



Photo courtesy of Maison Louis Latour

Panoramic view of the Hill of Corton. Château de Corton-Grancey sits among the trees on the right, with the Corton-Grancey winery just to its left. The village of Ladoix-Serrigny is visible in the top right.

KING OF THE HILL

LOUIS LATOUR AND THE HILL OF CORTON



Wooden fermentation vats inside the Corton-Grancey winery. Photo courtesy of Maison Louis Latour.

Photo courtesy of Maison Louis Latour



The Corton-Grancey winery in the nineteenth century

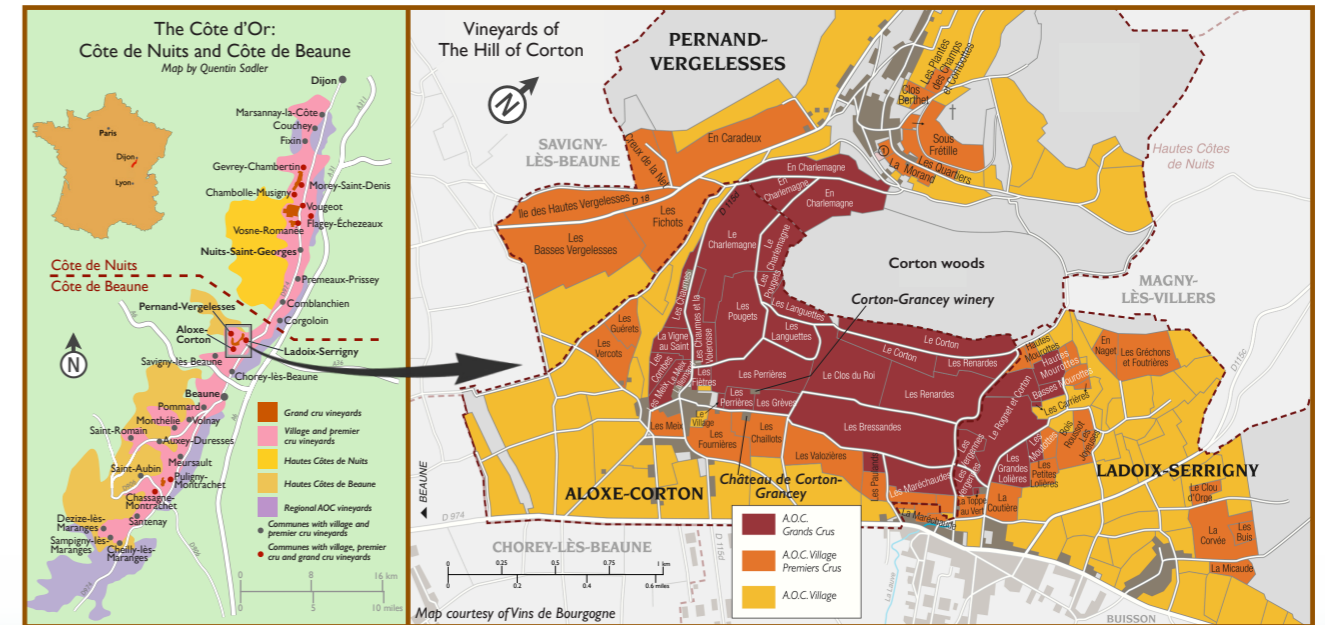
Photo courtesy of Maison Louis Latour

THE HILL OF CORTON RISES AT THE NORTHERN END OF THE CÔTE DE BEAUNE IN BURGUNDY, OVERLOOKING THE VILLAGE OF ALOXE-CORTON AND STRETCHING INTO NEIGHBOURING LADOIX-SERRIGNY AND PERNAND-VERGELESSES.



Photo courtesy of Maison Louis Latour

View towards the Hill of Corton from Château de Corton-Grancey, with vineyards extending beyond



Maps of Burgundy and the Hill of Corton. On the left, a map of Burgundy by Quentin Sadler shows the location of Corton. On the right, a map of the Hill of Corton, courtesy of Vins de Bourgogne, shows the vineyards and the three villages of Aloxe-Corton, Pernand-Vergelesse, and Ladoix-Serrigny

All three are wine villages inhabited by families who have often farmed their land for generations. Each have separate and distinct village level and Premier Cru vineyards, however they share one of Burgundy's great treasures: The Grand Cru vineyards of the Hill of Corton.

Its history dates back at least to Roman times, but it is perhaps best known through its legendary association with the Emperor Charlemagne, who is said to have once owned the hill. According to the story, in his later years his wife ordered the planting of white grapes so that the wine would no longer stain his now-white beard.

Today, the hill is shared by many growers and producers, but the largest landowner is Maison Louis Latour, which holds just under 27 hectares – around a fifth of the total area. The Latour family's connection to Corton dates back to 1731, when an ancestor acquired part of the Clos de la Vigne au Saint vineyard, just northwest of Aloxe-Corton. By 1768, the family had settled in the village, where they have remained ever since. When Maison Louis Latour was formally established in 1797, it was based there – and still is today.

During the nineteenth century, the Comte de Grancey family dominated land ownership on Corton. They built an impressive château and a pioneering gravity-flow winery carved into a quarry just 250 metres northeast of Aloxe-Corton. In 1891, Louis Latour acquired this prestigious estate. The house, Château de Corton-Grancey, became the family's ancestral home, and the gravity-fed winery remains in use today for producing their Domaine Louis Latour wines, from their own vineyards.



Aerial view of the village of Aloxe-Corton, surrounded by vineyards, with the Hill of Corton beyond

Photo courtesy of Maison Louis Latour



Château de Corton-Grancey, nestled among the trees. The vines beside the house are Aloxe-Corton Premier Cru Les Chaillots. The building to the left of the house is the Corton-Grancey winery, which marks the boundary between Corton Les Grèves and Corton Les Perrières

THE STRUCTURE OF THE HILL OF CORTON

Rather than a single vineyard, Corton is a patchwork of climats – distinct vineyard parcels – spread across varying elevations, exposures, and soil compositions. These differences create a wide range of expressions from the same grape varieties.

Upper slopes (approx. 280–350m):

Steep and dominated by limestone, with mainly southeast and southwest exposures, this area is planted almost exclusively with Chardonnay. It includes the climats of Le Charlemagne and En Charlemagne. Two Grand Cru wines can technically be produced here: Corton-Charlemagne and the rarer Charlemagne, the latter coming only from the, slightly cooler, En Charlemagne vineyard. In practice, most producers opt to use the more widely recognised Corton-Charlemagne appellation.

Mid-slopes (approx. 250–300m):

Here the terrain softens and soils become more complex, mixing limestone, marl, gravel, sand, and iron-rich elements. With varied exposures, these vineyards produce red Corton wines in a wide spectrum of styles – from linear and elegant to richer, rounder and more textured styles.

Interestingly, although the Hill of Corton is now synonymous with Chardonnay, the white grape grown there before the post-phylloxera replanting was in fact Aligoté.

LOUIS LATOUR'S RED CORTON VINEYARDS

Maison Louis Latour owns key parcels across several leading red Corton Grand Cru climats, including Clos de la Vigne au Saint, Les Bressandes, Les Chaumes, Les Pougets, Les Perrières, and Les Grèves.

Among their most distinctive wines is Château Corton-Grancey. This cuvée pays tribute to the wines once made by the Grancey family and is a blend from old vines across five climats: Les Bressandes, Les Perrières, Les Grèves, Clos du Roi, and Les Chaumes. It is one of Maison Louis Latour's most important and prestigious red wines.

OVERLAPS AND EXCEPTIONS

While Corton is often described in clear-cut terms, the reality is more nuanced. Some Pinot Noir is grown in areas typically associated with Corton-Charlemagne and conversely, small amounts of Chardonnay are planted in certain red Corton vineyards.

On the upper slopes, vineyards such as Les Pougets and Les Languettes neighbour Le Charlemagne and include limited Chardonnay plantings – these vines are included in Corton-Charlemagne. Further down the slope, climats like Les Vergennes, Le Rognet, Les Chaumes, and Les Bressandes also contain small quantities of Chardonnay. Wines from these parcels are labelled Corton Grand Cru, so some white Corton is made.

BEYOND GRAND CRU

The Latour family home, Château de Corton-Grancey (the building rather than the wine, which is called Château Corton-Grancey), lies just 250 metres from Aloxe-Corton, surrounded entirely by vineyards. To the north sit Les Perrières and Les Grèves, while to the east, south, and west lies Aloxe-Corton Premier Cru Les Chaillots – around 90% owned by Maison Louis Latour.

Les Chaillots takes its name from its stony soils (cailloux meaning small stones) and typically produces wines that retain structure while being more approachable than the Grand Cru Cortons up the slope.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE FUTURE

Alongside its vineyards and long-standing traditions, Maison Louis Latour faces the same challenges as any modern wine producer. Burgundy, located in eastern France, has a cool-to-moderate continental climate – conditions that have historically suited grape varieties like Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, which thrive without excessive heat.

However, the climate is changing, and rising temperatures are already reshaping the region. One of the clearest indicators is the shift in harvest dates. At Domaine Louis Latour, including their holdings on Corton, grapes that were typically harvested in mid to late October in

Photo courtesy of Maison Louis Latour



The Hill of Corton in winter

Photo courtesy of Maison Louis Latour

the 1950s are now ready as early as mid-September – and sometimes even by the end of August.

To safeguard the future of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in Burgundy, Maison Louis Latour has embraced a more sustainable approach to viticulture. All of their domaine vineyards are now fully certified organic, reflecting a commitment to healthier soils and ecosystems.

They are also adapting their vineyard practices, introducing new canopy management techniques designed to protect the vines from excess heat, while helping to maintain lower alcohol levels and preserve natural acidity in the wines.

Beyond the vineyard, the estate is actively involved in research. As a member of the Pinot Noir Foundation, Maison Louis Latour is contributing to the development of new drought-resistant rootstocks. The first of these were planted at the domaine in 2018, and all subsequent plantings have adopted this innovation.

Since 2021, they have also been selecting specific clones of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir better suited to a warming climate. These clones bud later – reducing the risk of damage from spring frost – and ripen at lower sugar levels, helping to produce more balanced wines with greater freshness and lower alcohol.



Photo courtesy of Maison Louis Latour

Château de Corton-Grancey, with vineyards on the Hill of Corton beyond. The upper part of the vineyard is Le Corton.

RECENTLY I WAS ABLE TO TASTE THROUGH A REPRESENTATIVE RANGE OF CORTON WINES FROM DOMAINE LOUIS LATOUR WITH ELÉONORE AND FLORENT LATOUR, 12TH AND 11TH GENERATION OF THE LATOUR FAMILY. HERE ARE MY NOTES:



2022 CORTON-CHARLEMAGNE GRAND CRU

100% Chardonnay – fermented in oak barrels – 10 months aging in oak barrels, 100% new wood, from the Louis Latour cooperage.

Harvest date: 26 August 2022 – Average vine age: 30 years

Pale white gold in colour, with aromas of peach, pear, citrus, light spice, and hints of cream, nuts, and a touch of aromatic smoke.

The palate is rounded and gently creamy, with flavours of peach, nectarine, almond, and a subtle note of cardamom. It has a smooth texture with some richness, balanced by fresh acidity that keeps it focused. Beautifully balanced with lovely bright acidity keeping the ripeness in check, a sumptuous wine – 96/100 points.

2020 CORTON-CHARLEMAGNE GRAND CRU

100% Chardonnay – fermented in oak barrels – 10 months aging in new oak barrels from the Louis Latour cooperage.

Harvest date: 19 August 2020 – Average vine age: 30 years

Deeper gold in colour, with aromas of nougat, ripe fruit, cream, and a delicate smokiness.

The palate is smooth and fairly rich, with peach, nectarine and dessert apple alongside touches of orange and pineapple. Fresh acidity keeps it balanced and prevents it from feeling heavy. Overall, it's a beautifully structured wine that is both lithe and powerful at the same time – 96/100 points.

2022 ALOXE-CORTON PREMIER CRU LES CHAILLOTS

100% Pinot Noir – fermented in large open oak vats – 12 months aging in oak barrels, 35% new wood, from the Louis Latour cooperage.

Harvest date: 26 August 2022 – Average vine age: 30 years

Cherry red in colour, with aromas of cherry and raspberry alongside earthy, sous-bois notes and a gentle hint of spice.

The palate is supple and well balanced, with good fruit concentration. Silky in texture, it is supported by fine, lightly firm tannins. Flavours of raspberry and a touch of blood orange carry through, with subtle spice on the finish. A poised and seductively drinkable wine – 95/100 points.

2018 ALOXE-CORTON PREMIER CRU LES CHAILLOTS

100% Pinot Noir – fermented in large open oak vats – 12 months aging in oak barrels, 35% new wood, from the Louis Latour cooperage.

Harvest date: 3 September 2018 – Average vine age: 30 years

Light ruby with a slightly earthy tone. The nose leans savoury, with notes of earth, subtle vanilla, and gentle spice.

On the palate, it is fresh and supple, with a more earthy, spicy profile. The texture is light and almost ethereal, supported by fine, drying tannins that remain smooth and well integrated. Balanced and beautifully understated in style, very elegant and refined – 93/100 points.

2022 CORTON CLOS DE LA VIGNE AU SAINT GRAND CRU

100% Pinot Noir – fermented in large open oak vats – 12 months aging in oak barrels, 35% new wood, from the Louis Latour cooperage.

Harvest date: 26 August 2026 – Average vine age: 40 years

Lifted aromatics with notes of raspberry and truffle, giving both freshness and a subtle earthy depth.

On the palate, it is silky and mouthfilling, with flavours of cherry, raspberry, and a hint of orange. There is good concentration, yet the wine remains balanced and controlled, lithe and rich by turn, with added complexity from light touches of menthol and mushroom. The texture is smooth and sensual, with fine tannins and no hard edges, making it elegant and deliciously approachable – 95/100 points.

2020 CORTON CLOS DE LA VIGNE AU SAINT GRAND CRU

100% Pinot Noir – fermented in large open oak vats – 12 months aging in oak barrels, 35% new wood, from the Louis Latour cooperage.

Harvest date: 19 August 2020 – Average vine age: 40 years

A smoky, savoury, almost umami-driven nose with darker fruit, led by black and red cherry.

On the palate, it is mouthfilling with fine-grain tannins and a layered mix of flavours. Earthy, savoury elements sit alongside sweeter notes of raspberry and a touch of orange, with gentle spice running through. The texture is structured yet balanced, finishing with suavely grainy tannins and a subtle mocha spice. Complex, savoury and quite beguiling – 95/100 points.

2022 CHÂTEAU CORTON-GRANCEY GRAND CRU

100% Pinot Noir – fermented in large open oak vats – 12 months aging in oak barrels, 35% new wood, from the Louis Latour cooperage.

Harvest date: 26 August 2022 – Average vine age: 40 years

A clear cherry-red colour. The nose is open and layered, with raspberry, cherry, a hint of orange, and light sous-bois.

The palate has real depth and concentration, with ripe cherry and raspberry fruit at its core, supported by notes of sweet spice and a touch of mocha. Despite the richness, there is a sense of lift and detail that keeps it precise. The texture is smooth and richly silky, with fine structure underneath – an "iron fist in a velvet glove" sort of wine, showing both power and finesse – 97/100 points.



2010 CHÂTEAU CORTON-GRANCEY GRAND CRU

100% Pinot Noir – fermented in large open oak vats – 12 months aging in oak barrels, 35% new wood, from the Louis Latour cooperage.

Harvest date: 20 September 2010 – Average vine age: 40 years

This mature wine leans towards a more savoury and earthy style on the nose, with notes of cinder toffee, gentle shallot sweetness, and a touch of orange peel.

The palate is supple and finely textured, with flavours of dried raspberry, light leather, and a subtle hint of menthol adding complexity. There is good balance between the savoury depth and the restrained fruit, and the wine carries through to a long, long finish. Refined, complex, supple and powerful – 94/100 points.

MY CONCLUSIONS

Corton is unique in the Côte d'Or in producing both red and white Grand Cru wines – sometimes even from the same vineyard. It is a site with a long history and a well-earned reputation for high quality. The story of Louis Latour is closely tied to that of the hill, and their approach reflects a strong sense of responsibility for its future.

At the same time, they don't let that attachment to the past weigh them down, there is no sense of standing still here. The focus remains on improving quality and preserving the vineyards for the future.

Judging by the wines I tasted, that balance is being handled very well.

Maison Louis Latour wines and Domaine Louis Latour wines are distributed in the UK by John E Fells. Quentin Sadler is a wine writer, wine educator and mapmaker.