart bistro that celebrates the French-inspired cuisine of three-star Michelin chef Georges Blanc. We sat in the terrace, people-watching and soaking in the evening breeze, and finished on duck breast in Grand Venere sauce and the inevitable oysters en meutes with a rich Epoisses cream, along with a bottle of Saint-Véran, a Burgundian appellation currently producing excellent white Burgundy.

of Burgundy and an open space to breathe in the city's soul, sip wine at open-air cafes or enjoy a meal. I did just that. Cave Yvonne to brand new wine cave or shop strategically located in La Place, serving shareable small plates of seasonal local dishes and an extensive wine list. You can schedule a wine tasting with sommelier Evren Point at the cave with its 650 labels.

Also worth a visit is Le P'tit Cerve, an upstart bistro that celebrates the French-inspired cuisine of three-star Michelin chef Georges Blanc. We sat in the terrace, people-watching and soaking in the evening breeze, and finished on duck breast in Grand Venere sauce and the inevitable oysters en meutes with a rich Epoisses cream, along with a bottle of Saint-Véran, a Burgundian appellation currently producing excellent white Burgundy.

## DIJON'S MUSTARD CONNECTION

Mustard is more than a condiment in Burgundy; it used to be considered a symbol of wealth, always on the table during meals at the palace. One of the most do-just experiences includes a mustard-making workshop. 'Burgundy mustard is made in Burgundy, with Burgundy-grown mustard seeds and Aligoté white wine. We consider it a showcase of Burgundy's history', explains Julie Milard of the Dijon mustard 'Tourisme et Congrès'.

As the summer afternoon waned, I dipped an apron with other enthusiasts and poured my brown mustard seeds from Burgundy with a mortar and pestle - the seeds are from Falot d'Amont Falot, the famous family-owned mustard maker, founded in 1840. 'Bovism mustard seeds are very hot, unlike the other varieties of mustard seeds', announced my host. There we added white wine vinegar and our own little cup of mustard - made in Dijon.

# Navalny never lost hope, his memoirs show

A lawyer by training, Navalny became the main challenger to Vladimir Putin

Ruma Singh  
feedback@livermint.com

In a memoir released eight months after he died in prison, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny never loses faith that his cause is worth suffering for while also acknowledging he wished he could have written a very different book. 'There is a mishmash of bits and pieces, a traditional narrative followed by a prison diary,' Navalny writes in *Putin*, which was published Tuesday, and is, unlike a traditional narrative, followed by a prison diary.

The final 200 pages of Navalny's 479-page book do, in some ways, have the characteristics of other Russian diaries of his, such as classic Russian literature as Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. But *Putin* also reads as a testament to fame-disorderly shuntle against everything from 19th century French literature to the Soviet Union. Navalny had become an international symbol of resistance. A lawyer by training, he started out as an anti-corruption campaigner, then turned into a political activist and an agitator for public office and eventually became the main challenger to Russia's longtime president, Vladimir Putin.

During the first section of his book, Navalny reflects on the fall of the Soviet Union, his imprisonment with 1990s Russian leader Boris Yeltsin, his early crusades against corruption, his entry into public life, and his discovery that he did not need to look for a politician 'who would understand all sorts of needs, interesting projects and cooperate directly with the Russian people.'

'I wanted to be a politician, and one day I realized I could be that person myself,' he wrote.

His vision of a 'beautiful Russia of the future,' which leaders are freely and fairly elected, official corruption is tamed, and democratic institutions work - as well as his strong charisma and sardonic humor - earned him widespread support. The authorities responded to Navalny's growing popularity by levying multiple fines against him, his allies and even family members. They jailed him often and shut down his entire political infrastructure - the Foundation for Fighting Corruption he started in 2011 and a network of several dozen regional offices.

In 2020, he survived a nerve gas poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin, which denied involvement. In the memoir, Navalny recalls telling his wife while still hospitalized in Berlin that 'of course' he will go back to Russia.

The press on him continued behind bars, intensifying after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. In December 2023, the authorities transferred Navalny to a penal colony of the highest security level. In February 2024, 37-year-old Navalny suddenly died. The day after the news, the circumstances and the cause of his death still remain a mystery. Yulia Navalna and his allies say he was 'killed in a Khamovniki jail,' while the authorities argue that Navalny died of 'natural causes.'

# 50 years of painting daily life in rural Telangana

An exhibition celebrates five decades of Thota Vaikuntam's practice, spanning sketches, drawings and paintings

Ruma Singh  
feedback@livermint.com

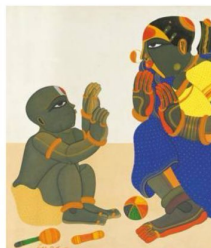
There is a poignant moment in Sruti Debnath's Subramaniam documentary when he says: 'The only thing that I feel about home is that my mother gave me everything [that I didn't give her anything]... This line speaks volumes about how he used to be shared with his mother, which went on to inform the many mother-child sketches and paintings he did in his five-decade-long career. It is in his work, he says, that he often finds an exude a sense of warmth, nurturing and protection. The summation of the socio-generational artist's part of the ongoing show *Thota Vaikuntam: Redefining the Cultural Gaze*, at Alvie Gallery, Delhi, a celebration of 50 years of a rich practice, spanning charcoal sketches, drawings and paintings.

Subramaniam's film acts as a perfect foil to the works on display. As she shows his daily routine at home in Hyderabad, at

you view the works on display and then see the film, you get a rare insight into the workings of Vaikuntam's mind. He is shown, for instance, using the back of his hand as the palette to make up artists are rarely painting as a child. 'Used to love, applying the colour from the skin to canvas.' 'The colours, the paintings, sketches feel so much more personal with this simple act,' says Sunita Nandani, director, Art Alvie Gallery.

He joined a association with Vaikuntam dates back to the early 2000s, when she saw his work for the first time at TTC, Mysuru New Delhi. She recalls being mesmerized by the form, colours and flights of imagination, which she thought to life, a side of rural Telangana, previously not seen in Indian art. This encounter resulted in a book on Vaikuntam, one of the first important projects Anand took on as a gallery and a long friendship between the two, with Anand often visiting his village, Burgapuragi, which has inspired his artistic practice.

Vaikuntam - the recipient of many honours, including the Padma Shri - granted towards painting as a child. 'Used to be fascinated with local street plays, dramas and puppetry shows, which had stories revolving around Indian mythology,' he says. He would study the details of the costumes, makeup and facial expressions of the performing artists. 'At home,



Thota Vaikuntam, 'Mothers and Child', acrylic on paper (2002)

I would draw these figures from memory,' he adds.

The women of rural Telangana, particularly their faces, have featured prominently in Vaikuntam's works. 'They're goddesses in my view,' he says. In a book accompanying the exhibition, art histo-

rians, perhaps seeing in them the maturity of life's productive. 'In her view, the artist, especially if mature, is not just a viewer to the viewers, an autobiographical account of the artist.

Vaikuntam has been taking viewers on walk-throughs of the show, on view till 20 November and spread over two floors of the gallery. He offers a detailed explanation of the processes behind some of his creations, including the complex wax technique that he mastered over many decades of his artistic practice. He points to one particular drawing: a character with a female figure with her bright red head, polka-dotted skirt, striking eyes, bold features, and a parrot - a recurring motif in his work - as a 'recurring motif in his work.'

His work is bereft of elaborate backgrounds or landscapes, with the focus being solely on the figure. 'I have often observed parents' feet seen into women's clothes in my village,' he says. In this particular work, the lady's face is in side into sections, each featuring different shades of a particular colour. 'One area is slightly darker than the rest, while the forehead is lighter,' adds Vaikuntam.

He attributes his journey of 'self-discovery' to mentor and teacher R.G. Subramaniam at the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodra, who offered Vaikuntam to 'discover himself, memories of those times spent in the village, and the people

inhabiting the area.' Thereafter, whenever the artist would head back home from Vadodra, he would sketch the locals.

Vaikuntam's art can also be viewed as a homage to his mother. The series titled, according to Bhagat, appear to be from Sruti, a woman in Telangana's Karmirama district. 'The story behind the garments is another textile tradition - the zangani saris from Madurai in Tamil Nadu.'

Some of the newer works on the exhibition highlight Vaikuntam's connection with larger causes. Only now, he uses polka colours in his paintings. According to Anand, Vaikuntam's unique contribution to contemporary Indian art, 'I had people in their 20s showing an interest in buying his art.'

Among the many elements that stand out in the show is a quote by the late modernist H.D. Thoreau from the book accompanying the exhibition: 'Vaikuntam's art is a unique synthesis of the traditional and the contemporary Indian art concepts (will... inspiration [emerging] from everyday Indian life. After Jaimini Jyoti, Vaikuntam's art is a unique contribution to contemporary Indian art, with its compromise and with fullness of imagination and a sense of the past.'

Abhilita (Oha is a Delhi-based artist and