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TEXT NICK STOCK

Running the Gamut

From premier cru whites and a red, through to impressive villages and generic bottlings François Mikulski's Burgundies are precise, pure and pared back, confidently setting his wines apart from the delightfully hedonistic drops usually found in Mersault.

FRANÇOIS MIKULSKI – Burgundy (France)

Meursault is such a fascinating and dynamic appellation of Burgundy. Unencumbered by even a single grand cru (although it's an oft-staged argument as to which plots are deserving of an upgrade), Meursault's 450-odd hectares are home to some of the best villages-grade whites and, perhaps more than any other white appellation of the Côte d'Or, it's very much an exercise in following producer form, rather than vineyard pedigree.

The wines are rounder and fuller than those of both Puligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet, and they respond well to winemaking overlay, carrying oak and sulfide-derived complexity with aplomb.

It's remarkable, then, when a producer like François Mikulski sails out of this delicious sea of artifact and hedonism, cutting a style that is precise, pure and vastly more pared back than most of its neighbours.

The quality seen at the generic level is testament to his dedication in both vineyard and cellar.

François Mikulski, nephew of winemaker Pierre Boillot, is in charge of the domaine and farms nine hectares of mostly rented vineyard, including five premier-cru whites and one premier-cru red. Beyond these are villages and generic bottlings, right down to Bourgogne Aligoté and a passetoutgrains red.

Where many in Meursault choose to paddle headlong into the swelling richness that typifies this patch of Burgundy, Mikulski's quest is that of elegance and purity. In the vineyard, yields for Bourgogne Aligoté and Bourgogne Chardonnay are at levels usually stated for grand-cru production on neighbouring slopes.

White grapes are de-stemmed and gently pressed before settling and clarifying juice prior to fermentation. Mikulski starts with clear juice and looks to build complexity into his wines through indigenous yeast fermentation in barrel and then working carefully with the lees for up to a year. New oak is kept to a minimum, only buying in enough to maintain a rolling inventory.

The wines are uncluttered and engaging. There's the weight and concentration of low yields and yet the composure holds everything in shape and the quality seen at the generic level is testament to his dedication in both vineyard and cellar.

The journey starts with the humble **2010 François Mikulski Bourgogne Aligoté** (A\$32), the first in a pair of varietally defined Bourgogne wines. Usually fermented in tank, this vintage was barrel fermented in older vessels due to a reduced yield across Mikulski's harvest – he needed to keep his barrels full.

Cropped at a staggeringly low (for Aligoté) 30 hectolitres per hectare, it has a nose of fresh pear and sliced apple, a little chalk too. The palate is similarly in the pear and apple zone, quite crisp and chalky, with a gentle phenolic grip and a crisp, bright finish.

But the magic really starts with the **2009 François Mikulski Bourgogne Chardonnay** (A\$45), a release that has more in common with a decent Meursault Villages-level wine. Aromas sit in the melon and white peach spectrum with a savoury overlay of mealy, yeast-derived complexity and gently toasty oak. It has lovely weight and precision for its station too, a balancing act that defines the

essence of Mikulski's style. Flavours of grapefruit, lemon and peach arrive amid smoothly textured flesh and impressive acid brightness. This offers terrific drinking.

The **2009 François Mikulski Meursault Villages** (A\$105) is an amalgam of three plots: Les Miex Chavaux, which sits up behind the northwest edge of the village, Les Pelles-Dessus, which is just below Le Porusot at the northern tip of the premier-cru band and Les Chaumes de Narvaux, a tiny patch that actually sits inside a section of Premier Cru Le Porusot itself.

The nose delivers more richness and a greater sense of ripeness, with expressive melon fruit, stony minerals and oyster shells – it reflects leaner soil origins. The palate places the richness of Meursault amid a gently tensile structure, allowing smooth texture to preside along impressive palate length. Flavours run through pithy citrus to melon fruits, finishing with essence-like green peach. A lovely wine.

The **2008 François Mikulski Meursault 1er Cru Charmes** (A\$150) is a more fragrant wine. Reflective of the vintage as much as anything else, it represents a classic case study in exactly why Mikulski is so great. The grapes are sourced from the southeast corner of the vineyard, where the soil is heavy with clay. This is a blend of a plot planted in 1930 (60 per cent) and one planted in 1998 (40 per cent). Wine from a third, separate plot of 1913 vines is bottled as a separate cuvée.

Far from being heavy, this is a fragrant wine with a green-ish thread, showing cucumber, fresh-picked herbs, citrus, fragrant peach and pear blossom too. It's strikingly pure, and doesn't rely on reduction or artifact to succeed. The palate rolls out in creamy textural style, delivering weight and

concentration without seeming heavy, it tastes of honey, peach and nougat.

The **2008 François Mikulski Meursault 1er Cru Genevrières** (A\$150) is the star of the currently available Mikulski wines. It's a vineyard that, like Charmes, fights it out with Perrières for top honours among the premier crus, yet it is roughly only half the size of Charmes (16.5 hectares versus 31 hectares) and doesn't run to the flatter, heavier ground.

Mikulski delivers the essence of this powerful vineyard's potential, making a deep impression on the nose, it smells of peach skin, fine yellow fruits, underlying minerals, hazelnut and melon. The palate is tightly coiled and sizzling with bright acid crunch. Citrus and white nectarine fruit flavours run long, fine and even through to a mouth-watering finish that promises to hold on point for many years. It's high-tensile stuff.

The **2009 François Mikulski Meursault 1er Cru Perrières** (A\$220) should, by right, be the pinnacle of the Mikulski offering, but here he buys a small amount of must (unfermented juice) and has no control over viticulture or harvest timing. It clearly shows the importance of controlling one's own destiny in the vineyard, revealing the mineral thread that makes this vineyard so renowned, but ultimately lacking the nerve. There's core strength, but less finesse and purity than is evident in the Genevrières.

But here is the real surprise: Mikulski farms a section of (red) Volnay 1er Cru Les Santenots du Milieu that is technically within Meursault, but is widely accepted as the best section of Les Santenots and takes the neighbouring Volnay name for marketing reasons.

I'm struck with the quality of the Côte de Beaune reds from 2009 and the **2009 François Mikulski Volnay Santenots de Milieu** (A\$140) is a perfect storm of ripeness, power and elegance. The red fruits swirl into a complex dance with oak and spice; it's very youthful and primary on the nose. The palate has a striking tannin shape, packed with supple fruit that is soft at the edge. Vibrant acidity runs the distance driving a svelte finish that is long and focused. It's an impressive wine now, but the best will be revealed in time, quite possibly a very long time for those with the patience to wait. !

