



The surfing Carignan

DOMAINE LE ROC DES ANGES, ROUSSILLON

If you tell a joke in the forest, but nobody laughs, was it a joke?

Steven Wright

Il faut être aveugle et sourd, abruti par le matraquage de la propagande, pour ignorer qu'il ne s'agit nullement de « protéger le citoyen », mais au contraire, sous les prétextes fallacieux de l'ordre, de l'hygiène et de la sécurité, de réprimer sans nuances et sans soucis d'élémentaire civilité, en un mot d'instituer la répression seule comme principe et mode de gouvernement.

R. Dumay, *La Mort du Vin*

"What passes for wine among us, is not the juice of the grape. It is an adulterous mixture, brewed up of nauseous ingredients, by dunces, who are bunglers in the art of poison-making; and yet we, and our forefathers, are and have been poisoned by this cursed drench, without taste or flavour..."

INDEX KEY

*Organic Wines — **

*Biodynamic Wines — ***

Natural Wines —!

Please note that not all wines designated organic or biodynamic are certified. Some are in conversion, others from producers who have eschewed classification for various reasons. The growers in question, however, work without chemicals other than copper & sulphur and seek natural solutions in the vineyard. Natural wines are organically farmed wines made with native yeasts & with min additions.

The Revised Alternative Natural Wine Manifesto

1. Start from the following simple premise: to borrow from Gertrude Stein, the wine is the wine is the wine and the grower is the grower, and the vintage is the vintage etc. It is not about “this is good” and “that’s better”. There is no uncritical freemasonry of natural wine aficionados, and its devotees will happily diss a faulty wine if it deserves it. As in any profession there are heroes and villains. Heroes can become villains. Whomsoever is up, whomsoever is down, we treat the wine for what it is, from where it comes from and who was the person or people behind it and most of all what it says to us.

This largely still holds true, although there are some growers and certain iconic wines that who have an aura about them and apparently invite unquestioning loyalty and love for the wines. While many consumers are recognising the point where flaws tip into faults, there are some drinkers (fans) who will smell and taste no evil as far as their favourite grower is concerned. Perhaps, this reflects a propensity to look solely at the image of the grower or valuing the label as if it were a commodity rather than a wine qua wine. Perhaps, it reflects also that we are investing more in the person than the wine and, loving the one, are more able to forgive the quirks and faults in the other.

2. **Who is the leader of the natural wine movement and articulates its philosophy?** Probably, whoever chooses to – over a drink. We are all Spartacus in our cups. Think camaraderie, *copinage* and comity with these guys, not po-faced table-thumping, self-indulgent tract-scribbling and meaningless sloganeering.

**The increasing number of wine fairs, forums and associated groups with charters suggests that there are people who wish to assert that natural wine is a recognised movement with specific parameters. Because of its political diversity, and because the groups and associations tend to splinter and then splinter again, it is difficult to say who is the heart or the head of such movement.*

3. **But wouldn’t it be a heck of a lot easier for consumers if there was a manifesto detailing what winemakers are supposed to do and not to do?** What conceivable difference would that make? Take several hundred individuals and ask them if they agree on every single point of viticulture and vinification. See what I mean. Rules is for fools. There are enough guidelines for natural winemakers to be getting on with and if they work within the spirit of minimal intervention, they may be said to be natural.

See 2. Although the original idea of natural wine was about championing diversity and prizing singularity over homogeneity and standardisation, there is an understandable desire to impose standards on vigneron to make good practice doubly assure. However, bureaucracy being made up of fallible human beings, and the element of policing and officiousness that dominates in any organisation, inevitably means growers will fall out over small matters.

4. **But that’s cheating! How can you claim the moral high ground for natural wines if you won’t submit to scrutiny?** We’re not claiming any high ground; in fact, we prefer rooting in the earth around the vines getting our snouts grubby; we’re simply positing an alternative way of making wines that doesn’t involve chucking in loads of additives or stripping out naturally occurring flavours. Working the land in an environmentally sustainable must be a (morally) positive activity. Yes, this is largely self-policed – there are no certificates to apply for or accreditation bodies to satisfy*. Praise be.

**And now there are. There is accreditation for natural winemaking from Triple A to Vin Nature, and all the charters and manifestoes issued by wine fairs across the world. There is broad agreement as to what constitutes a natural wine, but there are many small areas of disagreement. And that’s perhaps as it should be.*

5. **If natural wine is not sufficiently equipped/bothered to organise itself into a movement why should anyone take it seriously?** To paraphrase Groucho Marx: a natural winegrower wouldn’t want to belong to any club that would accept him or her as a member. The world of wine is far too clubby and cosy. In the end it is about what’s in the bottle of wine on the table. A movement is an organisation that creates rules and appoints spokespersons. Natural wine has always been more organic with people working singly or in small groups to make the best wines they possibly can.

That was indeed then. Perhaps the world was a more innocent place. The wine world is afflicted by politics and consumerist necessity. It is also driven by personalities. Some of those personalities would like to ensure that natural wine has an exclusive reputation and clearly demarcate points of difference with other wines. A natural movement with a bullet-point charter would be proof of oversight to work against the criticism from those who complain that consumers are being hoodwinked by a purposely vague designation.

6. **But we do know who they are, these growers?** Some are certainly well known; some fly under the radar. Yes, some of them are best mates; they drop in on each other, share equipment (including horses!), go to the same parties, wear quirky t-shirts, attend small salons and slightly larger tastings. And quite a few don’t because they have so little wine to sell (such as Metras, Dard & Ribo...) By their craggy-faced visages, rough manners and horny hands shall ye know them. But their activity is not commercialised; there is no single voice that speaks authoritatively for the whole natural wine movement – and therein lies its beauty, so many characters simply getting on with the job without hype or recourse to corporate flimflam.

This point deserves re-evaluation. There may be anything between 500 – 1000 producers making what I call natural wine. According to Raisin, the natural wine ap, there are 3,002. And counting! It is very tricky to keep track, as many have risen without trace in the last couple of years. Caveat: To make a wine without sulphur is not itself enough to be working within the spirit of natural wine, although it is kind of start. The hard yards and miles must be done first in the vineyard. The assessment of who is making natural wine is subjective, and therefore controversial. As some producers seek to capitalise on natural wine status, we are witnessing instances of envy with unsubstantiated

allegations about vineyard and winery practice, all of which arises out of personal dislike or a hidden commercial agenda. Secondly, the importers and various wine fairs have become the voices of natural wine. There are differences of opinion, and more voices means more clamour and less clarity.

7. **A certain amount of silliness and cod-referentiality is required to appreciate natural wine.** Especially those goofy labels. Plus, a working knowledge of French argot. And probably an intimate acquaintance with the oeuvre of Jacques Brel. And #creativehashtags

#thatsevenmorethecasenow

8. **Natural wine begins in the vines.** No, it begins in the earth. No, it begins in the place. #goethegavemethisidea

9. **We believe that wine is a living product** and will change from day from day and even hour to hour, just as we ourselves change.

10. **Oak is the servant of wine not its master.** Natural winemakers understand this.

11. **If it is a movement (and it's not) how big could it possibly be?** We are not talking about natural wine being a drop in the ocean, but the rivers are not running with the pure stuff yet. After all, we must threaten our growers with mock violence, we get on our knees and wail piteously and bribe and cajole for our pittance of an allocation of the best stuff. Take out those Parisian cavistes and wine bar owners with their hot line to the growers, the Japanese consumers who won't drink anything else and a healthy rump of Americans, Aussies and Italians, and there's barely enough to whet your appetites and wet our whistles, let alone begin to satisfy the market we're priming over here. Small is beautiful and marginal is desirable if continuity is not a commercial issue. We gnash our teeth, but we love it as the knowledge that the wine is such a finite commodity makes it even more precious (my precious) and we become ever more determined that it goes to an appreciative home.

This is a question I am repeatedly asked. Is natural wine a niche thing, a figurative and literal drop in the wine ocean, or does it have the potential to be more. I dispute that the wines are niche and not commercial; this is more to do with what successive generations of wine drinkers wish to consume. Since the time when we first identified this as a style of wine that we were comfortable calling "natural", the market, if we can characterise it thus, has expanded enormously to embrace the wines. From one bar, a tiny handful of importers and one wine fair to bars, restaurants, several fairs, to many dozens of retailers and importers. In the UK alone. And many many more farmers and producers. However, they are not part of a single movement.

12. **99% of people who criticise natural wine have never made a bottle of wine in their lives.** 110% of statistics like this are invented.

13. **The heroes of the natural wine movement are the growers.** There are mentors and pupils, there are acolytes and fans, but no top dog, no blessed hierarchy, no panjandrum of cool albeit some are born cool, and some have coolness thrust upon them. Some growers are blessed with magical *terroir*; others fight the dirt and the climate, clawing that *terroir* magic from the bony vines. They are both artisans and artists. What impresses us about the best natural growers is their humility before nature and their congeniality, a far cry from the arrogance of those who are constantly being told their wines are wonderful a hundred times over and end up dwelling in a moated grove of self-approval.

When the history of natural wine is written (or written again) there will be some stand-out personalities. The narrative, rather than being fluid and inevitable, meanders and lurches. Without Chauvet and Lapierre and the BD guys in the Loire and some of the Triple A growers in Italy, perhaps natural wine would have taken even longer to cause ripples. And you must give enormous credit to the very few writers and commentators who put their heads above the parapet and championed this breed of vigneron.

14. **One new world grower said to me that he felt had more in common with vigneron several thousand miles away;** he understood their language, loved drinking their wines – these people were his real family.

15. **Natural wines – they all taste the same, don't they?** D'oh! Of course, they do, there isn't a scintilla of difference between these bacterially infected wines which are all made to an identical formula of undrinkability; they are totally without nuance, subtlety, complexity, and those who drink, enjoy, and appreciate natural wines evidently had their taste buds removed at a very young age with sandpaper. This canard is one dead duck.

It is still a cliché bandied about by sceptics of the style, that all natural wines taste like... cider or barnyard... or vinegar. This suggests that critics are intoxicated by generalisation.

16. **Doesn't the process of natural winemaking mask terroir?** Terroir is in the mouth of the beholder, perhaps, but the clarity, freshness, and linear quality of natural wines, supported by their natural acidity, makes them excellent vehicles for terroir expression. But bad winemaking, be it in the conventional or natural idiom, always masks terroir. In the final mix, if the wine has a distinctive accent that is not obscured by process, then something of that precious terroir signature has been preserved.

Within the spectrum of natural wines, there are styles that are much more about instant gratification than the expression of terroir. These are known as glouglou or soif wines, usually the result of carbonic maceration and short élevage. Some might say that the process of skin contact in making orange wines inhibits terroir character. This is nonsense, and the opposite is more likely to be the case. Nor does oxidative winemaking obscure terroir; it just shows it in a different context.

17. **Natural wines are incapable of greatness.** Let us put aside for a moment the notion that good taste is subjective and transport ourselves to our favourite desert island with our dog-eared copy of the *Carnet de Vigne Omnivore*, the natural wine mini bible. Because the natural wine church has many mansions; you will discover a constellation of stars lurking in its firmament. Natural wine growers don't work according to precise calibrations of sulphur levels; instead, they seek to express the quality of the grapes from their naturally farmed vineyard by keeping interventions to a bare minimum. In certain regions such as Beaujolais, Jura, and the Languedoc-Roussillon, virtually all the great names are what we might term "natural growers". Again, we don't seek to make anyone join the family or fit in with an overarching critique. Natural wine is fluid, in that vignerons who are extremists, row back from their position, whilst others, who start out conventionally, feel emboldened to take greater risks by reducing the interventions.

Since writing this I have decided that greatness is purely an illusion. What many people have traditionally called great are wines that are seemingly "architectural", constructed to such a level that you can see all the layers attaching to each other. For me, greatness is far more elusive, tantalising – and personal. Wines that have this quality throb with energy, they open and close and open again, they resist tasting notes, they inspire – initially neither like nor dislike – but feeling and activate all the senses to their most responsive.

18. **Natural wines don't age well.** Hit or myth? Myth! It is true that many natural (red) wines are intended to be drunk in the first flush of fruit preferably from the fridge. So, sue them for being generous and gouleyant. Ironically, many white wines with skin contact and deliberate oxidation have greater longevity and bone structure than red wines. But it is simply not true to assert that natural wines can't age. A 1997 Hermitage from Dard et Ribo was staggeringly profound (et in Parkadia ego), old magnums of Foillard's Morgon Côte du Py become like Grand Cru Burgundy as they morgonner, some of Breton's Bourgueils demand that you tarry ten years before becoming to grips with their grippiness. Last year we tasted a venerable 10.5% Gamay d'Auvergne from Stéphane Majeune, as thin as a pin, and still as fresh as a playful slap with a nettle, whereas the conventional big-named Burgs, Bordeaux, and Spanish whatnots alongside it all collapsed under the weight of expectation and new oak. If the definition of an ageworthy wine is that you can still taste the knackered lacquer twenty years after, then give me the impertinence of youth any day.

The health of the wine lies in the bone structure and not in the flesh (which will wither). Some natural wines have amazing purity and minerality (that word), a structure built on the most solid foundations (great farming, great grapes) and sensitive winemaking (long élevage, the best kind of flavour extraction).

19. **Natural wines are unpredictable.** You said it, kiddo. And three cheers for that. Their sheer perversity is embodied in these lines by Gerard Manley Hopkins:

*And all things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim...*

20. **My glass is empty.** As it should be – it was a glass of delicious Crozes-Hermitage Rouge from Dard & Ribo.

Natural wine recognises that not everything can be made in a petri dish. To capture the spirit of the vineyard and the flavour of the grape, one must let go – to a certain extent. That means letting go of chemical adjunctives and making decisions based on taste, intuition and experience. Natural wine is the freedom to get it wrong, and the freedom to get it very right indeed. It relishes and embraces the contradictions and dangers inherent in not being in control.

We want people to drink without fear or favour, not worry about right and wrong, leave critical judgement on hold, and enjoy wine in its most naked form.

What passes for wine among us, is not the juice of the grape. It is an adulterous mixture, brewed up of nauseous ingredients, by dunces, who are bunglers in the art of poison-making; and yet we, and our forefathers, are and have been poisoned by this cursed drench, without taste or flavour—The only genuine and wholesome beverage in England, is London porter, and Dorchester table-beer; but as for your ale and your gin, your cyder and your perry, and all the trashy family of made wines, I detest them as infernal compositions, contrived for the destruction of the human species." Tobias Smollett – Humphrey Clinker

"For as we would wish that a painter who is to draw a beautiful face, in which there is yet some imperfection, should neither wholly leave out, nor yet too pointedly express what is defective, because this would deform it, and that spoil the resemblance; so since it is hard, or indeed perhaps impossible, to show the life of a man wholly free from blemish, in all that is excellent we must follow truth exactly, and give it fully; any lapses or faults that occur, through human passions or political necessities, we may regard rather as the shortcomings of some particular virtue, than as the natural effects of vice; and may be content without introducing them, curiously and officiously, into our narrative, if it be but out of tenderness to the weakness of nature, which has never succeeded in producing any human character so perfect in virtue as to be pure from all admixture and open to no criticism."

— Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*

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“It is the wine that leads me on,
the wild wine
that sets the wisest man to sing
at the top of his lungs,
laugh like a fool – it drives the
man to dancing... it even
tempts him to blurt out stories
better never told.”

The Odyssey

Putting out mission statements tends to erode credibility, but, as the song goes, we want to accentuate the positives and eliminate the negatives in our list. Those positives that we aim to promote are wines of terroir and typicity; delicious, tasty, unmediated wines; diversity of style and indigenous grape varieties; the endeavours of small independent growers; and the importance of sustainable, organic viticulture. We work from the point of view of understanding the wine by trying to understand the country, the region, the microclimate, the vineyard, and the grower. Every wine tells a story, and that story deserves to be told.

280 different grape varieties and counting... + 417 Georgians!

The future, we believe, lies in reacquainting ourselves with “real wines”, seeking out and preserving the unusual, the distinctive and the avowedly individual. The continuing commercialisation of wine has necessarily created a uniformity of style, a reduction of numbers of grape varieties and a general orientation towards branding. We therefore applaud growers and estates such as Mas de Daumas with their rows of vines from ancient grape varieties, Claude and Etienne from Touraine for working with French rootstock, diverse Alpine growers for upholding recondite traditional indigenous grapes (life for us is no cabernet, old chum), those who work the land and harvest by hand, those who apply sensitive organic sustainable solutions and achieve biodiversity whatever the struggle. Talking about *terroir* is not mad-eyed mumbling hocus-pocus nor misty-eyed mysticism (though the French wax so poetical about it); it concerns systematically highlighting the peculiar qualities of the vineyard, getting to the roots of wine itself so to speak, and analysing how flavours derive from sympathetic farming. Quite simply it is the main reason why things *naturally* taste differently. Ultimately, we want wine to taste of the place it came from. As one of our Italian growers puts it: “We seek to express exactly what the grapes give us, be it power or structure, or finesse and elegance, rather than transform or to impose a style that the wine would not otherwise have had”.

My glass was filled with a light red wine poured from a pitcher, left on the table. I was relaxed, carefree and happy. Oh, how ruby bright that wine was; it gleamed in the sunlight. I remember clearly its enticing aroma – youthful but with a refinement that surprised me. The wine was sweetly exotic: lively on my tongue, perfectly balanced, and with a long glossy finish. It was the sort of wine that Omar Khayyam might have in mind for his desert tryst. The young woman who had poured it for me was amused when I asked what it was. It was, she said, vino rosso.

Remembrance of Wines Past – Gerald Asher

Putting our oak chips on the table, wines that appeal to us must be well-made, earthy, mineral, not necessarily commercial, yet certainly more-ish, sapid, refreshing, digestible, and capable of accompanying food. In the words of Hubert de Montille in Mondovino we like “chiselled wines”. A wine should offer pleasure from the first sniff to the draining of the final dregs, although that pleasure may evolve according to the complexity of the liquid in the glass. The pleasure, of course, is personal. We each bring something to what is there in the glass and interpret the result differently. Over-analysis is invidious in that you frequently end up criticising a wine for what it is not, rather than accepting it for what it is.

In the wine trade we seem to be in thrall to notions of correctness. We even say things like: “That is a perfectly correct Sauvignon”. Criticism like this becomes an end in itself; we are not responding to the wine per se, but to a platonic notion of correctness. This is the “zero-defect” culture which ignores the “deliciousness” of the wine. We cannot see the whole for deconstructing the minutiae, and we lose respect for the wine. We never mention enjoyment, so we neglect enjoyment. This reminds me of the American fad for highbrow literary criticism, imbued with a sense of its own importance. Wine is as a poem written for the pleasure of others, not a textual conundrum to be unpicked in a corridor of mirrors in the halls of academia. If the path be beautiful, let us not ask where it leads.

And why should wine be consistent? There are too many confected wines that unveil everything and yet reveal nothing. The requirement for homogeneity reduces wine to an alcoholic version of Coca-Cola. Restaurants, for example, are perhaps too hung up on what they think customers think. Patrick Matthews in his book “The Wild Bunch” quotes Telmo Rodriguez, a top grower in Rioja Alavesa. “We were the first to try to produce the expression of terroir, but people didn’t like the way it changed the wine... The consumer always wants to have the same wine; the trouble is if you have a bad consumer, you’ll have a bad wine.” And, of course, if you push wines that are bland and commercial, then the public will continue to drink bland and commercial wines.

The Stepford Wines...

The philosophy of selling the brand is much like having your glass of cheap plonk and drinking it. To satisfy the thirsty market wines are produced in vast quantities which, by definition, must maintain a minimum level of consistency, yet the rationale of a brand is to sell more and gain greater market share which in turn necessitates bringing more and more land on-vine at higher and higher levels of production. Thus, we can view cheap branded wine as no more than alcoholic grape juice, a simulacrum of wine, because it aspires merely to the denominator of price rather than the measure of quality.

Why should we call it wine at all? Quality wine is what growers make: it is an art as well as a science; it is also, by definition, inconsistent, because it must obey the laws of fickle Nature. Real winemaking is surrounded by an entire sub-culture: we speak of the livelihood of small growers, of the lifestyle and philosophy of the people who tend the vines throughout the year, of how the vineyards themselves have shaped the landscape over centuries and the way the wines have become a living record of their terroir and the growing season. You only need stand in a vineyard to sense its dynamics. Terroir, as we have said, concerns the farmer’s understanding of the land and respect for nature, and a desire to see a natural creation naturally expressed.

This cannot be said for a commercial product, sprayed with chemicals and pesticides, harvested by the tonne, shipped halfway across the country in huge, refrigerated trucks and made in factories with computerised technology. For factory farming read factory wine production. The relationship with the soil, the land, the growing season becomes irrelevant – if anything it’s a hindrance. Flavour profiles can be, and are, determined by artificial yeasts, oak chips, and corrective acidification. The logical extension of this approach would be to use flavouring essences to achieve the style of “wine” you require. Nature is not only driven out with a pitchfork, but also assailed with the full battery of technology. The fault lies as much at the door of the supermarkets and high street multiples as with the winemakers. Volume and stability are demanded: stability and volume are produced. Style precedes substance because there is a feeling that wine must be made safe and easy for consumers.

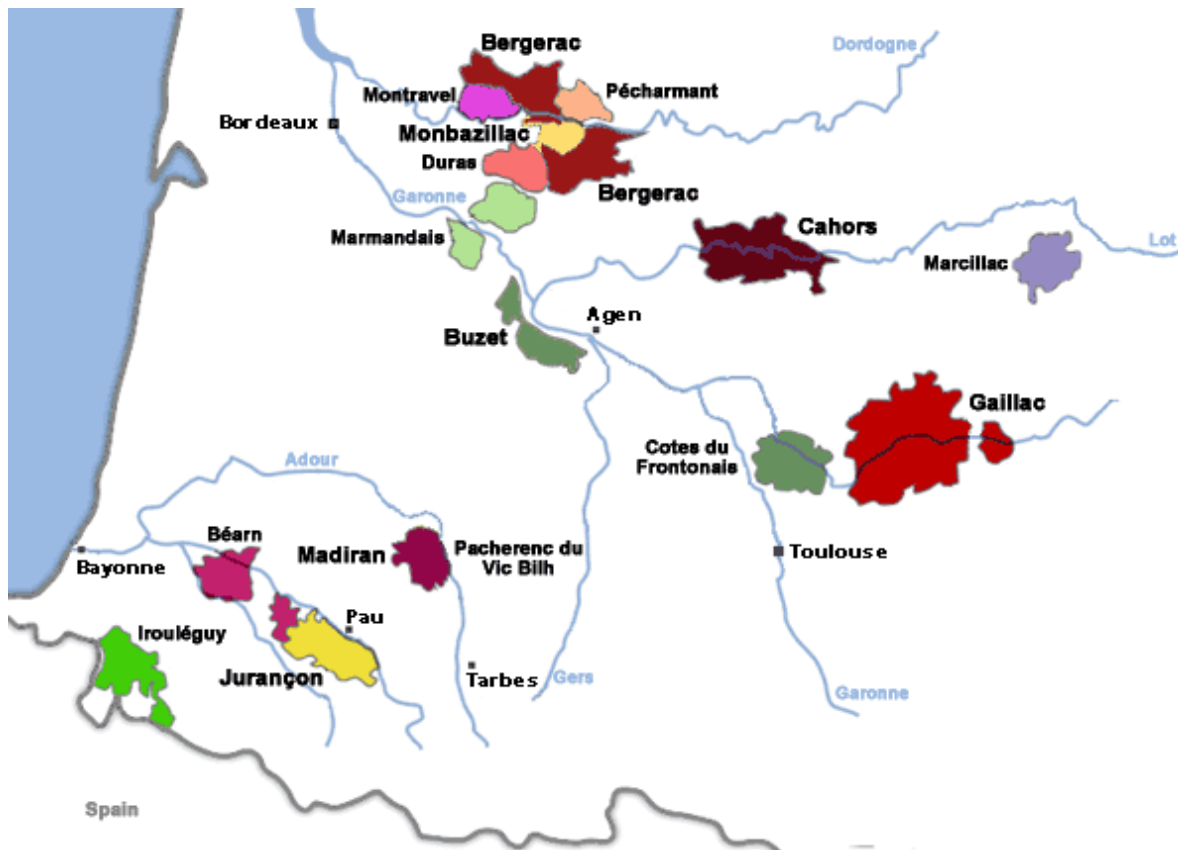
Such confected wines are to real wine what chemical air-fresheners are to wildflowers or as a clipped hedge is to a forest. Paul Draper, of Ridge Vineyards, highlights this dichotomy in what he calls *traditional winemaking* as opposed to *industrial or process winemaking*. (My italics)

Whilst it is no bad thing to have technically competent wines, it does promote a culture of what Draper calls Consumer Acceptance Panels and an acceptance of mediocrity. To adapt Hazlitt’s epigram, rules and models destroy genius. Wines are being made to win the hearts and wallets of supermarket buyers by appealing to a checklist, a common denominator of supposed consumer values. Result? Pleasant, fruity, denatured wines branded to fit into neatly shaved categories: *vini reductio ad plonkum*. Those guilty of dismissing terroir as romantic whimsy are just as much in awe to the science of winemaking by numbers (or voodoo winemaking as I prefer to call it). But where is the diversity, where is the choice?

Man cannot live by brand alone...

Research shows that branded wines dominate the market (i.e., the supermarket); these wines must therefore reflect what people enjoy drinking. This is a bogus inference, not to say an exaltation of mediocrity... Where is the supposed consumer choice – when week after week certain influential journalists act as advocates for boring supermarket wines rather than pointing people in the direction of specialist shops and wine merchants? How do we know that consumers wouldn’t prefer real wines (and paying a little more for them)? Those companies who commission surveys to support their brands are not asking the right people the right questions (otherwise they’d get the wrong answers).

There will always be branded wines, and there is a place for them, but the dead hand of globalism determines our prevailing culture of conservatism. Mass production ultimately leads to less choice and the eternal quest for a consistency denatures the product of nature with all its imperfections and angularities. We would like to give customers the opportunity to experience a diverse array of real wines produced by real people in real vineyards rather than bland wines that could be produced (and reproduced) in any region or country. There is enough mediocrity, vulgarity, and cultural imperialism in our lives. It is time to reclaim wine as something individual, pleasurable, and occasionally extraordinary.



The Vineyards of Southwest France

The same vine has a different value in different places (Pliny on terroir)

VINTAGE REPORT & NEW AGENCIES

We have stopped doing vintage reports. Growers are having to live with the effects of climate change and adapt their methods accordingly. But also, the styles of wine themselves, they are slowly a-changing. Once upon a time, vigneron embraced modernism and technical winemaking with enthusiasm, believing that intense inky luscious red and heavily-batonnaged whites were what the market was looking for (and would gain them critical acclaim). Now, although there are plenty of wines that still mimic the confected nature of top Bordeaux, a new generation of vigneron is beginning to understand the principle that “less is more.”

Yes, not all wines from the Southwest are designed to realign the molecular structure of your palate. *Dom. Plaisance Penavayre*, from the Fronton, is, as one might infer from the name, pleasing on the gums, as are the more structured wines of *Domaine Le Roc*. Look at wines from Négrette, Duras and Gamay for alternative summer quaffing. For those of you who aspire to speak in “russet yeas and honest kersey noes” our range of Gaillacs (five) & Marcillacs (two) will drink happily in your idiom. Two Marcillacs?! As Lady Bracknell might have animadverted: “To have acquired one Marcillac may be regarded as good fortune; to have acquired two looks like careless obsession.” (I’ve been told to leave that line in again.) Big can be beautiful though especially if you enjoy tannin on your tusks or lees in your lungs. Contrast the jaw-dropping Escausses *Vigne de l’Oubli* – another “semi” Sauvignon in the Moulin des Dames bracket (lots of lees contact, oak, thick with flavour – we second that emulsion!) with the more traditional ethereal qualities of a Plageoles Mauzac-inflected Gaillac.

The red wines pit pure extract of black night against pale-perfumed subtlety: the Escausses reds eat Saint-Emilions for breakfast; the Plageoles wines are in their own palely loitering uncompromising idiom. Check out the Prunelart – the art of Prunel. The biodynamic wines of *Eliau da Ros* straddle both styles: certain cuvées are frolicsome, others demand a decanter and attention. And don’t forget Monsieur Luc de Conti, aka Monsieur Mayonnaise, aka Le Vinarchiste. With lower yields and greater fruit extraction the wines from Bergerac are an impressive reminder of what can be achieved with Bordeaux grape varieties at a fair price. But this is all so mundane, you cry...

A former trip to Malbec-istan one yielded our xithopagi, (lots of scrabble points) most notably the wines of *Clos de Gamot* whose bottles might bear the ancient Roman warning “exegi monumentum aere perennius” (I have reared a monument more lasting than brass) – translated into modern wine speak as don’t forget your toothbrush. Creosote them gums or lay down for a millennium or two. The “classic” wines from *Château du Cèdre* and *Château Paillas* are, relatively speaking, much more amenable beasts; they slide down your throat like the Good Lord in red velvet breeches to quote Frederic Lemaitre (Pierre Brasseur) in *Les Enfants du Paradis* – not! This year the big boys are jousting to make the supreme super cuvée for squillionaires. Step forward “Le Grande Cèdre” from Château du Cèdre and “Le Pigeonnier” from Château Lagrezette. Never mind the hilarious prices – these are wines made with meticulous care from minuscule yields and should be sipped rather than supped. To coin a phrase, we’ve copped (the Cot) in the Lot.

Milton described “a wilderness of sweets” in *Paradise Lost*. Check out your quintessential nectar options with Jean-Bernard Larrieu’s Jurançons, Pacherencs from Madiran, the wondrous Vin d’Autan from Plageoles and finally the honeydewsome twosome from Domaine l’Ancienne Cure and discover the glories of nature and the winemaker’s art.

GRAPE VARIETIES OF GASCONY: a quick guide

Béarn : Tannat, Merlot, Cabs, Fer Servadou
Bergerac Blanc : Sauvignon, Sémillon, Muscadelle
Bergerac Rouge : Merlot, Cabs, Malbec
Buzet : Merlot, Cabernets, Malbec
Cahors : Malbec (Cot), Merlot, Tannat
Côtes de Duras Blanc : Sauvignon, Sémillon, Muscadelle
Côtes de Duras Rouge : Merlot, Cabs, Malbec
Côtes du Frontonnais : Négrette, Syrah, Cabs, Gamay
Côtes de Gascogne : Colombard, Ugni Blanc, Gros Manseng
Côtes de Saint Mont Blanc : Courbu, Arrufiac, Mansengs
Côtes de Saint Mont Rouge : Tannat, Cabernets
Côtes du Marmandais : Merlot, Abouriou, Cabernet

Vins d’Enraygues Le Fel (VDQS) : Fer Servadou, Cabernet Franc
Gaillac Blanc : Mauzac, Loin de l’Oeil, Ondenc, Sauv, Sem, Muscadelle
Gaillac Rouge : Braucol, Duras, Prunelart, Merlot, Cab Franc, Gamay, Syrah
Irouléguay Blanc : Mansengs, Courbu
Irouléguay Rouge : Tannat, Cabernets
Jurançon : Gros Manseng, Petit Manseng, Courbu, Caramalet, Lauzet
Madiran : Tannat, Cabs, Fer Servadou
Marcillac : Mansois
Monbazillac : Sémillon, Sauvignon, Muscadelle
Montravel : Sauvignon, Sémillon, Muscadelle
Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh : Mansengs, Arrufiac, Courbu
Tursan Blanc : Baroque, Gros Manseng, Sauvignon, Sémillon

NOT ONLY... BUT ALSO:

Mansoi(s) is **Braucol** in Gaillac, **Pinenc** in Jurançon and in Madiran – also called **Fer Servadou**

Malbec is also known as **Côt** and **Auxerrois**

Duras has nothing to do with Côtes de Duras

Confused...? You will be!

FOOD OF THE SOUTH-WEST

“Wine is a part of society because it provides a basis not only for a morality but also for an environment; it is an ornament in the slightest ceremonials of French daily life, from the snack to the feast, from the conversation at the local café to the speech at a formal dinner.”

- Roland Barthes

Paula Wolfert, one of the best of modern food writers, in her seminal book *The Cooking of South-West France* identifies the signature of the region which she terms ‘evolved food’, dishes rooted in historical traditions with natural taste affinities and their own logic. Such dishes, writes Stephanie Alexander, have come to meet the needs and the lifestyle of a hardworking and healthy people, who, in the main, cook what they produce and waste very little. The food’s deep flavours result from the slow melding of simple ingredients. The garbures from Landes illustrate that cooking a staple dish is about enthusiastic attention to detail. A Béarnais dish in origin it has several local variations depending on the ingredients and when it is eaten. Salt pork, cabbage and beans are the mainstay, but the many gastronomic embellishments sustain the ancient mystique of the dish. Some cooks will add a fricassée of onions and vegetables fried in goose fat, others will make their garbure into a kind of gratin, and the luxuriant versions will contain slowly amalgamated confit of goose. There is much discussion and lyrical debate about food in the South-West, a keen respect for the ingredients and for the process of cooking and an almost mystical appreciation of giving and doing credit to the bounty of the land. Truly, the best things should not be rushed.

The Whole Hog – Hamming it up in Bayonne

Ou il ya un bon cochon, il ya une bonne menagère

“Lou Moussur, as he is known. Nothing is lost with me.” The pig is treated with respect, almost reverence in the Southwest. Truly, nothing is wasted with the pig: saucissons, rillettes, andouille and boudin to rendered fat, tripe, tongue, and trotters – a culinary nose-to-tail journey in the pot or on the plate. Salt-cured country ham may be eaten raw or sautéed Basque style with eggs fried in goose fat or made into a kind of persillade and used to give certain dishes a lift. I like a rosé from the Fronton, Béarn or Irouléguay, or a lightish Cahors with this, or a fresh young Gaillac made from Duras or Braucol. With a confit of pork, or a typical terrine, or chorizo with lentils, a savoury sapid red from Fronton, Marcillac or Marmande is a good bet.

Live a Little – Liver Lot – Fee Fi Foie Gras

The making of foie gras is both a cottage industry and an industry. Fattening the goose may be a controversial issue outside the Southwest and any factory farm approach is certainly to be deplored. The livers are soft (they should have the suppleness of cold butter when raw) and perishable; they can be cooked and tinned; *mi cuit* (barely cooked and vacuum-packed) or raw. The raw livers may be steamed in a towel or *tournichon* or poached in delicious solutions and subsequently served cold or warm (pan-fried or grilled). There are more than a hundred recipes for foie gras, but it can be a stand-alone dish with some fresh baked brioche and a jelly made from Sauternes or grapes. A well-chilled Sauternes or Monbazillac is traditional; the late harvest wines of Jurançon and Pacherenc are equally fabulous. The meticulous care taken in preparation and cooking of the foie gras is mirrored by the elaboration of the wine; the buttery, silky textural decadence of the liver begs to be matched by a sweet wine with singing acidity.

Mushrooms at the Auberge – Morel Fibre for the Truffle Generation

Paula Wolfert recounts her first experience eating truffles: “It was baked in a salt crust and served on a doily. The waiter cracked it open with a mallet, releasing the powerful penetrating bouquet. I sliced the truffle myself and ate in on toast, with a light sprinkling of walnut oil and a pinch of salt. As I ate, I sipped a glass of Médoc. The truffle seemed to me like earth and sky and sea. I felt at one with nature that my mouth was filled with the taste of the earth. There was a ripeness, a naughtiness, something beyond description. A gastronomic black diamond, it was utter luxury and earthiness combined.”

Fresh ceps can be eaten raw with olive oil and lemon or stewed gently à la Bordelaise with olive oil and garlic (ham and parsley may be added). A simple red with the taste of the earth would hit the mark, a Cahors, Marcillac or Côtes de Saint Mont. Ceps can be also used with potatoes or in the classic *Salade Landaise* with sautéed strips of duck breast, warm croutons, rocket, endive and radicchio and fresh herbs.

Picking a Peck of Piquillo Peppers – The Catalan Influence

Piperade is a classic light supper dish (which can be eaten at lunch or breakfast). The sauce Basquaise is made with onions, garlic, peppers, and pimentos combined with lightly scrambled eggs and fried ham. *Poulet à la Basquaise* is a classic dish containing red and green peppers, beautiful ripe tomatoes, good-quality ham from Bayonne as well as garlic and cayenne. A rosé from Irouléguay would be the perfect accompaniment.

FOOD OF THE SOUTH-WEST continued...

Cassoulet S'il Vous Plait – 57 varieties – Beanz meanz duckz

I love the cassoulet debate. It mixes science and folklore, regional rivalry, fierce pride, stubborn traditionalism. Eternal verities about food itself are enshrined in the debate, the genius of cooking which is about taking the slowest and most deliberate of pains. Technicalities aside the main ingredients are confit of duck leg, pork knuckle or bacon, sausage, and broad beans. Be it from Toulouse, Carcassonne or Castelnaudary this is a rustic glutinous dish begging for a wine of high acidity and digestible tannin, a Cahors, for example, or a red wine from Malepère, or even a garrigue-scented Languedoc red.

Fromage

Roquefort, the celebrated blue-veined ewe's milk cheese matured in the limestone caves of Chambalou, deserves nothing less a brilliant Jurançon. And don't forget the plump fresh figs. One talks airily of food and wine marriages, but this threesome represents connubial bliss. Salt, sweet, creamy, sharp, ripeness – the oppositions are sublime attractions. *Cabecou de Rocamadour* is a silky goat's cheese, milky when young, fruity, and piquant when it is affiné. Cabecous can be eaten in several ways; just as they are; semi-molten, having been passed under a hot grill, on toast or on leaves or on country bread drizzled with honey. A Sauvignon from Côtes de Duras or sharp young Gaillac works best. The cheeses of the Pyrenees are very fine especially the *Ossau Iraty*, the cow's cheese *Crottin du Poivre* and the 100% sheep's milk *Ardi Gasna*. *Le Cabri-Ariegois* is a goat's cheese version of Vacherin, wrapped in thin strips of pine bark and with a washed rind. Finally, we should mention two cheeses from the mountains of the Aveyron: *Cantal* and *Laguiole*, the historic former mentioned by Pliny the Elder, no less. Uncork your best bottle of Marcillac – that's what it's there for! *Gaperon* is from the Auvergne; it is flavoured heavily with garlic and pepper and made with skimmed milk or buttermilk. Look for the sweetest juiciest Gamay, bang it in the fridge and guzzle it with this rustic cheese.

Minding Your Prunes and Quinces

Gascony has a wonderful array of dishes to appeal to the sweetest of teeth. Traditional desserts include *les daudines*, a kind of pain perdu, *millas* (a Languedoc version with cornmeal porridge that is fried and sprinkled with sugar), otherwise crepes, waffles (*gaufres*) and the famous *Gateau Basque*. Clafouti with cherries, apricots and plums is an internationally renowned and frequently copied dessert. Justly famous, also, are the croustades, pastis and tourtières, regional versions of pastry pies, filled with sweetened fruit and then baked. Using fruits in savoury dishes has a rich tradition: the prunes and quinces that often feature in meat stews are part of the Moorish culinary heritage that appeared in France by way of Spain many centuries ago. Roast figs, Pyrenean style are another seasonal treat. Prunes themselves are often marinated in Armagnac (or Sauternes) for a period before being added to desserts. Gateau Basque itself is a cake filled with pastry cream flavoured with almonds, anise, rum, orange flower water and Armagnac. Sponge cakes such as madeleines are fun to dunk in brandy or sweet wine. Sweet wine is not always necessarily the ideal companion for sweet food: the combination can become cloying. *Vins Doux Naturels* with a touch of bitterness – such as Muscat de Rivesaltes, Banyuls or Maury – are more appropriate. However, with simple fruit pastries or a bowl of white peaches a glass of chilled Jurançon is a pleasure not to be denied.

Le Trou Gascon

Taste of the earth, dancing fire, velvet flame. If Cognac has finesse, Armagnac has fiery power, a hearty roughness – this is the distinction le trou Gascon will give you. Like the raw country wines from Gascony Armagnac roughens you up, helps you to digest and leaves the day/evening open for further indulgence. A dash of the spirit will lift a daube or stew, cut the richness of a sauce or perfume and flavour fruits.

“Happy and successful cooking doesn't rely only on know-how; it comes from the heart, makes great demands on the palate and needs enthusiasm and a deep love of food to bring it to life.”

- Georges Blanc, from '*Ma Cuisine des Saisons*'

Lamb, veal, pork and game, ducks and geese, chicken and guinea fowl, truffles, ceps and mushrooms, chestnuts and cheeses, prunes, and plums endless variants, here a Catalan influence, there a Languedocian note, the terroirs of Landes, the Dordogne and Quercy all yielding their diverse signatures. Writing in generalities can't do justice to the regional vitality, the sheer diversity of the cuisine of the area that we call Southwest France. Moreover, every recipe is a kind of history, and every family has its story to tell about the way it should be cooked. It would be a mistake nevertheless to assert that things stand still. As recipes are handed on, subtle refinements are made, sturdiness may be replaced by lightness, but the *cuisine de terroir* always remains close to the earth – each dish invariably constructed around the strength of local ingredients. In the Southwest food and cooking is that most tangible and sensuous necessity of people's lives, writes Paula Wolfert. We believe that to appreciate fully the wines of the Southwest you must also experience the food and that the pleasure you take in the one nurture a desire for the other.

GASCONY & THE LANDES

*Free fighters, free lovers, free spend-
ers –
The Cadets of Gascoyne the de-
fenders
Of old homes, old names and old splen-
dors.*

Edmond Rostand – *Cyrano de Bergerac*

The Southwest, with its rich gastronomy, love of song and rugby, will always be our favoured region. We have sought to demonstrate the individuality and integrity of the wines from this area by focusing on their uncompromising strong flavours, their compatibility with food and, how, once you've developed a taste for them, nothing else confers the same kind of bibulous pleasure (well, almost nothing). There is unparalleled variety as well: from the modern fruity wines of the Côtes de Gascogne, through the Bordeaux-influenced efforts of Duras and Bergerac, to the dark and powerful rustic curiosities of Cahors, Madiran and Irouléguy. These, therefore, are wines that reflect the notion of terroir; not only the microclimate, soil & growing conditions, but also the local culture and heritage & even the personality of the growers themselves. Gascony itself is a land of rolling hills and fortified towns, of great chefs, of foie gras, truffles and *garbures*, and, of course, Armagnac. In the Landes, as Paula Wolfert observes, the people are truly sweet; their idea of a burning issue is whether one should put white wine or red in a wild mushroom ragout.

PRODUCTEURS PLAIMONT, Caves de Saint Mont

The Caves Co-operative de Saint-Mont has established a reputation for unrivalled consistency over the last ten years. The basic white, being a blend of Colombard (40%) & Ugni Blanc (60%), is light, extremely fruity and refreshing with pleasant acidity. It would be far too easy for Les Caves de Pyrène to list purely commercial wines, so we've added a Côtes de Saint Mont Blanc which contains Gros Manseng, Arrufiac & Courbu. The grapes are picked by hand and when the juice has fermented the wine is transferred into rotating steel cylinders & the lees are pumped back. Fresh as an iced buzzsaw on the palate, this has attitudinous pithy (crunchy celery) Gascon-style drinkability. The baby white has acquired a ruddy partner, namely Le Lesc rouge, a blend of Tannat, Cabernet and Merlot, an honest fruit-driven style with cherry-skin crunch and white pepper. Great with a plate of pimentos de padrones.

Plaimont are pioneers in the farming and production of ancient local grape varieties. Their Manseng Noir first exhibits a nose of violets, then an astonishing balance on the palate and a moderate richness in alcohol underscored by a fantastic acidity. Softly rounded tannins are apparent from the very first months of the élevage period. This varietal wine displays a unique aromatic typicity: spices, elderflower, and tapenade. Unicorn ahoy!

The Trois Fontaines duo are from an organic parcel of vines and show the benefit of conscientious farming.

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| 2023 | LE LESC BLANC, COTES DE GASCOGNE ~ Ugni Blanc, Colombard | W |
| 2023 | LE LESC BLANC, COTES DE GASCOGNE – 10-litre BIB | W |
| 2010 | SAINT-MONT BLANC MILLESIME D'EXCEPTION ~ Gros Manseng, Arrufiac, Courbu | W |
| 2022 | COTES DE GASCOGNE ROUGE « TROIS FONTAINES » ~ Cab Sauv, Merlot, Tannat ~ organic | R |
| 2022 | LE MANSENG NOIR | R |

Porthos: *[he puts the rope around his neck and prepares to jump]* Farewell, world... farewell to useless Porthos.

[jumps]

[Aramis and Athos are watching the building from the outside]

Aramis: It's alright; I sawed through the beam.

[the building promptly collapses, and Athos stares at Aramis in disbelief]

Aramis: Well, I'm a genius, not an engineer!

The Three Musketeers

DOMAINE JEANDAUGE, SEBASTIAN FEZAS, Pays du Gers ~ Organic conversion/BD methods

In 2012, this family estate was under conventional farming methods. Then Sébastien Fezas stopped the use of weedkillers and planted all the rows with green cover crops from autumn to spring, using organic practices. It has taken a few years to re-establish the soils, the biodiversity, the vegetation and thus to have grapes suitable for natural vinification. In 2017 he made his first vintage of a rosé and a white with indigenous yeasts and no other additions, only 2mg/l of SO2 before bottling. Since 2019, with the help of Dominique Andiran (natural winemaker, friend, and neighbour), Sébastien has been proudly able to sell his 'jus' to other fellow winemakers (in the Loire to Bertrand Jousset & Frantz Saumon, and in Jurançon, Jean Baptiste Semmartin). He values their relationships and believes sharing of the same values with such passionate producers is essential. Since autumn 2018, organic conversion was initiated, with the implementation of biodynamics on the whole vineyard. Biodynamic compost (Maria Thun dung and preparation 500) is used alongside copper and herbal tisanes (dandelion, horsetail, comfrey, nettle, etc.) with the help of the lunar calendar. A local shepherd has loaned his 50 sheep to graze the vineyards.

Partie Fin is the white made from Colombard and Ugni Blanc, whole bunch fermented in concrete, all natural, aged on the lees before blending. No sulphur. The wine is properly turbid with leesy intensity and flavours of grapefruit and white spice. Its red equivalent is 100 % Syrah, part destemmed, the rest whole bunch, fermented also in concrete and pressed after 13 days after a semi-carbonic maceration. Inky-dark red with wild forest fruit notes, blackberries, and blueberries. The wine is glycerous and coats the mouth with thick layers of dark fruit.

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|------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 2022 | PARTIE FINE VDF BLANC ~ Colombard | W |
| 2023 | LA BAIE ~ Tannat | R |
| 2022 | FRANCHE LIPPEE ~ Syrah | R |
| 2021 | PISTACHE VDF ROUGE | R |

DOMAINE DE MENARD, ELISABETH & HENRY PRATAVIERA, Côtes de Gascogne

Situated in Gondrin in Bretagne d'Armagnac Domaine de Ménard is one of the new wave of estates making highly reckonable Gascon white. The terroir for the Cuvée Marine is special with a subsoil comprising decomposed seashell (similar to that of Chablis) with a clay/calcareous topsoil, which allows the blend of Colombard, Ugni Blanc and Gros Manseng to express fully its minerality and purity. The baby Gascogne is a blend of Colombard and Ugni Blanc with immediate tangy richness and grapey freshness. Subtle hints of spice and pear mingle with peachiness on the finish. The Marine is elegant and aromatic, with beautifully defined citrus flavours of lemon and grapefruit and mineral notes of chalk and seashell.

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|------|--|----|
| 2023 | COTES DE GASCOGNE UGNI BLANC COLOMBARD | W |
| 2023 | COTES DE GASCOGNE "CUVEE MARINE" | W |
| 2021 | CUVEE D'OR MOELLEUX | Sw |

“The available worlds looked pretty grim. They had little to offer him because he had little to offer them. He had been extremely chastened to realize that although he originally came from a world which had cars and computers and ballet and Armagnac, he didn’t, by himself, know how any of it worked.”

The Ultimate Hitchhiker’s Guide – Douglas Adams



1

Le Carré des Fantômes

Domaine d’Aurensan has just launched ‘Le Carré des Fantômes’, an Armagnac blend of the six very rare grape varieties authorised to produce AOC Armagnac.

The production of AOC Armagnac authorises ten grapes, though for the most part, producers use the four main varieties of Ugni Blanc, Baco, Folle Blanche and Colombard. The other six bygone varieties have however been making a bit of a comeback over the last few years and add even more to the complex diversity that is Armagnac.

With Armagnac in her veins, so to speak, Caroline Rozes and her family at Domaine d’Aurensan in the Armagnac Tenarèze production zone, started planting all ten grapes in 2014.

The ancient varieties of Plant de Graise, Mauzac Blanc, Meslier St François, Jurançon Blanc, Mauzac Rosé and Clairette de Gascogne, are what the Rozes family called the ‘Phantom grapes’ and they have been planted at Domaine d’Aurensan on a single plot called ‘le Carré des Fantômes’.

This “complantation” was common practice before phylloxera and made it possible to reduce disease pressure on the one hand and to ensure a minimum harvest on the other hand. The Carré des Fantômes is grown without pesticides.

The subsoil here contains banks of lake limestone, some 20 million years old. These limestone soils are high in minerals such as anhydrite and gypsum, which associated with the decalcification clays, create a soil with an original mineral composition. The plot has also undergone a slight compaction, resulting in a deep and homogeneous soil, constituting a unique micro-terroir for these phantom grape varieties. Finally, it slopes towards the west and therefore is subject to ocean winds ensuring good ventilation.

Never seen in Armagnac, the new blend of these six forgotten varieties, ‘Le Carré des Fantômes’ named after this vineyard plot, are distilled in an Armagnac alembic at 58% abv. Due to its distillation process, no other spirit than Armagnac maintains closer proximity to its original raw material. The notion of terroir takes on its full meaning here.

There is no sugar, no colouring, and no filtration. The final Armagnac is 46% abv.

The nose on the Carré is expressive and of great delicacy. On the palate, the attack is powerful and full of freshness. It immediately reveals notes of fleshy and juicy fruits (pear, apricot, peach...) then evolves into subtle aromas such as honey and linden tree blossom. A fine *eau-de-vie* that offers both freshness and unprecedented aromatic richness.

Pamela: Derek?
 Del: Mm ... brandy, please, Pamela.
 Pamela: Armagnac?
 Del: Yeah, that'll do if you're out of brandy.

Only Fools and Horses

DOMAINE D'AURENSAN, FAMILLE ROZES, VINTAGE ARMAGNACS

The Aurensan vineyard – a family venture run by father Bernard and his two daughters, Sophie and Caroline, spreads over five hectares of land in the Tenarèze region of Armagnac and comprises Ugni Blanc, Folle Blanche and Colombard planted on chalky-clay soils. The Tenarèze Armagnacs tend to be structured, powerful yet stylish.

The estate places a great emphasis on the soils, and to that end, have started farming organically. Everything is done by hand in the vineyard and according to the needs of each vine with careful attention to pruning, shoot-thinning, and trellising.

Grapes are harvested when they reach full maturity for distillation, which means a good degree of acidity and low sugar. Vinification can then go ahead without the need for oenological products (yeasts, sulphur). Distillation takes place in a classic Armagnac single still, continuously heated. After this process, the brandy is collected at the bottom of the column and taken away to be matured in barrel.

The cellars at Domaine d'Aurensan are very humid, which favours a long, progressive ageing. The casks, made from wood from oak trees grown on their estate, bring aromatic singularity to the eaux-de-vie. Bottling is by order and to demand and done without filtration.

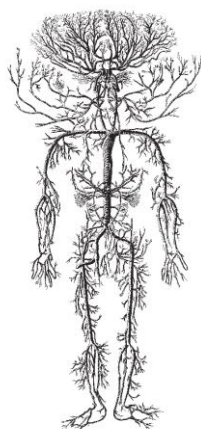
This is known as Triple Zero Armagnac – no sugar, no colouring and no water is added. Whilst ten grape varieties are allowed to be used by historical decree only four major ones are commonly seen. The others have become known as ghost grape varieties. Aurensan have replanted one of the rarest – Plant de Graise – for its rich texture and incredibly long aromas.

According to the 1936 decree of Armagnac AOC (Protected designation of origin), ten grape varieties are officially recognized as suitable for the production of the eau-de-vie: Folle Blanche, Ugni Blanc, Colombard, Jurançon, Blanquette, Mauzac Rose, Clairette de Gascon, Meslier Saint-François, Plant de Graise and Baco 22A. Only four of them are commonly used nowadays (Ugni Blanc, Colombard, Baco, Folle Blanche), to the point that others are called the « ghost grape varieties ».

Yet, these forgotten varieties built the reputation and the aromatic richness of Armagnac in the past. The most interesting among them is Plant de Graise that gives wonderful eau-de-vie characterized by their fat texture and very long-lasting aromas.

This is the variety Aurensan decided to reintroduce in their vineyard.

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| NV | LE CARRE DES FANTOMES | Arm |
| NV | DOMAINE D'AURENSAN ASSEMBLAGE 15 ANS | Arm |
| NV | DOMAINE D'AURENSAN ASSEMBLAGE "30 ANS D'AGE" | Arm |
| 2001 | DOMAINE D'AURENSAN VINTAGE | Arm |
| 1998 | DOMAINE D'AURENSAN VINTAGE | Arm |
| 1977 | DOMAINE D'AURENSAN VINTAGE | Arm |
| 1973 | DOMAINE D'AURENSAN VINTAGE | Arm |
| 1961 | DOMAINE D'AURENSAN VINTAGE | Arm |



BERGERAC & THE DORDOGNE VALLEY

Bergerac and its associated appellations are strung out along the Dordogne River valley. Despite having been virtually annihilated by phylloxera a century ago and being viewed simply as an extension of Bordeaux, the wines are now rapidly beginning to acquire their own discrete identities. Of the various inner appellations Montravel is associated with a variety of dry, medium and sweet white wines, Saussignac is sweet Bergerac with a peppermint lick, Monbazillac is renowned for the stunning quality of its unctuous botrytised Sauternes-style wines, the delightfully-named Rosette, named after a tiny village, has a mere six growers making deliciously floral medium-sweet wines, whilst Pécharmant, which lies furthest east on the river, is an AOC for red wines only and has a particular gout-à-terroir derived from a mineral-rich subsoil.

In nature, nothing is perfect, and everything is perfect. Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways, and they're still beautiful.
~ Alice Walker

DOMAINE DE L'ANCIENNE CURE, CHRISTIAN ROCHE, Monbazillac – Organic – Certified AB
Monbazillac has a long history (known as early as the 14th century) and is one of the world's great sweet wines. The vineyard on Monbazillac hill is on limestone interbedded with molassic sands and marl and the special micro-climate of its position on the north-facing slopes is particularly conducive to those autumnal mists which harbour the microscopic fungoid growth called botrytis cinerea.

The Cuvée Abbaye, (60% Muscadelle, 20% Semillon, 15% Chenin, 5% Ondenc) picked on successive tries through the vineyard) with its spanking botrytis, is stunning, a wine to give top Sauternes a run for its money. Deep gold, honeyed, fat with peachy botrytis tones, gingerbread, hazelnuts, fresh mint, and eucalyptus on the palate. The Ancienne Cure is mini-Mon-bee, marzipan, orange peel and spices. Christian Roche has emerged in the last five years as one of the best growers in this appellation.

"A charcuterie in Aurillac or Vic-sur-Cère or some other small but locally important town will possibly provide a paté the like of which you have never tasted before, or a locally cured ham, a few slices of which you will buy and carry away with a salad, a kilo of peaches, a bottle of Monbazillac and a baton of bread, and somewhere on a hillside amid the mile upon mile of golden broom or close to a splashing waterfall you will have, just for once, the ideal picnic." (Elizabeth David)

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|------|--|----|
| 2022 | MONBAZILLAC "JOUR DE FRUIT" – ½ bottle | Sw |
| 2022 | MONBAZILLAC "CUVEE ABBAYE" – 50cl | Sw |

**CHATEAU TOUR DES GENDRES & ALBERT DE CONTI, LUC DE CONTI, Bergerac – Organic - ~ Certified AB
Agrocert**

An Italian family that settled just south of Bergerac in SW France in 1925 and set up an agricultural business. Luc de Conti is the third generation, inherited some old vines and planted more parcels, while his wife managed the rest of the business. They were joined eventually by Luc's cousin, Francis. The wine, a red, called Chateau Tour des Gendres Rouge was made in 1986, followed by a white next vintage, and the gastronomic wines called Moulin des Dames a few years later. In 1994 they trialled organic farming on the parcel called "Les Gendres" and by 2005 had converted their entire farm to organic viticulture. They continued to experiment and innovate with single plot farming for each of the grape varieties, experimenting with zero-sulphur winemaking and transitioning away from new oak to using foudres and even amphorae.

How do you like them grapes: The Bordeaux varieties: Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon for the reds; Sauvignon, Semillon and Muscadelle for the whites. One cuvee called "Vigne d'Albert" is from a plot of vines in Saint-Julien d'Eymet and contains other original grapes such as MÉRILLE (locally known as Périgord, Abouriou and Fer Servadou).

In the vineyard: Fully organic since 2005 - certified by Agrocert. Travail du sol to improve drainage. Organic composting. No synthetic products. Use of some biodynamic methods such as herbal teas. Guyot pruning is practiced – the aim is to reach a total of 5-6 bunches of grapes per vine.

In the winery: Intervening on the wines depending on the vintages: fresh wines, fruity wines, wines to age, the discovery of a certain variety or an expression of one single plot of vines... They blend and mature wines reflecting on each year, desires, terroirs, and ambitions. Native yeast ferments and yeast lees are prized, adding richness and texture to the wines and batonnage is practiced. The red grapes are destemmed and undergo micro-oxygenation according to the cuvee, whereas the whites have a brief cold maceration to extract extra material. The fresher wines age in stainless steel tanks, a variety of foudres for those that will stand the test of time and the De Contis have recently introduced amphorae into their cellar. The wines are only lightly filtered, but occasionally fined with gelatine.

QI: Luc was the President of the Federation of Bergerac wines and oversaw mapping out the terroirs of the region. He was also known by the sobriquet: "Monsieur Mayonnaise" for his devotion to lees-stirring.

Food match: The lighter reds would be ideal candidates for rillettes on toast. The more structured wines would happily partner confit of duck or cassoulet or a game terrine. For the lighter whites, river fish cooked with a beurre blanc sauce or a plateau of fruits de mer, and for the more unctuous Moulin des Dames try this with truffles, goat's cheese (or blue cheese) or chicken with morels.

Philosophy: "Winemakers and farmers should relearn to have confidence in the nature – everything has been put into place to work perfectly naturally, without our help. The more we try to intervene through creating a 'false' balance and trying to manage everything all the time, the more danger and restrictions there will be for the nature in the long run. Putting an almost-dead soil on the drip cannot and will not be a long-term solution. On the other hand, the more we learn how to tolerate the threats of the nature, by adapting ourselves to it and not the opposite, the more the biodiversity will naturally balance things out, the more the soil will give us, meaning our wines will be more authentic."

Important to note: The domaine has now been split into Albert de Conti (the oldest vines) looked after by Guillaume and Paul and their friend Yann and the original Château Tour des Gendres, supervised by Luc de Conti and the rest of the family.

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|------|--|----|
| 2023 | ALBERT DE CONTI PET NAT SAUVIGNON/CHENIN | Sp |
| 2023 | BERGERAC BLANC "CUVEE DES CONTI" | W |
| 2022 | MOULIN DES DAMES BLANC | W |
| 2022 | CANTALOUETTE ROUGE | R |
| 2023 | LA VIGNE D'ALBERT | R |
| 2021 | BERGERAC ROUGE "LA GLOIRE DE MON PERE" | R |

"The last time that I trusted a dame was in Paris in 1940. She was going out to get a bottle of wine. Two hours later, the Germans marched into France."

Sam Diamond in Murder by Death (1976)

ANTHOLOGIA AND THE NATURE OF WINE TASTING

Many dozens of books have fully explored the mechanics of taste, its fixities and definites, and there are numerous systems to codify or judge these. Sometimes I wonder if this is not a case of “we murder to dissect”. I would like to propose an alternative romantic notion that wine is a liquid vessel of experience waiting to be tapped by the poet within us, by alluding to the primary imagination, that which Coleridge refers to in his *Biographia Literaria* as “the living power and prime agent of all human perception... a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM”. This may be linked to our primary unmediated experiential perception of wine, an imaginative commitment which is creative in that it is inspirational, receptive, and spontaneous. The secondary imagination according to Coleridge “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate” and so we use it to make sense of our primary experiences and shape them into words, culminating in the act of creation or, in our extended metaphor, the moment when wine becomes word. Tasting (wine) can be a sensory conduit through which we explore our memories and emotions and, like the contemplation of art, has the capacity to transform us positively.

The current orthodoxies in wine tasting seem to date back to Locke’s model of the mind as *tabula rasa* – totally passive in itself and acted upon only by the external stimuli of the senses. Reducing wine to its material components is like reducing a rainbow to its discrete prismatic colours – a pure function of the mechanism of the eye. But there is a relationship between man and nature to be teased out: a *camera-obscura* can reproduce the rainbow insofar that it imitates the action of the eye, and, similarly, one can measure the physical contents (acidity, alcohol, tannin, sugar) of wine with laboratory instruments. As what the camera does not do is *to perceive*, which the romantics would define as a sentient act, and therefore an emotional experience, neither do the instruments in the laboratory taste the wine.

So far so obvious. The romantics would further say that the mind was an *esemplastic*, active, shaping organism with the capacity for growth. If we look at tasting merely as the science of accounting or describing phenomena, we diminish our own role in the process. Without the taster there would be no taste.

Some wines yield so much that they *demand* the deepest absorption from the taster. The *Anthologia Blanc* from Luc de Conti is for me one such. Allow me to wax lyrical. I poured a glass: its colour was striking, a definitive old gold that seemed to trap the light in its embrace. This peach-hued song of sunset with resonant nose-honeying warmth was truly the “yeast of Eden”. If the colour drew me in, then the nose conjured a riot of sensuous (and sensual) images. One breathes in tropical aromas of candied apple, coconut, plump peach, and honeydew vying with exotic Indian spice – there’s cumin, fenugreek and dried ginger ... and as the wine warms and develops after each swirl in the glass the leesy butteriness which reined in the rampant fruit dissolves, and one is left with sweet balm tempered by the most wonderful natural fresh fruit acidity. Experiencing the *Anthologia* for the first time was an epiphany for me, like the beauty of a sunset “...the time between the lights when colours undergo their intensification and purples and gold burn in the windowpanes like the beat of an excitable heart... when the beauty of the world which is soon to perish, has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish”. Or like summer arriving after a harsh spring, when the clouds fold back, like the ravelling up of a screen, as Adam Nicholson put it. This was not Vin Blanc but Vin d’Or. Certainly not Piat d’Or. Everyone has their special wine moment and their own private language to describe it.

When the cultured snob emits an uncultured wow, when the straitjacketed scientist smiles, when scoring points becomes pointless, when quite athwart goes all decorum, when one desires to nurture every drop and explore every nuance of a great wine, surrendering oneself emotionally to the moment whilst at the same time actively transforming the kaleidoscopic sensory impressions into an evocative language that will later trigger warm memories, it is that the wine lavishes and ravishes the senses to an uncritical froth. Greatness in wine, like genius, is fugitive, unquantifiable, yet demands utter engagement. How often does wine elicit this reaction? Perhaps the question instead should be: How often are we in the mood to truly appreciate wine? Rarely, must be the answer, for if our senses are dulled or our mood is indifferent, we are unreceptive, and then all that remains is the ability to dissect.

To experience a wine fully you need to savour with your spirit as well as your palate, put aside preconceptions and “taste in the round”. Not every wine can be a pluperfect *Anthologia* – not even an *Anthologia* on every occasion! And context is everything after all. A rasping, rustic red from Southwest France should not be dismissed for having rough edges but considered as rather the perfect foil to a traditional cassoulet. Food should always be factored into one’s overall perception. Magic is what you make of it. Victoria Moore describes how a glass of Lambrusco (bloody good Lambrusco it must be said) whisks her on an imaginative journey: “And if I only had a villa in Umbria with a terrace surveying a tangle of olive groves and cypress-ridged hills, it (the Lambrusco) would exactly fill that gap when the afternoon had faded but the evening has not properly begun... Perhaps that’s why I like this Lambrusco so much – it makes me think of all these things.” The magic is lost when you are (over)conditioned to judge. The other day I held a tasting for group of sommeliers at a well-known London restaurant exhibiting a dozen white wines comprising various grape varieties and styles. The first thing I noticed is that they all suffered from compulsive taster’s twitch. This is the vinous equivalent of the yips, a nervously fanatical rotation of the stem of the glass to imbue the taster with an air of *gravitas*. No wine should be so relentlessly agitated for two to three minutes, and over-studious sniffing obfuscates the impressions. Anyhoo, considering that the first three wines of our tasting were cheerful gluggers retailing for around three pounds a bottle it all seemed a bit melodramatic. By all means, nose the wine for primary aromas and swirl a bit to discover if there are lurking secondary aromas, but don’t, to blend some metaphors, create a tsunami in the glass and always expect to discover the holy grail amongst the sediment.

ANTHOLOGIA AND THE NATURE OF WINE TASTING *continued...***The Walrus and the Carpenter deconstruct a Chardonnay...**

Ah yes, the furrowing of the brows denoting concentration, the sepulchral hush, the lips curled in contumely, the business of being serious about wine – the calculated response based on a blend of native prejudice and scientific scepticism. But all wines are different and there is a story behind each one. Good humour, good company, good food and open-mindedness are the best recipe for imaginative appreciation. Leaving aside that dross is dross for a' that, the mindset of the critic is often to anatomize for the sake of it. Too oaky, commented one sommelier about one Chardonnay that we were tasting. Too acidic, re-joined another. Too shoes and ships and sealing wax, said one. Too cabbages and kings, said another. Criticism like this becomes an end, a stylized response uncoupling pleasure from the experience, as if registering subjective pleasure should be invalid.

In conventional, reductive wine criticism you will not find any words like magic, joy, passion, spontaneity, or creativity – the language of transcendence, where structures dissolve and new meaning is found through emotion and reaction. The more I taste wine, the more I believe that that each response is one of many truths and that if I purely use a narrow critical approach then I exclude my imagination and intuition. If we can bring an open mind to tasting wine – as Coleridge wrote, “There is in genius an unconscious activity” - we may allow the wine itself to breathe and fulfil its living destiny.



I say there's only one thing better with oysters than a good Chablis and that's a bad Chablis

WINES OF THE MIDDLE GARONNE

"I am not fond, for everyday at least, of racy, heady wines that diffuse a potent charm and have their own particular flavour. What I like best is a clean, light, modest country vintage of no special name. One can carry plenty of it and it has a good and homely flavour of the land, and of the earth and sky and woods". Steppenwolf.

Between the southernmost part of Bergerac and Entre-Deux-Mers lies the Côtes de Duras. The vineyards here are scattered and virtually half the production is in the hands of the cooperatives. The grapes are the same as Bordeaux with Sémillon and Sauvignon dominant in the whites and Merlot and the two Cabernets accounting for the reds. There is also some decent Moelleux made from Muscadelle. Marmandais straddles the Garonne River with two caves co-operatives dominating production. Here you will find the Abouriou grape and red wines with a touch more rusticity, although serious oak-aged cuvées have become fashionable recently. Wine has been made in the Côtes de Buzet, an area between Agen and Marmande on the left bank of the Marmande since Roman times. The excellent Les Vignerons Réunis des Côtes de Buzet is responsible for 85% of the production of AOC Buzet. Country-style Buzet will be a firm mouthful of black cherries and prunes – many growers are suspicious of new oak while others yearn to create a smooth rich Bordelais style.

DOMAINE DE LAULAN, GILBERT GEOFFROY, Côtes de Duras

Dubbed the brains behind the appellation by Paul Strang in his book "The Wines of The Southwest of France", the charismatic Gilbert Geoffroy (hailing from Chablis) makes benchmark Sauvignon, with classical gooseberry and elderflower crispness and this vintage exhibits a crackling return to form. Not for nothing is Gilbert known as the "Pope of Sauvignon". The ultimate realisation of his Sauvignon-hood is the Cuvée Emile Chariot, wherein the vinification takes place in barriques (one third each of new, one-year-old, and two-year-old wood) with batonnage on the lees for twelve months. The wine is "gras" with a nose of vanilla and grilled bread and a full palate – and palette – of pineapple and passionfruit prolonged with flavours of hazelnuts and grilled almonds. A wine for quiches and other cheese tarts.

2023 COTES DE DURAS, SAUVIGNON BLANC

W

DOMAINE ELIAN DA ROS, Côtes du Marmandais – Organic – Certified Qualisud

Elian worked with Olivier Humbrecht in Alsace before starting his own domaine in southwest France in the 1990s. He works his 16 ha with fanatical dedication, replanting rootstocks, working without chemicals (8 hectares are en biodynamie). Harvest is always manual, grapes are destemmed. He vinifies parcel by parcel. Vinification is in open tank with pigeage à la bourguignonne according to observation rather than by predetermined method. The bare minimum of sulphur is used in the winemaking process. The four types of soil and subsoil which make up the domaine determine the styles of wine produced. His top cuvée, Clos Baquey, is a blend of Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah and Abouriou from his best vineyard sites, aged in barriques for around 14 months. Almost black with an intense expressive nose of plums, cassis and black cherries and notes of coffee and vanilla from the oak. Additional balsamic notes also of resin and liquorice. A powerful wine which is just starting to show its potential. Chante Coucou Rouge is a mix of southwestern French grape varieties, sixty per cent Merlot with equal parts of Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon and a soupçon of Syrah, is classic, rigorous, deep-coloured, appetisingly dry red wine designed to age and to be drunk with food. "If it were a Médoc it would be classed growth status – by which I mean it should not for a moment be confused with common or garden AC Bordeaux – but it has a little extra spice. This is serious stuff whose chief distinguishing characteristic is freshness – lively fruit without a dead grape in that vat but with quite sandy tannins still in evidence. (Jancis Robinson)". It's undeniably dense yet also quite crisp. Lovely purple colour, expressive nose of cherries, wild sloes, violets, and liquorice. You could certainly drink it now, ideally next year, but you could also cellar it for at least five years with confidence. The Abouriou is lean and crisp with juicy violet-scented black cherry fruit. It's more pepper than tannin, more savoury than sweet, and there's a very agreeable prickle combined with earthy minerality that carries the wine easily over the tongue.

2022 LE VIN EST UNE FETE ROUGE ~ Abouriou, Cabernet Franc, Merlot

R

2021 ABOURIOU

R

2021 CHANTE COUCOU ROUGE

R

If I'm going to sing like someone else, then I don't need to sing at all.

- Billie Holliday

DOMAINE DU PECH, MAGALI TISSOT & LUDOVIC BONNELLE, Buzet – Biodynamic (Demeter)

Domaine du Pech is situated on the slopes of Sainte-Colombe-en-Bruilhois in the extreme southeast of the appellation.

The white gravels have excellent drainage, and the consequent reflection of light and accumulation of heat ensures optimal maturity for the grapes. Viticulture is "biodynamic". No fertilizers have been used for twenty years. Since 2000 yields have been significantly reduced and since 2004 the drive towards biodynamic methods of cultivation has included the use of medicinal plants as well as minerals, thereby necessitating minimal treatments with copper or use of sulphur.

Only natural yeasts and bacteria are used, and the wines are bottled without filtration.

The estate was originally founded in 1978 by Daniel Tissot, son of a long-standing winemaking family in Jura. In 1997 the estate was taken over by his daughter Magali and her boyfriend Ludovic Bonnelle, he of the permanently windswept hair. Domaine du Pech now comprises 17ha situated on the slopes of Sainte-Colombe-en-Bruilhois in the extreme southeast of the appellation. The calcareous white gravels in this area have excellent drainage and the consequent reflection of light and accumulation of heat ensures optimal maturity for the grapes.

In 2003, the all-important transition to converting the winery to biodynamics began, with initial reductions of doses of copper and sulphur and using medicinal plants to make preparations; this was also the year the first manual harvest took place. In 2005 the winery was certified biodynamic. Ludovic is proactive in the vineyard, tending the vines, removing leaves from the canopy to allow circulation of air. Horses are also used now to plough between the rows. Winemaking is old school. The grapes are destemmed and foot-pressed in the traditional way. Totem has a 30-day cuvaizon in wooden vat, an indigenous, ambient ferment, and then spends 14 years slumbering in a 200-year-old foudre, before being finally bottled without filtration, fining or sulphur added. So crazy that it works. A wine to bring a smile to the recently retired Bob Parker's craggy visage.

Whilst it is mature, Totem is not over the hill. The plums have evolved into prunes, there are secondary notes of leather and there is something of the tawny port to it, but no caramelisation to it, just sheer honest vitality.

Le Pech Abuse is hewn from the same rustic cloth and sports a rustic mien. Ripe hedgerow fruit, meaty/umami back notes, a bold mouthful of spice and good natural acidity.

If classic Bordeaux took a wrong turning in its youth it would end up in this place. Which is a good place to be.

2021 VIN DE TABLE LE PECH ABUSE ~ Merlot, Cab Franc, Cab Sauvignon

R

2009 BUZET ROUGE « TOTEM »

R



GAILLAC & THE TARN

Nothing endured at all, nothing but the land... The land was forever, it moved and changed below you, but was forever.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon – *Sunset Song*

Gaillac is one of the most original wine growing areas in France in every sense. The Romans started planting vines as far back as the 1st century AD, then in the Middle Ages the Church leased out land to farmers who were prepared to plant vines. François I of France used to buy Gaillac wines. When he visited the town in 1533, he was given fifty barrels as a gift. He offered some of them to Henry VIII of England on their meeting in the field of gold and the latter was to drink more of these wines regularly in the course of the following years, as is shown in his account's books. In the 18th century, Catel wrote the following words in his Memoirs (1633): "Gaillac is a town standing on the Tarn river in the region of Albi; this terroir is widely renowned for the excellence of the wines that are grown there, which are sold to both Italy and England..." and he added that "the wine is perfect for the stomach and is not in any way harmful, for it goes to the veins rather than to the head". The range of grapes and styles is amazing, the limestone slopes for the white grape varieties, whilst gravel areas are reserved for the red grapes. The Mauzac grape, for example, is especially versatile: it is resistant to rot and ripens late and may be found in everything from sparkling wines (*methode rurale* or *gaillacoise* was being praised by Provençale poet Auger Gaillard long before champagne was a twinkle in Dom Pérignon's eye) through dry (*en vert*), to semi sweet and even *vin jaune*. Mauzac is gently perfumed with a nose of apples and pears and an underlying chalkiness. The other major variety is Len de l'El, which, in Occitan, means "far from the eye" (*loin de l'oeil*). The reds are mainly made from two other native varieties, Duras and Braucole, although the temptation to create a Bordeaux style in the interests of commercialism has meant that grapes such as Merlot, Cabernet and Syrah have found their ways into blends. Robert Plageoles has been dubbed "one of the artists of the appellation". Mauzac was his passion. Now his sons produce all styles; the accent is always on wines with purity, delicacy, and finesse.

Barthes said that current opinion (which he called *Doxa*) was like Medusa. If you acknowledged it, you become petrified. We feel he would have approved of Robert Plageoles.

CHATEAU CLEMENT-TERMES, JEAN-PAUL & FRANCOIS DAVID, Gaillac

The red is a light, juicy fruit-charmed red, something to smack down with the bacon and eggs of a morning, composed of Duras and Merlot and that sappy acidity should you need "une soif etancher"! The original vineyards of this estate were located at the foot of the historic Bastide town of Montaigut, a former bastide town, which, during the Wars of Religion, was rebuilt on the plain of the Lisle and became Lisle-sur-Tarn. Clément was passionately interested in the vines and in wine and decided, in 1868 to construct a winery building. It was only a few years later that he built the château. He delivered his wines all over France in barrels. His clients then were largely composed of churchmen. 150 years later the winery is spicclean new and the philosophy commercially oriented. However, the respect for tradition is undimmed. The Gaillac Blanc, a fascinating native blend of Mauzac and Loin de l'Oeil, exhibits fragrant apple-blossom aromas and vibrant fruit. Floral, fruity, and herbal it is understated and yet happily satisfying. Were it Italian, you suspect, the price might be somewhat different.

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| 2023 | VIN DE PAYS DES COTES DU TARN SAUVIGNON-MAUZAC | W |
| 2023 | GAILLAC BLANC SEC | W |
| 2023 | VIN DE PAYS DES COTES DU TARN MERLOT-DURAS | R |

CAVE DE LABASTIDE DE LEVIS, Gaillac

Elegance by name, Sauvignon by nature.

The wine is aged on the fine lees (after filtering out the heavy lees) for six months. It is terrific value, gravid with gooseberries and requited passion fruit (we love it, anyway), a touch smoky with exquisite acidity. Les Bardets are two wines made under the Terroirs Project label.

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| 2023 | TERRANE SAUVIGNON | W |
| 2022 | TERRANE DURAS BRAUCOL | R |
| 2022 | LES BARDETS BLANC ~ Mauzac, Loin de l'Oeil | Or |
| 2022 | LES BARDETS DURAS BRAUCOL BIO ROUGE ~ organic ~ Braucole, Cab S, Dura, Syrah | R |

The Soul of Wine - Poem by Charles Baudelaire

One eve in the bottle sang the soul of wine:
 'Man, unto thee, dear disinherited,
 I sing a song of love and light divine-
 Prisoned in glass beneath my seals of red.

I know thou labourest on the hill of fire,
 In sweat and pain beneath a flaming sun,
 To give the life and soul my vines desire,
 And I am grateful for thy labours done.

For I find joys unnumbered when I lave
 The throat of man by travail long outworn,
 And his hot bosom is a sweeter grave
 Of sounder sleep than my cold caves forlorn.

'Hearest thou not the echoing Sabbath sound?
 The hope that whispers in my trembling breast?
 Thy elbows on the table! gaze around;
 Glorify me with joy and be at rest.

'To thy wife's eyes I'll bring their long-lost gleam,
 I'll bring back to thy child his strength and light,
 To him, life's fragile athlete I will seem
 Rare oil that firms his muscles for the fight.

I flow in man's heart as ambrosia flows;
 The grain the eternal Sower casts in the sod-
 From our first loves the first fair verse arose,
 Flower-like aspiring to the heavens and God!

DOMAINE D'ESCAUSSES, DENIS BALARAN, Gaillac

The serious side of Gaillac. Domaine d'Escausses is located halfway between Albi and the medieval village of Cordes.

The climate is a balance of oceanic with Mediterranean influences. There are 26 hectares under vines for AOC production. The soil is a mixture of marls and sedimentary limestone, and the vineyards are treated with organic and mineral-based manures. La Vigne de l'Oubli, from a mixture of fifteen-to-fifty-year-old vines, is a barrel-fermented blend of Sauvignon (50%), Mauzac and Muscadelle spending twelve months on the lees in new oak and has a subtle flavour of dried fruits and curry spices. The Cuvée des Drilles, mainly juicy Duras (75%) with some Fer, with its bright peppery notes, hints of Seville orange, bitter cherry, and appealing suppleness in the mouth, is one for the lads and ladettes after a hard day's harvesting, the sort of red that we need to drink for medicinal quenching purposes.

La Croix Petite, named after a small stone cross in the vineyard, is a dark powerful blend of 50% Fer, 25% Syrah, 15% Merlot and 10% Cab Sauv raised in a mixture of new oak (1/3) and one year old Allier oak barrels. The mint and vanilla are plummed (sic) in now, the terroir will do its phantom of the opera routine later. A fair accompaniment to Sir Loin of Steak. The Cuvée Vigne Mythique (100% Fer Servadou) has merited its soubriquet by harvesting another coup de Cœur from the Guide Hachette. This cuvée confidentielle was created for a restaurant in Albi and undergoes an élevage for one year in futs de chêne (Allier oak for some, American oak for the rest) with renewal of barrels every four years. The nose is enchanting: coffee, ink and warm gravel and lovely wild mint notes. Beautifully supple and creamy in the mouth with the oak beautifully offset by pure acidity and delicious fresh berry fruit flavours.

“Notre région a tout pour séduire : un paysage doux et vert, fait de coteaux et d'ondulations de terres, avec ici et là, de petits bois, des champs de colza, de blé ou de tournesol, délimités par des haies de genets, de chênes ou de genévriers...

Quand au climat, il convient lui aussi à la perfection à la culture de la vigne. Clément, avec des hivers peu rigoureux, des étés chauds et des automnes ensoleillés, il est la conjugaison subtile et savante de deux alternances: l'une océanique, stable et forte, l'autre méditerranéenne, chantante et fantasque. A l'image de nos vins.”

You can certainly taste the country in these wines.

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|---------|-------------------------------------|
| 2018/19 | GAILLAC BLANC “LA VIGNE DE L’OUBLI” |
| 2022 | GAILLAC ROUGE “CUVEE DES DRILLES” |

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| W |
| R |

DOMAINE LES TRES CANTOUS, PLAGEOLES FAMILY, Gaillac – Organic ~ Certified Bureau Veritas

Tradition is not a return to an obsolete past, but rather the permanence of its origins through time
- Frederik Tristan

Robert Plageoles believes in rediscovering what has been lost. Not for him the slavish adherence to global varietals; he has grubbed up his plantings of Sauvignon and concentrated instead on the native Mauzac, in which he has found the potential for a whole range of styles. Mauzac, when dry (or sec tendre to be precise) can produce a fascinating soft style redolent of pears, white cherries, and angelica; it is also responsible for sparkling wines and an array of sweeties ranging from the off dry (Roux) to the unique piercingly dry sherry-like Vin de Voile. This arcane wine is made from the first pressing, which is fermented in old oak and returned to the same barrel where it remains for a further seven years, losing about 20% of volume. After a year the must develops a thin veil (voile) of mould which protects it from the air. The flavour is delicate, reminiscent of salt-dry amontillado, with the acidity to age half a century. This curious wine would go well with a soup of haricots beans laced with truffle oil or a Roquefort salad with wet walnuts. The Vin d'Autan, on the other hand, is made from the obscure Ondenc ("the grape which gave Gaillac its past glories") in vintages when the grapes shrivel and raisin in the warm autumn winds. The style: like a Beerenauslese or a Tokaji, contriving to be sweet, yet subtly fresh: bruléed autumn apples and pears flecked with syrup and a persistent elegant finish hinting at walnuts. According to Paul Strang, Plageoles described it as à nul autre comparable, il est le vin du vent et de l'esprit." They order these things better in France (I wish I'd said that too).! Back to Mauzac, and back to Nature (so to speak) why not get your frothy jollies from the infinitely pluggable sparkler (à boire à l'esprit libre as Andrew Jefford quotes Plageoles as describing it). Champagne producers – please note quality of base product here! Bro-Cool is Braucol (geddit?). Grapes are destemmed into concrete vats and undergo a short maceration and natural fermentation. Bright savoury nose, notes of gravel, earth, spice. Cranberry and red cherry. Delicious acidity. Light alcohol and very soft tannins. The Mauzac Noir is made the same way – this pale red very individual wine has earthy, vegetal aromas, notes of green and white pepper and a touch of cherry and blueberry on the finish. The Prunelart (a grape revived by the Plageoles and vinified as a varietal) is darker and more powerful grape. Rich, lifted, plummy nose leading to a silky-smooth palate, with plum, soft liquorice, and something cool and fresh too – green peppercorns, and then meat and earth come into subtle play with the bright fruit. Some gentle, fine, peppery, spicy tannins kick in, keeping the finish fresh. Prunelart is the art of pruniness – onomatopoeia works!

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|------|------------------------|----|
| NV | MAUZAC NATURE | Sp |
| NV | MAUZAC NATURE – magnum | Sp |
| 2022 | MAUZAC EN VERT | W |
| 2010 | VIN DE VOILE | Y |
| 2023 | TERROIRISTS PRINTEMPS | R |
| 2021 | BRAUCOL | R |
| 2022 | MAUZAC NOIR | R |
| 2017 | LE PRUNELART | R |
| 2022 | L'ONDEC DOUX – 50cl | Sw |
| 2008 | VIN D'AUTAN – 50cl | Sw |

THE HISTORY OF A UNIQUE WINE

The Autan wine, the flagship of this domain, is made from Ondenc, a grape variety originally from the Tarn Valley and which had been widespread in the southwest region of France since the Middle Ages. Phylloxera, however, almost wiped it out. Dr. Guyot, who invented cane pruning (*taille Guyot* as it is called in France), used to say that Ondenc produced wines that could rival the best Sauternes. Robert Plageoles replanted almost five acres (2 ha) of it in 1985.

The Plageoles don't just stop there. They also perpetuate a way of working which was prevalent in Gaillac from the 12th to the 18th century. Robert, an avid reader of old manuscripts, has found writings on this type of work in some forgotten archives. While the way they prune the vines combines tradition and new methods (gobelet and trellising), when the grapes are ripe, the vintners go through the vineyards and pinch the peduncles to stop the sap from flowing to the fruits. The grapes then slowly dry out, thanks to the *Autan* wind, which blows from the southeast. Later they are carefully picked and left to desiccate even further on straw mats, with a method similar to the one used to make straw wines. After pressing, the grapes ferment and the *elevage* in concrete tanks lasts 12 months. Robert Plageoles and his son have always refused to use wood barrels for the *elevage*, as they want to keep the purity of the fruit and the characteristics of the *terroir*.

Leaving the overripe grapes on the vine and the subsequent drying out of the fruits on straw mats dramatically reduce the yield. In 2001, it was only 0.45 ton/acre (6hl/ha). "This is a climatological wine," says Plageoles, which explains why it is not always consistent in style. From this point of view, 2008 was a perfect vintage.

“What passes for wine among us, is not the juice of the grape. It is an adulterous mixture, brewed up of nauseous ingredients, by dunces, who are bunglers in the art of poison-making; and yet we, and our forefathers, are and have been poisoned by this cursed drench, without taste or flavour—

Tobias Smollett

DISTILLERIE ARTISANALE, MAISON LAURENT CAZOTTES, Villeneuve sur Vere – Organic

These are “haute de vies” from a distillerie artisanale. Made without sulphur, artificial yeasts or enzymes, Laurent Cazottes lets nature do the talking. It is all about picking the fruits when they have reached optimal maturity – that is to say (in the case of pears) when they have dropped to the ground. Cazottes sources the best pears either from the organic orchards of friends or from his own biodynamic ones. The pears are then allowed to ripen further in cagettes in the warm autumn wind. From 3-4 degrees of potential alcohol, they attain 8-9 degrees. 12 tonnes of pears realise a mere 2,000 bottles. The work is a labour of love: the cores, the pips and the stems are removed to preserve the maximum aromatic flavour of the pears. The juice is fermented for six weeks in tank to transform the sugars into alcohol. All this confers an unctuousity and richness to the final eau de vie. La Reine-Claude Dorée is a very ancient variety and no stranger to jam-makers, distillers, and liqueur-makers. To bring out the flavour of the plums Cazottes effects a passerillage on racks. To obtain freshness and purity the stalks and stones of the fruit are manually eliminated leaving nothing else other than the flesh and the skin. A long, slow fermentation using only the indigenous yeasts intensifies the perfumes while the gentle, precise distillation amplifies the aromas further. The Goutte de Mauzac Rosé truly embodies the spirit, as it were, of this autochthonous variety. Meticulous work in the vineyard ensures ripe and healthy grapes (debudding in spring, green harvest in summer, manual triage). Light pressing and a natural fermentation leaves the residual sugar to distil into eau de vie of delicious suppleness. For the liqueur de Prunelle Cazottes again attends to the details that make the difference. The sloe bushes form a habitat to shelter fauna, meanwhile the fruits are left until December to passerillé, and the first frost announce the harvest. They are allowed to dry further on shelves until the colour of the skins changes from yellow to red. Then they are manually de-stoned and split one-by-one and then undergo six-month maceration in sugar syrup before distillation.

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| 2015 | APERITIF AU NOIX VERTES – 50cl |
| 2016 | APERITIF DU FLEURS DE SUREAU – 50 cl |
| 2016 | LIQUEUR DE COING SAUVAGE – 50cl |
| 2018 | LIQUEUR DE TOMATE – 50cl |
| 2017 | LIQUEUR DE PRUNELLE – 50 cl |
| 2015 | LIQUEUR DE FOLLE NOIRE – 50 cl |
| 2017 | LIQUEURS DE GUIGNES ET GUINS – 50cl |
| 2019 | CEDRAT – 50cl |
| 2018 | GOUTTE DE POIRE WILLIAMS PASSERILLE – 50cl |
| 2018 | GOUTTE DE REINE-CLAUDE DOREE – 50cl |

LAURENT CAZOTTES, Villeneuve sur Vere – Organic

Laurent Cazottes, artisan distiller extra-ordinaire, who furnishes us with a variety of amazing eaux-de-vies, liqueurs and aperitifs, also makes a pair of wines from indigenous Gaillacoise grape varieties. Adèle is from Mauzac Blanc the grape that is the heart of many Gaillac wines; it has an almost pinkish tint, is typically floral yet quite vinous with bruised apple, dry honey, herbs, and spice. The Champêtre comes from Braurol. Laurent's version, a purple full-flavoured wine is reminiscent of Gamay or even Négrette, with its bold cherry fruit and violet overtones. Both wines are certified organic.

Adèle Blanc sec refers to Jacques Tardi's famous comic strip published in Sud-Ouest magazine about an Indiana Jones-style heroine battling various monsters and dinosaurs in Paris between the wars. Doubtless she would quaff this wine with poached Pterodactyl eggs. Rackham le Rouge is a piratical character from Hergé's Tin Tin adventures. Would pair well with Captain Haddock, Omar Ben Salaad, or anything meaty that Cutts the Butcher can carve. These picturesquely named comic cuvee names became the more prosaically-named Champetre – meaning rustic.

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| 2022 | VIN DE FRANCE CHAMPETRE BLANC – Mauzac Blanc | W |
| 2022 | MARCOTTE BLANC ~ Mauzac, Loin de l'Oeil – 20- litre key keg | W |
| 2021 | RACKHAM ROUGE ~ Jurançon Noir | R |

MARCILLAC & AVEYRON

“As hard-working as an Auvergnat” *Saying quoted in Flaubert’s Sentimental Education*

*La nuit a dans sa robe un trou de clair de lune.
Bois du vin : on n’a pas toujours cette fortune
Sois heureux et jouis : après nous, bien des fois,
La lune éclairera nos tombes une a une*

Omar Khayyam

Marcillac lies on the Aveyron river just northwest of Rodez, is linked historically to the Abbey of Conques and is the only appellation in the Aveyron region to enjoy AOC status. To the north are the barren plateaux called *les causses*. This is wild mountainous country gutted with deep river gorges. For nearly a thousand years, vineyards were the base of the region’s economy. In 1868 phylloxera destroyed the vineyards by ninety percent. The economy was devastated, and many natives of the region moved away. The style or philosophy of the wines is connected to the area and the grape variety. The vineyards are grown on terraces with very steep gradients; the soil is the reddish-purple *le rougier* with a schist underlay; the grape variety is *Mansois*, otherwise known as *Fer Servadou*; only old barrels and traditional methods are used; minimal sulphur is required in the fermentation. The result? Violet-tinted, brilliant fresh reds packed with fresh currant fruits, provocative acidity and a medicinal minerality, the vinous equivalent of Chalybeate water. The medieval citizens of Rodez used to take Marcillac for their health, because it was preferable to drinking the local water. More recently, Pascal Monestier, the son of a pharmacist in Marcillac, in a thesis on the prevention of cholesterol by the consumption of wine, discovered especially high concentrations of catechins and procyanidols – anti-cholesterol agents. Well, as the bible says, “Take a little wine for thy stomach”!

DOMAINE DU CROS, PHILIPPE TEULIER, Marcillac

Marcillac is a tiny obscure appellation near Clairvaux in Aveyron comprising some eight growers. The wines here are made exclusively from the Mansois grape, otherwise known as Fer or Fer Servadou in Gaillac. Domaine du Cros makes two styles: a basic “tradition” or Lo Sang del País which is quite supple with juicy raspberry flavours underpinned by slate and gravel notes and the “Cuvée Speciale” from 50-80-year-old vines (now called “Vieilles Vignes”) which spends 18 months in old oak casks and expresses myriad black fruits: myrtle, mure and cassis to name but several. The wines define the notion of gouléyant or gracia placendi, delicious wine so instantly appealing that we unfurl our tongues and allow the flavours to slide silkily across our palates without analysis. Clock the Occitan dialect on the label whilst you tuck into milk fed lamb from the Aveyron (or Sainsbury’s). Other local delicacies include tripoux and aligot (mashed potato and cheese) and fromage de Laguiole.

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| 2022 | MARCILLAC “LO SANG DEL PAIS” | R |
| 2019 | MARCILLAC VIEILLES VIGNES | R |
| 2019 | MARCILLAC VIEILLES VIGNES – magnum | R |
| 2021 | MARCILLAC “LO SANG DEL PAIS” ~ 20-litre key keg | R |

DOMAINE MATHA, JEAN-LUC MATHA, Marcillac – Organic – Certified AB

One does not live by how one eats, but by how one digests
— Southwest Saying

Do we love these wines or what? Marcillac is good for you, indeed after the third glass or so you feel that your life expectancy has substantially increased! The grape variety here is known locally as Mansois (the local patois for Fer Servadou). The soil of Marcillac is very particular, called “rougier” by the locals, due to its intense red colour, thanks to the high iron content. The wines are high in jagged acidity with a haunting earthiness and should be drunk with food: confit de canard, oxtail with carrots or a traditional pot au feu are choice partners. You might say that drinking Marcillac is like letting your tongue go on an outward-bound course for terroiristes. You certainly end up with a grasp of rasp. Jean-Luc Matha trained to be a clown and priest (although not necessarily at the same time) before finding his true vocation. The Cuvée Lairis undergoes 28 days of maceration in closed fermenters. The wine exhibits a supple texture full of red and black fruits. This mouthful of forest fruit, minerals and spices teases, provokes, and delights in equal measure. “Delightful red fruit flavours abound amidst the sturdiness of the wine; raspberries and cherries on top of a layer of cool stones and pungent medicinality. It has a sanguine quality that gets the pulses racing; it is good will amplified in a glass; it is the earth, water, grass, and stones churned into a ruby-hued liquid; Keats’s beaker of the warm-with-a-mitigating-cool-microclimate-south! I can almost feel the cholesterol dissolving now. A word of advice though. In the vernacular parlance, don’t mull it, skull it! I love the things that the earth gives,” says Matha. “I love working with the vine up on the hill. And just before I come down, I like to watch the sunset and see how the colours change... I breathe and listen to the sounds around me... I am in the midst of nature and feel completely content.” Thoreau revisited or winemaker? Both, really. “So far, I have made thirteen wines at this property. And in a way, they are like my thirteen children. Each one is a little bit different, yet each one has a common bond that gives them their ultimate identity, the earth, the vine, the frost, the rain, and the sun. That, for me, is the beauty of winemaking.”

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| 2018 | MARCILLAC, CUVÉE LAIRIS | R |
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L'homme est le vin – Jean-Luc Matha

“GET” MARCILLAC

Is there a point in getting the wine? Understanding something is necessarily constrained by the very limited linguistic frameworks within which we operate. I do a lot of tutored tastings and I realise that although we may all use the same words in describing a wine, we may mean quite different things by them. Language is an impure form of description: in tasting notes we use ten words where one will do, and we never get close to the heart of the wine. Oh yes, we can anatomise every single detail and pile up the adjectives, but the words are just cold echoes of the emotions we feel when we taste the wine. If you listen to classical music, do you appreciate it more by pulling it apart intellectually or do you allow yourself to be swept up in the flow and feel it on the pulses? The time I get the wine (or the picture, or the poem, or the music) is when I am least critical, least straining after meaning, then I don't “get the wine” – it “gets me”. I also think, whilst we are in philosophic mode, that the wine in the glass is only one stage in a complex transformative process. The so-called objective transformations are the result of what happens to the grapes in the vineyard and in the winery. But the final transformation is the response to tasting the wine itself and where that experience takes the individual taster. It is difficult to share these responses, as I've mentioned, because language is an insufficiently sensitive instrument. I admire Parker, for example, in one major respect. When he really loves a wine, his descriptive powers completely desert him, and the tasting note collapses in on itself; he'll start gibbering and saying Wow! Tasting doesn't just involve the usual “perceptive” senses; our sense of excitement, our sense of pleasure and our sense of imagination brings the wine ineluctably to life. And that's something worth getting.

Back on terra firma, points are the means whereby we codify “getting the wine”. The usual register is 100, although it effectively operates at 80 and above according to some, or 50 and above according to others. Who establishes the criteria for marking and is the scale remotely meaningful? Is there a received wisdom concerning wine that we can deconstruct the various components that make it up and assess clearly and conscientiously the real value of what we are drinking?

Critical approbation tends to focus on the lavishly made-up wines: primped, pumped, souped up models. I don't “get” these wines any more than I get an expensive fake fur coat. My experience of wine competitions is that in a line-up of multiple wines of various styles the nuances are discarded in favour of the broad brushstrokes.

Disagreement is an important part of debate. The way I taste is who I am and what I like. Consequently, there are wines that I find faulty because I dislike them. For example, any wine which tastes acidified or alcoholic or sweetly toasted, wherein I can taste the interventions at the expense of the fruit and essential flavour is, to my palate, faulty. I can't imagine the winemaker admitting the fault – which becomes a neat paradox: the desire to avoid faults in the wine is so great that it drives the winemaker into making meretricious, over-elaborated wines. The desire to improve on nature and keeping on adding layers of flavour is the desire to conform to a perceived archetype of what is good. The winemakers themselves are guilty in coaxing the wine fit the recipe.

The sanguine wines of Marcillac remind us that less is more. As Eric is wont to ask: “Which is the wine that you would take home and drink”? The delicious gutsy-savoury wines of the Aveyron and Gaillac are a million miles away from the ramped up international cuvées lying inertly in their oak coffins surrounded by their trove of competition medals. The former gets the juices flowing; the others clog our arteries. Wine does not have to be pretentious to be interesting; when we drink Marcillac we believe that simplicity is an under-rated virtue.

Located in the southwest of the Massif Central, Aveyron offers spectacular landscapes. Its plateaus, called Les Causses, are filled with flowers; they are circumscribed by the Lot and Tarn rivers which cut deep gorges into the countryside. The Lot rises in the Cévennes Mountains and flows through villages rich in history. Entraygues is situated at the confluence of the Lot and Truyère rivers; its name in Occitan means “between waters”. The town was founded in the middle of the 13th century at the same time as the castle built by Henri II, count of Rodez and fortified in 1357 and still has a strong medieval flavour.

According to Curnowsky “The Rouerge is one of those lands blessed by bounteous nature; giving us a lust for life on this planet which Man is otherwise intent on making totally uninhabitable”.

Specialities of the region include aligot (a rich purée made with Tomme cheese, butter, and mashed potato), stuffed cabbage, tripous (sheep’s feet stuffed and folded up in pieces of stomach) and estofinado (salt cod cooked in walnut oil). From the rivers come trout and crayfish, from the woods, beautiful ceps, and flocks of lamb (from the Causses), herds of beef from the Aubrac, bebies of game, and lard-loads of cured pork and ham roam blissfully and earthily throughout the local menus. If you’re hunkering down for some wholesome filling refreshment, try Potée Auvergnate, a substantial soup of vegetables and meat. And, of course, there is cheese to please and bring you to your knees: on mange Roquefort et Cantal ici.

You’ve had a hard day tripping in the fields or in front of a blinking computer screen. You are dwanged and snooled, not to say forswunke, and you’re feeling partial to a schooner of some revivifying red. Not an oak-breasted vanilla soft-soaper from the New World, nor something in the chomping tannin vein, but a simple ruby liquid that speaks of stones and earth. The Entraygues is the perfect paregoric, putting iron back into your blood.

CAHORS & CASSOULET – AS NATURE INTENDED

Those of you who don’t have duck fat coursing through their veins look away now for this a paean to three C’s: cassoulet, Cahors, and cholesterol. Certain foods take me back to places I’ve never been and conjure effortlessly a John-Major style misty-eyed epiphany:

The ploque of boule upon boule in the village sandpit, a glass of chilled pastis, grimy-faced urchins in rakishly-angled caps with their warm crusty baguettes cradled like sheaves, old maids cycling home with their confit de canard – and is there cassoulet still for tea?

Cassoulet is more than a recipe; it is a visceral sacrament based on ritual and intuition. There is even a moral dimension associated with this dish for to cook slowly and with care is to suggest that food is precious, should be savoured and not wasted. Patience is the slow careful flame that transforms the off-cuts, bones, beans, and sinewy meat into wholesome nosh, reduces and melds the various components to the quintessential comfort food. The origins of cassoulet and the regional, even familial, variations, recounted so eloquently by Paula Wolfert and others, add to the mystique of the dish, which seems to exist as a metaphor for all such slow-cooked peasant dishes in Europe.

Slow cooking is a luxury in a world driven by convenience and fraught by the notion of wasting time. The genius of slow food is that it nourishes more than our bodies; it also teaches us to appreciate the value of mealtime. The taste of things is influenced by the degree to which we engage with food and wine; how we savour and understand it, the value we ascribe to details.

Eating cassoulet without a glass of wine though is like trying to carve your way through the Amazonian jungle with a pair of blunt nail clippers or wading through lava in carpet slippers. We should accept that some combinations are meant to be. It’s called a local marriage not because it is a love-date of perfect unquenchable affinities, but because it is a hearty entente of two mates with close memories of where they come from. Cahors is renowned for its medicinal, iodine flavour; it expresses notes of tea, fennel, dried herbs, and figs; it has a pleasant astringency and a lingering acidity. Cassoulet is crusty, oozy, and gluey, beans bound by fat. The food requires a wine of certain roughness and ready digestibility. Sweet, jammy oaky reds and powerful spicy wines lack the necessary linear quality; sometimes we should look at wine as an elegant seasoning to the food. Cahors adds a dash of pep (and pepper) to the stew whilst remaining aloof and cleans your palate by providing a cool rasping respite from the richness of the cassoulet.



LANGUE D'OC OU LANGUE DE CHAT
CELA NE VAUT PAS UN CASSOULET

“No-one is prepared to admit that wine doesn’t have any taste.”

- Bernard, *Black Books*

The Story of Victor of Aveyron, the wild child

Victor of Aveyron was a feral child who lived naked and alone in the woods of the Aveyron before being found wandering near Saint-Sernin-sur-Rance in 1797. He was captured, escaped, and re-emerged a couple of years later when he was taken in by the townspeople. Eventually, he was taken to Paris to the National Institute of the Deaf to be studied by Roch-Ambroise Cucurron Sicard, who believed that by educating the boy and giving him the tool of language, he would elevate him from his savage state.

Victor was given his name after the leading character in the play *Victor, ou l'enfant de la forêt*, the oddly prescient melodramatic play — indeed, the first fully developed melodrama — by René Guilbert de Pixérécourt, written in 1797/8, first produced in 1798 and published in 1803, and itself based on a book with the same name written by François Guillaume Ducray-Duminil in 1796.

The Enlightenment caused many thinkers, including naturalists and philosophers, to believe that human nature was a subject that needed to be redefined and looked at from a completely different angle. Because of the French Revolution and new developments in science and philosophy, man was looked at as not special, but as characteristic of his place in nature. It was hoped that by studying the wild boy, this idea would gain support. He became a case study in the Enlightenment debate about the differences between humans and animals.

Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, a young medical student, effectively adopted Victor into his home and published reports on his progress. Itard believed that two things separated humans from animals: empathy and language. He wanted to civilise Victor with the objectives of teaching him to speak and to communicate human emotion. Victor showed significant early progress in understanding language and reading simple words but failed to progress beyond a rudimentary level. Itard wrote “Under these circumstances his ear was not an organ for the appreciation of sounds, their articulations and their combinations; it was nothing but a simple means of self-preservation which warned of the approach of a dangerous animal or the fall of wild fruit.”

The only two phrases that Victor ever actually learned to spell out were *lait* and *oh, Dieu*. It would seem, however, that Itard implemented more contemporary views when he was educating Victor. Rousseau appears to have believed “that natural association is based on reciprocally free and equal respect between people.” This notion of how to educate and to teach was something that although did not produce the effects hoped for, did prove to be a step towards new systems of pedagogy. By attempting to learn about the boy who lived in nature, education could be restructured and characterized. While Victor did not learn to speak the language that Itard tried to teach him, it seems that Victor did make progress in his behaviour towards other people. At the Itard home, housekeeper Madame Guérin was setting the table one evening while crying over the loss of her husband. Victor stopped what he was doing and displayed consoling behaviour towards her. Itard reported on this progress. Victor died in Paris in 1828.

Victor’s story was memorably retold in François Truffaut’s “*L’Enfant Sauvage*”. One of the striking scenes in the film sees the professor trying to teach Victor morality. When Victor accomplishes a task successfully, he is given a glass of milk as a reward. However, on this occasion the professor strikes him across the face. Victor cries (not because he is hurt – he is virtually impervious to pain), but presumably because he dimly recognises the injustice of the action.

“Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed”
On Nature, Anaxagore de Clazomenes.

Like an echo to nature and the never-ending motion of the wine, we constantly evolve ourselves. Our profession is an ongoing creation; much like the philosophers of nature, we experience every day in astonishment, investigation, and learning.

Amongst this ongoing movement, our quest is for balance: Ecological balance in the vineyards and preservation of the entire grape quality during wine making. A fragile balance; as every step to transform the grapes is a loss and every action to countervail this loss the beginning of another transformation, we are therefore constantly trying to approach perfection, without ever achieving it. But ever since, this never-ending movement has become a virtuous circle.

Philosophy at Chateau du Cèdre

CAHORS

Wine should be drunk neat
In the morning, without
Water at mid-day, and in
The evening just as
The Good Lord gave it to us!

Old Aveyron proverb – quoted in Paul Strang’s *Wines of South-West France*

Cahors has enjoyed a long and complex history. Vines were originally introduced by the Romans, and when the river Lot was eventually adapted as a trading waterway, the reputation of Cahors became established all over the world. By the 14th century Cahors was being exported throughout Europe including England (where it earned the sobriquet of “The Black Cahors!”) and Russia; it was even considered superior to Bordeaux in France. Paul Strang quotes Monsieur Jullien in his book *Wines of South-West France* describing this strange black wine: “They make a point of baking a proportion of the grapes in the oven, or bringing to the boil the whole of the vintage before it is put into barrel for its natural fermentation... The first-mentioned process removes from the must quite a lot of the water content of the wines and encourages a more active fermentation in which the colouring agents dissolve perfectly”. Tastes change... now one can find wines made by carbonic maceration. Pascal Verhaeghe from Château du Cèdre has just started using the micro-oxygenation technique (pioneered by Patrick Ducournau in Madiran) to create wines of great suppleness, whilst Jean-Luc Baldes has just created his version of the original black wine. By the way, an anagram of Cahors Auxerrois is “Ou! Six Rare Cahors!” Sometimes, as Voltaire said, the superfluous is very necessary.

CHATEAU DU CEDRE, VERHAEGHE FAMILY, Cahors – Organic – Certified Ecocert

If you think that Cahors is just brushing your teeth with tannin-flavoured twigjuice, think again!

Pascal Verhaeghe has been the driving force behind the Cahors “Quality Charter” and quality oozes from these wines. The estate was originally created by Charles Verhaeghe on vineyard land devastated by the frosts in 1956 in Viré-Sur-Lot. His sons

Pascal and Jean-Marc duly studied winemaking, the former in Burgundy and California, the latter in Bordeaux. Ecological viticultural methods eschewing weedkillers and chemical fertilizers, yield reduction by serious pruning, leaf stripping for greater sun exposure and air circulation, harvesting the grapes on the verge of overripeness yield the superb raw material essential to create fabulous wines. In the cellars the Verhaeghes aim for softness, richness, and harmony through gentle extraction by long vatting and limited pigeage, malolactic fermentation and sensible use of oak. The Heritage du Cèdre is the Pugsley in this Addams menagerie. The family traits of abundant dark brooding fruit are evident; the heart is black, but the flesh is youthful. Its unchtime and you could murder a Cahors, but you don’t fancy taking out one of the big guns. Heritage is for you, a bonny ruby-red, the Malbec softened by plummy Merlot soothing to the gullet, a nice touch of lip-smacking acidity. It quacks duck magret to me.

The Cahors is inky, spicy red wine endowed with red and black fruits and smoked fig and liquorice flavours. A mixture of new and old oak, the top cuvées are made from low yields and old vines on the estate. The grape variety here is Malbec (also known locally as Auxerrois), supplemented by smidgens of Merlot and Tannat. We also receive a healthy allocation of his remarkable top treacle-thick cuvée “Le Cèdre”, made from the oldest vines on the estate, “as cypress black as e’er was crow”, sweet, perfumed and plum-prune. Decant and be awed. This is 100% Malbec from 30–40-year-old vines and miserly yields of 30hl/ha. The recipe is exacting: a tri de vendange, destemming, a light pressing, vinification at 30–32 degrees with pigeage and a 40-day cuvaizon followed by 100% malolactic fermentation in new oak barrels. The wine is then aged for twenty months where it acquires its fabulous colour, almost impenetrably dark with glossy purple tints. With its thick cassis aromas and wild raspberry fruit this is a meal and should be eaten with great reverence and a long spoon. Now top that – and we have – with Le Grand Cèdre. From vines yielding a mere 15hl/ha this black beauty, a thoroughbred in a fine stable of Cahorses, is aged in 500-litre new oak demi-muids with long lees contact, and is, as Andrew Jefford describes it so eloquently “strikingly soft, lush and richly fruited, a kind of Pomerol amongst Cahors”. The Cèdre wines repay long ageing and will accompany local goat’s cheeses such as Cabecou and Rocamadour, grilled meats and duck every which way.

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|------|--------------------|---|
| 2022 | CAMILLE MALBEC | R |
| 2022 | TERRE ROUGE MALBEC | R |
| 2020 | HERITAGE DU CEDRE | R |
| 2022 | CAHORS JUVENILES | R |
| 2022 | CAHORS | R |
| 2022 | CAHORS EXTRA LIBRE | R |
| 2022 | CAHORS – ½ bottle | R |
| 2018 | CAHORS– magnum | R |
| 2020 | LE CEDRE | R |
| 2019 | LE GRAND CEDRE | R |

CHATEAU PAILLAS, Cahors

How many Cahors can we list? Come on, it's Cahorses for courses! We like Cot (Malbec) a lot. The Paillas with its frisky tannins and gentle foginess is our summer Cahors drinking like a dangerous dream now. The domaine is situated on the Floressas plateau and benefits from excellent terroir. The vines occupy a single parcel of 27 hectares and are an average age of 30 years old. The final blend is 90% Cot and 10% Merlot. Factoid: Domaine de Paillas was the test wine used in an experiment by one Erik Skovenborg to examine the isolated and combined effects of red wine solids on atherosclerosis-prone apoE deficient mice. And why, pray? "The chosen red wine is Cahors, Domaine de Paillas, 1996, selected for its high content of phenols, and the fact that it is not matured in oak tree casks, which could add additional oak-specific phenols to the wine." I would have chosen Marcillac myself but then I'm not a scientist.

2016

CAHORS

R

CLOS SAINT-JEAN, FAMILLE JOUFFREAU, Cahors

*"I told my wife that men, like wine, improve with age. So, she locked me in the cellar."
- Rodney Dangerfield*

The vineyard of Cahors, one of the oldest in France, was much praised as early as the 7th century by the Bishop of Verdun. In the 13th century, the English, who were the then masters of Guyenne, considered it very highly, and so did the Tsar Peter the Great. Destroyed by phylloxera at the end of the 19th century and later killed by the devastating frost of 1956, it is only in the early sixties that it came back to life, when the Auxerrois, a noble grape variety specific to the appellation, was cultivated again. Long-lived, powerful, and generous, richly endowed in tannins and aromas of liquorice, aniseed and red fruits, the wine of Cahors has re-conquered connoisseurs and won back its rightful place among the great appellations of France.

Clos Saint Jean is the result of a unique experiment from the Jouffreau family, winemakers since 1610, whose ambition was to rediscover the expression of a forgotten vineyard. Loyal to their philosophy of producing authentic, age-worthy wines, the Jouffreaus chose to wait more than ten years before releasing the wines from Clos Saint Jean's quality-rich terroir. They were not trying to duplicate the wines of their principal domaine, Clos de Gamot, but rather expose the superb characteristics of this specific terroir with their extensive wine-making savvy. The vineyard is situated on a small mountain face, near the village Sals located between Castelfranc and Labastide du Vert. Over the centuries past winemakers used the stones in the vineyard to build walls; these can still be seen on the edge of the vineyard. Small stone huts, called "gariottes", were also erected to give the labourers temporary cover while working amongst the vines. Viticultural life was extremely hard. These original winemakers were responsible for constructing the landscape of the Quercy region and today, junipers, stone walls and "gariottes" still dominate the landscape. Wines from the "Pech de Sals" were particularly valued and renowned throughout Europe during the 17th century.

The Jouffreau family planted three generations of Malbec, and its close, local relative Auxerrois (all from the Clos de Gamot vineyards) on a variety of rootstocks. The first generation, 'the original' Auxerrois, came from the 100+ year old vines that the 'Vignes Centenaires' cuvée is made from. The second comes from a more recent Gamot site that is partially used for the vieilles vignes cuvée. The third and final generation, Clone JU (Jouffreau) 594, comes from another site used for the Vignes Centenaires. Everything was done by hand (shovels and pickaxes carved the vineyard out of the rock and scrub) and the vines were densely planted – on the terraces 10,000 per hectare. The wine is vinified entirely in small cement tanks to conserve the maximum character from this great terroir. The cuvaision lasts an average of three to five weeks and the methods of extraction remain traditional and respectful of each vintage's needs. Gentle pumpovers are performed to obtain a harmonious structure.

Ageing takes place over 18-24 months in demi-muids. Racking, tasting, fining, and blending over this time allow the tannic structure to soften and bring out the numerous complex aromas of the Malbec. The 2001 Clos Saint-Jean is a grandly caparisoned Cahors with deep ruby colour and aromas of menthol, liquorice, toffee, and truffle. Complex and mineral on the palate with prune fruit and concentrated black truffle notes. Try with truffe sous la cendre, shoulder of lamb or duck magret with a balsamic and honey reduction sauce.

2015

CLOS SAINT-JEAN

R

CLOS DE GAMOT, JEAN JOUFFREAU, Cahors

This is an historic estate, tucked into a bend on the River Lot in the village of Prayssac, making very traditional unembellished Auxerrois – the authentic voice of Cahors calling from the vasty deeps. Jean's family has been making wine at Gamot since 1610. The wines are from low yields, the harvesting by hand and the viticultural solutions are green. The Cuvée Centenaire is made only in exceptional years: it is from one hundred and twenty-year-old vines. Don't expect to be blown away by power – this wine describes subtlety and understatement. It is just on the mark, with a delicate whiff of rose-petal (interestingly Jouffreau plants roses at the end of each row of vines – it keeps off the mildew apparently) and a gentle palate of soft currant. You can almost taste the wisdom of centuries.

2021

CLOS DE GAMOT

R

FRONTON & VILLAUDRIC

To me

He is all fault who hath no fault at all:

For who loves me must have a touch of earth

Tennyson – *The Idylls of The King*

Fronton and Villaudric are embraced in the Côtes du Frontonnais. We are due north of Toulouse here and just west of Gaillac between the Tarn and the Garonne. The unique Négrette grape grows here. The story is that the Knights Templar brought the vines back from Cyprus almost 900 hundred years ago and called it Négrette because of its dark skin. Fronton is one of the oldest vineyards in France. It was the Romans who planted the first vines on the terraces overlooking the Tarn Valley. But it was only in the 12th century that the Négrette appeared, the variety which was to write Fronton's history.

At this time, the vines belonged to the Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem. They were the ones who, on one of their crusades, discovered and brought back a local grape from Cyprus, the Mavro (which means black in Greek), out of which the Cypriots used to make a wine to "increase their valour." The Knights introduced this grape to their commanderies in the Occident, including that of Fronton. Over the years, the Mavro became the Négrette and is the origin of the typicity of Fronton wines, the only area in France where this variety has become perfectly and durably acclimatised.

When Calixtus II, 160th Pope after St Peter, came to consecrate the church in Fronton on 19th July 1191, he was so enthusiastic about the wine that he demanded that its praises be sung on parchment.

Much later, the two neighbouring parishes of Fronton and Villaudric quarrelled over the supremacy of their soils. The story goes that in 1621, during the siege of Montauban, Louis XIII and Richelieu, having each taken quarters in one of the two towns, sent each other a gift of the respective wines.

Négrette makes good quick-maturing wines, quite low in acidity, but with a pronounced and flavour of almonds, white pepper, cherries, rhubarb, and liquorice. The wines are given structure by the addition of Syrah, the Cabernets and Gamay in various quantities. The wines reflect their terroir: the soil is poor, a red stone called *rouget* with a base of iron and quartz; you can sense their earthy digestibility and taste the significant concentration of minerals.

DOMAINE LE ROC, FAMILLE RIBES, Fronton ~ Organic conversion

Je negrette rien ("I have no negrette") – Edith Pif (the little nose)

The Côtes du Frontonnais is a highly unique winemaking region located on the left bank of the Tarn River about twenty miles north of Toulouse. The area is generally flat, with occasional hills that create small slopes. The vineyard's subsoil is composed of ice age deposits, topped by alluvial soil and rouget, a material very rich in iron that lends a particular flavour to the wines. The typical climate of the region is similar to that of Bordeaux: warm and dry in the summer, and mild and wet in the winter.

Jean-Luc and Frederic Ribes have always wanted to make Frontonnais with some oomph since they took over the Château Le Roc property in 1988. Soil composed of gravel and stone allied to low-yielding vines provided the foundation for this intention.

La Folle Noire d'Ambat is 100% Negrette. Folle Noir means "Crazy Black" and Ambat is the name of the single vineyard this wine is made from. This 3-hectare parcel is particularly rich in oxidized small stones called Rougets There is also a mix of iron-rich sandstone and red quartz, which is unique to Fronton. The grapes are very lightly crushed, destemmed, and fermented in small open top vats for 2 weeks at 25C. The wine is held in 20 hl old foudre for 10 months before release.

Hubbubbles in SW France? Roc' Ambulle Vin de Table de France Turbulent to give its full name and address comes from Fronton near Toulouse. Flip the crown cap and you can almost hear the Marseillaise playing. A blend of goodness knows which and heaven knows what – we think Negrette IS involved – this zero-sulphur slimline (9%) goodie is dark pink and discernibly sweet. It is petillant and has nice mousse and oozes sweet cherries, raspberries and peardrops. Whether it will always be thus or whether the sugars will ferment to dryness, neither God, nor even I suspect the grower even knows.

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|------|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 2023 | LE ROC AMBULLE | Sp/Ro |
| 2023 | LE ROC AMBULLE - magnum | Sp/Ro |
| 2020 | LE ROC CLASSIQUE | R |
| 2021 | FOLLE NOIRE D'AMBAT ROUGE ~ Négrette | R |

Here nature was simple and kindly, giving an impression of rusticity, both genuine and poetic, blossoming a world away from our contrived idylls, with no reference to the universe of ideas, self-generated, the pure product of chance.

Balzac – *The Wild Ass's Skin*

DOMAINE PLAISANCE PENAVAYRE, MARC PENAVAYRE, Villaudric – Organic – Certified AB

Based in the village of Vacquiers in the south-eastern part of the appellation, the utterly jovial Marc Penavayre makes wines that are a sheer joy to drink. The vines are planted on the highest terrace of the Tarn at an altitude of about 200m. The soil is composed of alluvial deposits, essentially pebbles, gravel, and silt. These deposits provide a check to the vine's vigour which is what is needed to produce quality grapes.

The grapes are not destalked, but cuvaisons are relatively short: 6 days for Gamay; 7-8 for the Négrette and a bit longer for the Syrah and Cabernet. He makes several styles of wine, the Cuvée Classique, for example, with greater emphasis on the fruit, is composed of Négrette (62%), Syrah (28%) and Cab Franc (10%), and is aromatically akin to putting your nose in a cherry clafoutis. The freshness is delightful and a twist of liquorice on the finish gives this wine a little bit extra. Grain de Folie features Négrette (68%) and Gamay (32%), a bright red wine marked by aromas of spice and rhubarb fruit and is fully expressive of typicity. On the palate, the wine is rounded and balanced with a finish of tannins that are present yet refined.

Time for some grilled country bread rubbed with garlic and tomato and the best Bayonne ham.

If Ribes wines lean towards the Rhône in accent, Penavayre's seem more Burgundian, but who cares – let's celebrate diversity. The pinky and perky coral-hued rosé (66% Négrette, 24% Gamay and 10% Syrah) is a sheer joy with a moreish, floral white-peppery quality that cries: Drink me!

*With aching hands and bleeding feet
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone;
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day, and wish were done.
(and that's not including the "flail of lashing hail")*

Subsequent vintages have been delightful and Penavayre is moving to a more natural style of winemaking. A relatively recent addition to the wine portfolio is Serr da Beg, which in Breton means: "On se tait et on déguste". . . "let's just shut up and taste". Serr da Beg is pure Négrette sans soufre. The wine is dark, earthy, sanguine, and very moreish, a sapid reminder of the virtues of southwest French wines.

| | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 2023 | CRUCHINET BLANC | W |
| 2021 | PLAISANCE PENAVAYRE CLASSIQUE ROUGE | R |
| 2022 | PLAISANCE PENAVAYRE ROUGE "ALABETS" | R |

There are moments in our life when we accord a kind of love and touching respect to nature in plants, minerals, the countryside, as well as the human nature in children, in the customs of country folk and the primitive world, not because it is beneficial for our senses, and not because it satisfies our understanding of taste either... but simply because it is nature.

Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller – *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*

MADIRAN & PACHERENC

“... Sebastien is a man of hot temper.”

“He is a southerner”, admitted Sir Lulworth; to be geographically exact he hails from the French slopes of the Pyrenees. I took that into consideration when he nearly killed the gardener’s boy the other day for bringing him a spurious substitute for sorrel. One must always make allowances for origin and locality and early environment; ‘Tell me your longitude and I’ll know what latitude to allow you’, is my motto.”

The Blind Spot – Saki

Confidentiel – description of a wine which is known only to connoisseurs and the local growers.

There have been vineyards in Madiran or Vic-Bilh (to give its original dialect name) since the 3rd century and, in the Middle Ages, pilgrims en route for Santiago de Compostela appreciated the wines. Pacherenc may be made from any one of a variety of grapes: Arrufiac (or arrufiat or ruffiac) is traditional, although many growers are turning to Gros and Petit Manseng and even a little sauvignon. Dry, off dry, or sweet, these wines are unusual and quite distinct from Jurançon with flavours of spiced bread and mint. In Madiran the traditional grape variety is Tannat, its very name suggestive of rustic astringency, and it constitutes anything between 40 and 60 per cent of the blend with the Cabernets and a little Fer (locally called Pinenc) making up the remainder. The soil in Madiran is endowed with deposits of iron and magnesium and is so compacted that neither rain nor vines can easily penetrate – these are dark, intense, minerally wines. As with Jurançon (q.v.) a group of young wine makers have worked hard to promote the identity of their wines. These growers are known locally as “*Les Jeunes Mousquetaires*” and foremost amongst them is Alain Brumont whose achievements at Château Montus have garnered worldwide recognition. His passion for new wood is unfettered; he experiments constantly with oak from different regions of France and with different periods of ageing. He also believes that true Madiran has as near 100% Tannat as possible. Patrick Ducournau, meanwhile, has harnessed modern technology, in his invention of the *microbules* machine. This device injects tiny bubbles of oxygen into the wine after the fermentation; the idea being that the normal method of racking off the lees disturbs the wine too much, whereas this gentler method allows slow aeration leading to wines of greater suppleness.

MADIRAN

DOMAINE BERTHOUMIEU, CLAIRE & MARION BORTOLUSSI, Madiran – Organic (certified AB)

There are several fine growers in Madiran now and Didier Barré ranks in the first echelon. These wines are perfect expressions of the notion of terroir – they are true to themselves, uncompromising and will develop in their own time. He even has a few rows of gnarled and knobbly 100-year-old + Tannat vines. The Madiran Constance is a pugnacious vin de terroir, a rustic tangle of umus and farmyard aromas, flavours of dark cherries, figs and pepper, a blend of Tannat, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinenc (Fer Servadou), whilst the award-garnering Charles de Batz is oak-aged, made from 90+% Tannat, purple black in colour and could probably age forever, a veritable vin de garde. Such is the fruit quality, however, that it will be drinking beautifully soon. The wine is named after Charles de Batz Castelmoré d’Artagnan, a French soldier under Louis XIV, and inspiration for Dumas. It certainly inspires us.

This Batz is made for your belfry. There lurks a Tannat-ridden beast in the Madiran mould blacker than a black steer’s tuckash in a moonless prairie night. And if that sentence makes any sense at all, you’re probably halfway through a bottle of “Charles de Batz”. En garde indeed. Madiran – O tannin bomb, o tannin bomb!

2021 MADIRAN CONSTANCE

R

2018 MADIRAN “CUVEE CHARLES DE BATZ”

R



WINES OF THE PYRENEES

JURANCON & BEARN

When I was a young girl, I was introduced to a passionate Prince, domineering, and two-timing like all the great seducers: Jurançon.

Colette

The history of Jurançon begins in effect with Henri IV, born in Pau when it was the capital of the Kingdom of Navarre. The story is that during his christening his lips were rubbed with Jurançon and cloves of garlic, the prelude to any great reign one would imagine. The area of Jurançon lies in the foothills of the Pyrenees. The town of Gan marks the eastern limit of the vineyards, and La Chapelle-de-Rousse is the village name you will commonly see on growers' bottles. The slopes here are very steep; the south-west facing vines require a long growing period. In a good vintage the results can be stunning. The wines range from a dry almondy style with aromas of fresh hay and lemon-zest through the mellow marzipan brioche flavours of moelleux, to the spectacular late-harvested nectars made from the Petit Manseng grape with their beautiful bouquet of honey and flowers and opulent flavours of guava, pineapple, and nutmeg. To the west and, at a much lower altitude, lies the commune of Monein and therein some of the great white wine makers in southern France. Growers such as Charles Hours, Jean-Bernard Larrieu and Henri Ramonteu are thinkers and innovators engaged in continuous debate with fellow growers about the styles of the wines they are producing particularly about the role of oak. If one had to distinguish between the wines of Chapelle-de-Rousse and Monein it would be that the former have higher acidity and are a touch more elegant whilst the latter are more vinous and richer.

CLOS LAPEYRE, JEAN-BERNARD LARRIEU, Jurançon – Organic – Certified AB (Ecocert)

The vines of Clos Lapeyre face southwards towards the hound's-tooth Pic du Midi d'Ossau with maximum exposure to sunlight yet simultaneously protected from strong winds. The 12ha vineyard has been exhaustively mapped and analysed for soil composition to obtain a profile of the microbial activity in the vineyard and as a result divided into twelve segments, each of which are treated according to how the soil, and, by definition, the vine needs to be nourished. Jean-Bernard Larrieu is one of the poets of Jurançon. Even in his straight Jurançon Sec (100% Gros Manseng) he achieves aromatic intensity by picking late and using the lees to obtain colour and extract. This delightful number dances a brisk citric tango on the palate. The old vines (Vitatge Vielh) cuvée sees some oak, has a proportion of Petit Manseng (40% - and also Courbu 10%), and is richer still with a powerfully oily texture, but it is his super sweet wines (100% Petit Manseng in new oak), harvested as late as December in some years, which consistently offer the greatest pleasure, exhibiting a sublime expression of sweet fruit: mangoes, coconut, grapefruit and banana bound by crystal-pure acidity. Magical as an aperitif, perfect with foie gras or anything rich, classic with Roquefort, and simply delicious with white peaches. La Magendia is an Occitan expression meaning the best. The basic Moelleux, known simply as Jurançon, is immensely enjoyable as a pre-prandial quaff. It is called, I believe, a four o'clock wine, so if you're about to watch Countdown, this is ideal. And is also what Jurançon used to taste like before sec became sexy. Made from 80% Gros Manseng and 20% Petit Manseng with the latter picked in three successive tries. Finally, a rare liqueux, Vent Balaguer, of great sweetness and delightful acidity, which we will be drinking with friends and family. La Magendia plus some. If you have to ask you can't afford it and even if you do ask, you can't afford it. "Le Béarnais" (a dialect of Occitan spoken in Béarn) is the mother tongue of Jurançon. The typical Béarnais expression of "ca-i bever un cop" (to share a drink) is symbolic of the region's welcoming nature. Just like singing, dancing and gastronomy, the wine of Jurançon encourages conviviality amongst friends.

| | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 2022 | JURANCON SEC | W |
| 2022 | JURANCON SEC – ½ bottle | W |
| 2020 | VITATGE VIELH DE LAPEYRE | W |
| 2013 | VITATGE VIELH DE LAPEYRE - magnum | W |
| 2021 | JURANCON EVIDENCIA | W |
| 2018 | JURANCON MANTOULAN | W |
| 2022 | JURANCON MOELLEUX | D/S |
| 2019 | LA MAGENDIA DE LAPEYRE | Sw |
| 2020 | LA MAGENDIA DE LAPEYRE – ½ bottle | Sw |

IROULEGUY

Nomansland, the territory of the Basques, is in a region called Cornucopia, where the vines are tied up with sausages. And in those parts, there was a mountain made entirely of grated parmesan cheese on whose slopes there were people who spent their whole time making macaroni and ravioli, which they cooked in chicken broth and then cast it to the four winds, and the faster you could pick it up, the more you got of it.

Giovanni Boccaccio – *The Decameron*
(quoted in Mark Kurlansky's *The Basque History of the World*)

Irouléguy, an appellation consisting of nine communes, is situated in the French Basque country high up in the Pyrenees on the border with Spain. These wines are grown on the last remnants of a big Basque vineyard founded in the 11th century by the monks of Ronçevaux Abbey. Much of the vineyard work is artisanal; the vines are grown on steep terraces and must be harvested by hand. Virtually all production is red or rosé with Tannat and the two Cabernets being blended according to the taste of the grower. A minuscule amount of white is made at the co-operative from the two Mansengs and Domaine Brana, for example, produces a wine from 70% Petit Courbu. There are only about half a dozen wine makers as well as the co-op, but the overall standard is very high with Domaine Arretxea (see below) being the reference in the region.

Glinting in the glass
Le Roi Henry's golden wine
Coolly exotic
Bristles with minerals
To bring you to your
Pyrenees.



Jean-Bernard Larrieu in “artist of the vines” garb



Old gold – Manseng nectar sweetenin' in the cellars

Jurançon Vent Balaguèr de Lapeyre

Vent Balaguèr means “southern wind” in Occitan. It is the warm wind that comes from Spain, up from behind the Pyrenees. The Petit Manseng grapes are late harvested and then put in trays to perfect the process of “passerillage”. These trays are laid outside on the sun during the hot and sunny days and brought inside the winery in damp and rainy weather. Besides dehydrating, the grapes change in colour, turning from a golden-yellow to russet and brown. Their flavour also changes and hints of apricot, candied orange peel and medlar fruit appear. Bright amber colour. Intense, profound nose, returning to haunt one with its multiple nuances: new wood, honeydew, apricot jam, confit of orange and lemon, Corinth raisins, blond tobacco, and spiced bread. The mouth is lively, spicy with cooked fruits, also floral with superlative concentration. The tactile sensation is unctuous and rounded, giving the impression of biting into perfectly ripe grapes with poised citric notes. The vanillin flavours are integrated into a rich texture and enrobed by a truly noble acidity. The finish is long and harmonious with mirabelle plum, peach and apricot. This is an extraordinary wine with exquisite equilibrium that will last for decades.

DOMAINE ARRETXEA, MICHEL & THERESE RIOUSPEYROUS, Irouléguy – *Biodynamic ~ Certified Organic Ecocert*

There are truths on this side of the Pyrenees, which are falsehoods on the other.
Blaise Pascal

Michel Riouspeyrous is a native Basque. He met his Alsatian future wife Thérèse while on a charity mission to Africa. On their return to France, they got married and decided to start their own domaine by renting two hectares of vineyards. Domaine Arretxea was born in 1989. Arretxea (from the Basque arre meaning stone and xea house) is a small six-hectare domaine entirely planted on south-facing terraces. Michel and Thérèse practise organic viticulture throughout their vineyard & use biodynamics on the plot where they grow white grapes. The Hegoxuri, made from 50% Gros Manseng, 40% Petit Manseng & 10% Petit Courbu, given an eighteen maceration & partially fermented in foudre, part in 600-litre demi-muid and part in stainless tank, is remarkable from its golden straw colour to its subtle nose where white flowers mingle harmoniously with extremely fresh exotic fruits. As for the Tannat-rich reds 4–5-week macerations, repeated pigeages and long elevage in oak with lees-stirring make for strong yet harmonious wines. The classic Irouléguy Rouge is a cement-aged Tannat-based red is given fragrance by its Cabernet partners. Fascinating aromas of forest fruits allied to sous-bois (undergrowth), fern and tea. Elegant and fine on the palate with delicious acidity. A wine of great character and real purity – a wine of terroir. Haitza (80% Tannat, 20% Cab Sauv) aged 18-months in foudre and demi-muid, has aromas of sour cherry, blackcurrant, liquorice, and caramel. The palate is infinitely silky with wild black fruits (ripe, black cherry), remarkable persistence of subtle notes of menthol, eucalyptus and liquorice and tannins which are mellow but still fresh. The ripeness of the grapes emerges in crystallised black fruit scents & a full palate perfectly structured by tasty tannins. Haitza and Hegoxuri? Sounds like a couple of Verdi characters that wandered into a Wagner ring cycle and started mixing it with the Valkyrie.

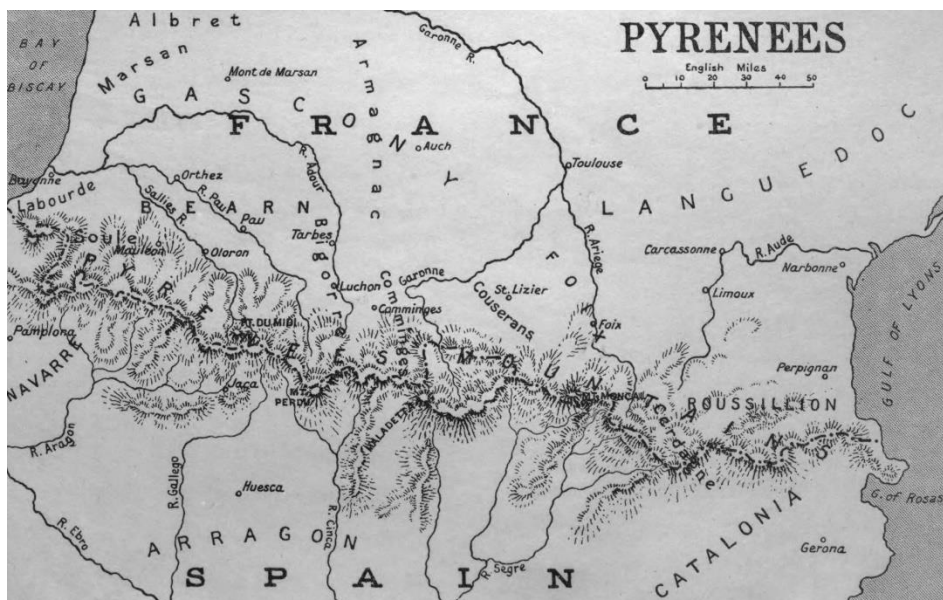
| | | |
|------|--|---|
| 2021 | IROULEGUY BLANC “HEGOXURI” ~ Gros Manseng, Petit Manseng, Courbu | W |
| 2021 | IROULEGUY BLANC “GRES” ~ Gros Manseng, Petit Manseng | W |
| 2021 | IROULEGUY ROUGE~ Tannat, Cab Franc, Cab Sauv | R |
| 2020 | IROULEGUY ROUGE CUVÉE HAITZA ~ Tannat, Cab Sauv | R |

Seen on a web site...

“The subject of inquiry was le gâteau Basque, Basque cake, a homemade delicacy prepared in the Pyrénées since the 17th century and properly called etxekobiskotxa, or “cake of the house.”

On the traditional Basque home, called *etxe* or *etche* (the x in Basque words often appears as ch to indicate the way it is pronounced in English): For the Basque, the *etxe* carries enormous emotional weight. It protects him from the empire of the outside: divine and intemperate forces. It is also his cradle, his daily life, and his sepulchre. The *etxe* is profoundly rooted in the Basque earth and soul.”

...with every piece of cake an historical, social, and philosophical discourse!





THE VIRTUES OF SIMPLICITY

When first my lines of heav'nly joyes made mention
 Such was their lustre, they did so excel,
 That I sought out quaint words, and trim invention;
 My thoughts began to burnish, sprout and swell,
 Curling with metaphors a plain intention,
 Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.

Thousands of notions in my brain did runne,
 Off'ring their service, if I were not sped:
 I often blotted what I had begunne;
 This was not quick enough, and that was dead
 Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne,
 Much less those joyes which trample on his head.

As flames do work and winde, when they ascend,
 So did I weave myself into the sense.
 But while I bustled, I might heare a friend
 Whisper, *How wide is all this pretence!*
There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn'ed
Copie out only that and save expense.

George Herbert – *Jordan (II)*

Herbert, writing about the act of glorifying the son of God, makes the point that the very grandiloquent language designed to exalt and celebrate obscures the simple notion of devotional love. In just the same way winemakers may take something which is pure, add lustre and burnish to it and lose the connection with the wine. “*Decking the sense, as if it were to sell*” describes the impulse to “improve on nature” (*plain intention*). Style soon supersedes substance: more oak, more extraction, more flavour, and more alcohol, louder, bigger, better – nothing is too good or too much to show the wine in its best light. It is like putting gilded metaphor before meaning or gaudy clothes before the body. Ultimately, the choice is this: is winemaking a natural act, an intuitive and highly sensitive response to what nature provides or is it about the greater glory of being the creator oneself (*so did I weave myself into the sense*). Our wine manifesto would echo those who argue for “natural wine” or a natural balance: specifically, for no chemicals in the vineyard, neither correction nor amplification of flavour, for a reduction of sulphur, additives, and stabilizers and for natural fermentation (i.e., without artificial enzymes). As Herbert writes: “*There is in love a sweetness readie penned*”. Commercialization has created a competitive wine culture where glossy wines are *products* created to win medals. There is a fine line between art and artifice in winemaking.

VINTAGE REPORT & NEW AGENCIES

It seems a very long time ago that when you introduced a wine from the south of France that lips would curl in contumely and the words “Midi plonk” would be spat out along with the wine in question. Now the generic has become appellation, and the appellations are being segmented into crus and the domaines are making single vineyard expressions of their wines. If Aramon has not become a noble musketeer, then Muscat has; and Carignan has proven its lineage over and again.

At the commercial end some excellent varietals are being made without sacrificing terroir unlike their new world counterparts “distill’d almost to a jelly”, whilst, perversely, the cooler conditions on the margin flatter the white wines. The quality of fruit is now being captured and enhanced by expert wine-making techniques. The modern wines of Stephane Vedeau, for instance, continue to prove that France can compete on the varietal front with any of the laboratories of garnishes/fruit factories around the world, whilst the elegant Chardonnays of the *Les Caves du Sieur d’Arques* are antidotes to the usual lactic caricatures.

For class in a bottle and a class look to Minervois and Jean-Baptiste Sénat and Clos du Gravillas in whose portfolio shines a star, a pure Carignan from old vines, a meticulous, eighteen-carat, bang-to-rights respect-my-quality red wine called Lo Vieilh. Look also for his wines made from distinctly unfashionable grapes such as Terret Bourret and some irrepressible Muscat every which way. Sénat makes beautifully elegant wines. With the recently acquired fabulous little “schist-hot” Saint-Chinian from Thierry Navarre, the beguiling garrigue-perfumed Corbières of *Ollieux-Romanis* and Côtes du Roussillons of *Marjorie Gallet*, the definition of purity and finesse, wonderful wines are emerging at all levels from the Languedoc-Roussillon appellations. To walk on the wild side, please engage with the Faugères reds of Clos Fantine. The teeming earth moves in these wines.

The Rousse is on the loose

Roussillon is where a lot of small growers are making stunning natural (low/no-sulphur) wines. *Jean-François Nicq* and *Bruno Duchene* make gentle-fruited, characterful reds with soft tannins and light extraction. Hand-crafted from grapes harvested from organically farmed vineyards and often centenarian bush vines the whites are also sensational, being packed with complex aromatics, vinosity, and mineral salts. The aforementioned Marjorie Gallet is doing some beautiful things in her stunning vineyards in Montner,

There comes a time in life when one begins to prize young wine. On a Southern shore there is a string of round, wicker-covered demijohns always kept in store for me. One grape harvest fills them to the brim, then the next grape harvest, finding them empty once more, in its turn fills them up again... do not disdain these wines because they give such quick returns: they are clear, dry, various, they flow easily from the throat to the kidneys and scarcely pause a moment there. Even when it is of a warmer constitution, down there, if the day is a really hot one, we think nothing of drinking down a good pint of this particular wine, for it refreshes you and leaves a double taste behind, of muscat and cedarwood.

Colette – *Earliest Wine Memories*

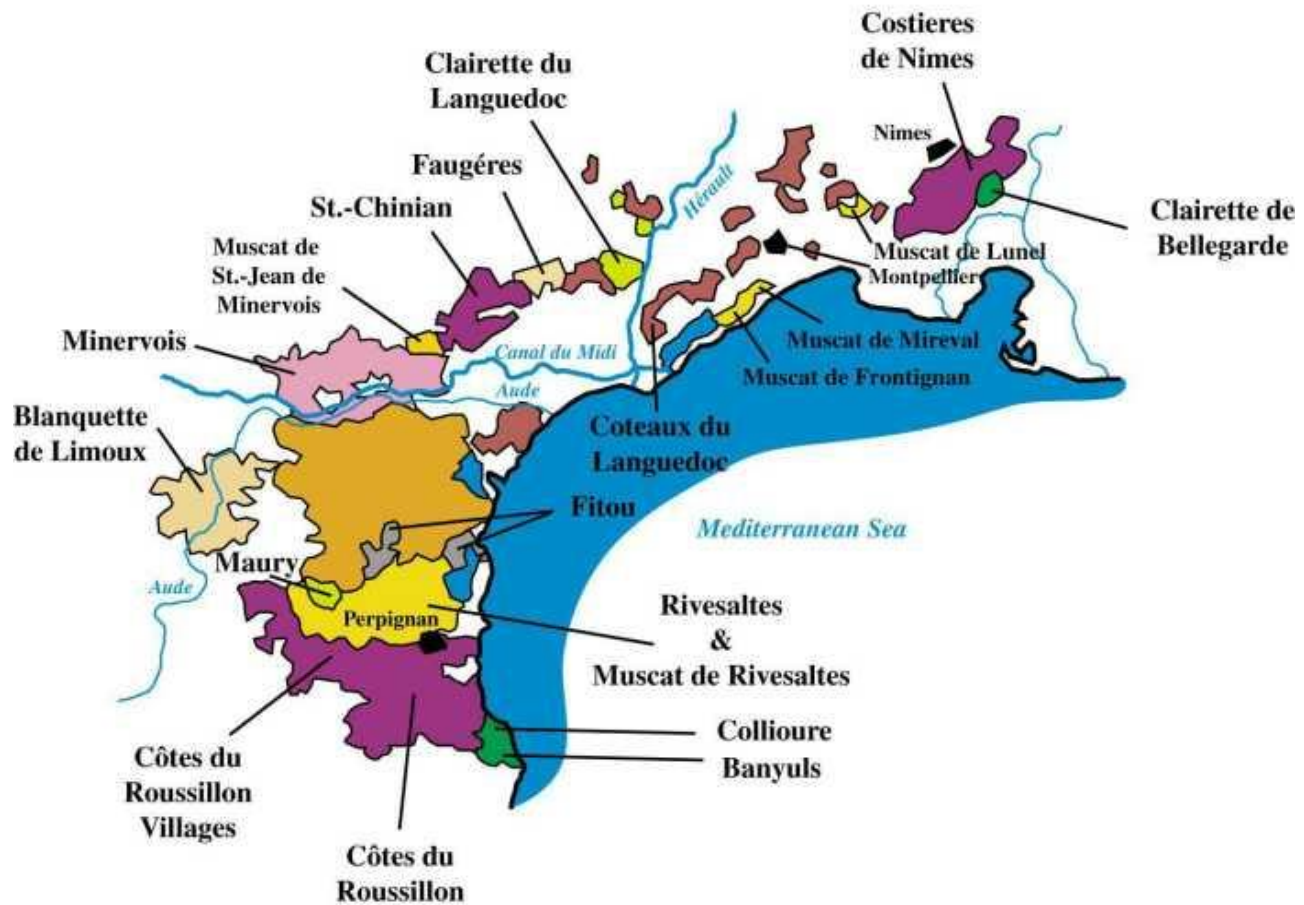
The Languedoc-Roussillon, described as “the largest vineyard in the world” by Liz Berry M.W., is a laboratory of innovation where the best of the old is being given a healthy technological makeover. The wine culture of centuries (vines were introduced by Greek traders as early as the eighth century BC) has been revitalised in the last thirty years, particularly after the significant reduction in the Aramon, a variety bogging down the image of the wines from this region. Soils and climate have historically combined to create an environment that is exceptionally well suited to growing vines; grape varieties are matched to their most appropriate terroir. When the wines hit top form, you would look in vain for equivalent value for money in the Rhône or Bordeaux. To highlight this fusion between traditional quirkiness and newfangled expertise look particularly at our two estates from Minervois: Jean-Baptiste Sénat and Clos de l’Azerolle. The wines fully reflect the terroir of the region, yet they retain their individual identities. The grape varieties (or blends) are different, the use of oak is different, and the vinification methods are different – the wines are homogeneous only in their respective excellence.

Mas de Daumas Gassac, invariably described as the first “Grand Cru of the Languedoc”, is an estate for which we have a strong affinity. The wines have charm and subtlety; every glass seems to express the history and terroir of this remarkable estate. Because of its early notoriety it endured a period of critical reverse snobbery. Those bored with garage-brewed Shiraz soup will enjoy Gassac’s more refined eloquence.

And who needs clunking claret after all when you can fill your mouth with epic taste sensations from southern France at a fraction of the cost? It is not only, however, against the traditional French areas that one should be measuring the phenomenal progress of the Languedoc-Roussillon, rather it is countries like Spain and even Australia that could do with a quality/price ratio lesson.

Someone once wrote: “Far from despising the word ‘peasant’ wine, these appellations embrace it with pride and give it due nobility”. Respect due.

LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON



Sure – it's a lovely map, but where the hell is Corbières?



Brand new Gassac tractor

ORGANIC WINES – THE SEMANTIC MIRE

The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector, by which disease passes into health, age into youth, death into life. Without proper care for it we can have no community, because without proper care for it we can have no life.”

— Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*

It is surprising that a positive philosophy that *should* connect people divides on so many levels. We believe – as do many of the growers on our list – in the relationship between terroir and organic viticulture, in agricultural sustainability, in sensible and sympathetic farming practices, in nurturing the soil and protecting the environment. Sounds fine and dandy, but there are a group of certified growers and journalists who strongly believe that the use of the word “organic” (now sanctified in legislation) is heretical unless appropriate certification is produced. Given that the growers have submitted to a regime of inspection one can understand that they might feel aggrieved if people started bandying around the term willy-nilly, but I think they are being over-defensive for a variety of reasons and damaging the reputation of organic wines.

We do not actually claim official organic status for non-certified wines but explain in detail in our list the viticultural practices, which would entitle them to that status should they wish to apply for it and be inspected. The fact that most of the estates don’t, despite more than fulfilling the criteria of “organic status”, is largely irrelevant. Or should be irrelevant. The growers are not trading on it, nor are we as the wine merchant who distributes their wines, but when we know how a grower works, we tell it as it is. Despite legislation regarding labelling no one body *owns* the notion of “organic” farming – if you farm organically then you farm organically. (Monty Waldin in his book “Biodynamic Wines” cites Felton Road Winery as a good example of an essentially organic estate that works the vines according to biodynamic principles but is unwilling to go for organic certification because of perceived weakness of the Bio-Gro dictates). This semantic lockout of the word “organic” is ridiculous; if we’re forced to use a synonymous term we will, but that won’t alter the fact that the grapes can be grown organically anywhere. Nor, incidentally, are we advertising any special properties for the wines by their being organic although we implicitly believe that all vine growers and farmers should move towards sustainable and organic viticulture.

The question that should be posed is: are organic wines better than non-organic wines? Given the extremely variable quality of food and drink that is passed off as organic, is the term worth a candle anyway? Real quality depends on good provenance which depends on the relationship between the consumer and the supplier and not between the consumer and a label, no matter how worthy the body that confers it. As a wine merchant we are in the position to give more information to our customers than a mere blanket certification – including our own caveats. It makes commercial sense for us to educate our customers, which entails giving them as much information about the product as possible. Just because an estate describes its produce as organic tells us nothing about the quality of farming (when the grapes are picked, the yields) nor does it give any indication of competence in the winery.

We live in a culture *in thrall* to the certificate, where information is packaged like fruit in a supermarket. We’d rather read a label than touch or smell something. Wine labels contain much information that is crass, pointless, patronising or just plain bogus. We want to celebrate great organic wines, not wines with labels where “organic” is the unique selling point.

In any case the certification system is flawed. We have heard from several of our growers of examples of accredited “organic” estates spraying crops with proscribed chemicals; presumably they falsify their records. Who to believe? In other words, just because a bureaucratic body ratifies something doesn’t make it true. We would presume, if this anecdotal evidence was correct, that these were rare examples, but the wine world is not, and never has been, purer than pure – especially regarding labelling. Speaking of purity – what is the position of the farmer who does not spray at all, but whose neighbour uses pesticides, herbicides and other aggressive chemicals that militate into the soil and water table or are blown onto the organic vines of the first farmer? And are we just talking about certificates here or something more profound? As I have mentioned we deal with many growers whose philosophy is stricter than the minimal guidelines laid down by the bodies that grant organic status. Organic farming derives from a philosophical choice: a desire to grow things naturally without recourse to damaging chemical solutions; to respect and protect the environment; to ensure that the soil is full of living organisms; in short, allowing nature to express the quality of the product. Whereas many of our growers in France and Italy understand and accept this as a matter of course, they do not see the necessity for some officious body to pronounce on a farming methodology let alone a lifestyle that they have been privately pursuing for years and possibly for generations. Others have made a considered choice to eschew certification. Why? Because they strongly believe that the current EEC laws are weak and poorly administered and that the need to fill out more paperwork has little or nothing to do with the choices that they make as artisanal growers. As Jean-Gérard Guillot observes in Patrick Matthew’s *The Wild Bunch*, “C’est une question de liberté. I have the necessary paperwork to go organic. But in some cases, it’s a racket, anyway. Let’s face it, either people like the wine or they don’t. The whole philosophy is *in* the wine, not *on* the label”.

Calling a wine organic has not sold a single bottle for us. The quality of what is in the bottle always matters most. Should a customer ask us about organic wines then we are totally transparent, highlighting those that are genuinely certified, but also mentioning growers and estates that abide by the self-same principles laid down by Ecocert and other similar bodies. We don’t confer any legitimacy on those wines other than our profound knowledge of the growers and the way they work in their vineyards. Knowledge may not constitute proof in a verifiable legal sense, but knowledge, in an evaluative sense, is more meaningful than a certificate *qua* certificate.

In summary, we support growers who make quality wine. We have seen an enormous growth towards the eradication of chemicals in the vineyard and a movement towards sustainable agriculture with respect for biodiversity. This is not so they (the growers) can achieve a certificate, but that they can have a vital, healthy vineyard with healthy grapes, the raw material to make great wines.

And time for all the works and days of hands...
 Time for you and time for me,
 And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
 And for a hundred visions and revisions
 Before the bottling of a wine *sur lie*’

(With apologies to TS Eliot)

VIN DE PAYS**LES CLAIRIERES, CELLERS. JEAN D’ALIBERT, IGP d’Oc**

Plumply plummy little number from a co-operative in La Livinière. The wine is almost indecently purple with bags of blackberry fruit and more than a smidge of (ripe) tannin.

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| 2023 | MERLOT | R |
|------|--------|---|

BERGERIE DE LA BASTIDE, IGP d’Oc

This pair of wines illustrate amply that the Languedoc is where the mustard is being cut vis-à-vis bang-for-buck cheapies (that’s not a sentence you read every day). The Bergerie de la Bastide white is a mouthful, and then some, of 50% Grenache Blanc, Terret and Sauvignon. It reveals typical notes of dried herbs, white flowers, fennel, juniper, and green olive with a touch of citrus to bring up the rear. A wine that will hold its own with shellfish and crustacea. The red is a savoury assemblage of Grenache Noir, Cinsault and Merlot, a lovely effort built on the twin pillars of fruit and structure. Ruby red with red fruit aromas of cranberries and red cherries it is light, clean, and fresh on the palate with lively acidity and recurrent flavours of cassia and vanilla. Surprisingly good with Indian and Chinese food as well as grilled fish. The rosé is a blend of Cinsault, Syrah and Grenache. These are real wines: not whey-faced macedoines of token gumfruits.

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|------|---|----|
| 2023 | BERGERIE DE LA BASTIDE BLANC | W |
| 2023 | BERGERIE DE LA BASTIDE BLANC – 10-litre BIB | W |
| 2022 | BERGERIE DE LA BASTIDE ROUGE | R |
| 2023 | BERGERIE DE LA BASTIDE ROUGE – 10-litre BIB | R |
| 2023 | BERGERIE DE LA BASTIDE ROSE | Ro |

VILLA SAINT-JEAN, Pays d’Oc

The vines for these wines are cultivated on soils composed of pebbly scree and clay from an area southeast of Avignon. The grapes for the white are harvested at night to preserve the natural acids, thereafter to the wine where light skin maceration (four hours) is succeeded by pneumatic pressure and light racking of the must. The wine is distinguished by its pale-yellow robe with straw-yellow nuances. The nose is fresh with notes of citrus fruits such as grapefruit, lime, and liquorice and both round and fresh on the palate. The grapes for the red are destemmed with a traditional vinification including two-week fermentation on skins. After a pneumatic pressing the wine is matured in stainless steel. The mouth offers a nice freshness with a long-lasting finish and pleasing cherry, redcurrant, and plum notes.

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|------|------------------------|---|
| 2023 | VILLA SAINT-JEAN BLANC | W |
| 2021 | VILLA SAINT-JEAN ROUGE | R |

*The luscious clusters of the vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine
The nectarine and curious peach
Into my hands themselves do reach*

Andrew Marvell – *The Garden*

Cultivate simplicity, Charles Lamb counselled his friend Coleridge, advice many wine growers might heed.

DOMAINE HENRI NORDOC & LA BOUSSOLE, STEPHANE VEDEAU & CLAUDE SERRA, Pays d'Oc

Domaine Nordoc may sound like an orc-overridden enclave of Middle Earth, but is, in fact, one of Stephane Vedeau's many labels. Behind the label is some very good quality inexpensive vin de pays. The Chardonnay is from a selection of the best parcels located on the hillsides along the Mediterranean Sea, well known for natural restriction of the yields and a good microclimate. On chalky soils, the Chardonnay can give its best expression. Grapes are harvested at night to preserve natural acidity and prevent oxidation. After fermentation, the wine matures in tank on the fine lees for six to eight months. Very aromatic nose with notes of quince, honey and spices combined with hints of citrus fruits. The mouth is fleshy yet fresh, and the exotic palate suggests mango and ginger. Delicious Merlot oozing bags of primary fruit: mulberry, sweet cherry and plum, rounded off by savoury flavours of black olive, eucalyptus leaf and white pepper. The Cabernet Sauvignon, from chalky-clay soil with broken stones, is varietally bang on, a touch of clove-edged bitterness and Languedoc herbs mark its individuality.

The Boussole Pinot Noir displays ripe strawberry fruit flavours with secondary aromas of sous-bois and menthol. This would be good with a lamb curry or duck with olive. The Viognier is extraordinarily rich, deep gold, with aromas redolent of lychee and sun-ripened peach. A wine that matches modern fusion cuisine. None of these wines are aged in oak (or in orc for that matter).

The rose is a nifty perky pink at an appealing price. This palely shimmering number comes from the commune of Caux near Pezenas from vines grown on classic clay limestone soils. Viticulture is environmentally sensitive (lutte raisonnée), and harvest is by hand.

The blend is 80% Cinsault – providing the floral component to the mix – and Syrah, the remainder and the structure. The vines have decent age on them – 35-40 years old. The varieties are fermented separately in stainless steel at low temperature to preserve their aromatic properties. The resulting wine is delicate and attractive with fresh zingy strawberry fruit and appealing notes of red flowers.

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|------|---------------------------------|----|
| 2021 | HENRI NORDOC CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | HENRI NORDOC MERLOT | R |
| 2022 | HENRI NORDOC CABERNET SAUVIGNON | R |
| 2022 | LA BOUSSOLE PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2023 | HENRI NORDOC CINSULT SYRAH ROSE | Ro |

GRANGES DES ROCS, Coteaux du Languedoc

Very correct Picpoul made from hand harvested grapes from vineyards located in the sandy soils in Montagnac in the heart of the appellation. Viticulture is with the minimum of treatments and fermentation is in stainless steel vats with the malo inhibited. The result is a wine that is crisp, herbal, and slightly buttery – very easy to drink indeed.

| | | |
|------|------------------|---|
| 2023 | PICPOUL DE PINET | W |
|------|------------------|---|

DOMAINE MAS MONTEL, DOMINIQUE GRANIER, Pays du Gard ~ Certified Organic

A domaine outside the village of Aspères near Montpellier that is making great strides. The terroir (Terres de Sommières) is characterised by soils of limestone and clay with flints. Dominique Granier's wines are always very approachable with charming fruit. La Petite Syrah is marvellously consistent with soft ripe fruit flavours to the fore, an uncomplicated "vin de bébé" showing stewed fruits flecked with cinnamon and nutmeg. Garnet colour, earthy aromas, notes of red fruits, spice, leather, and liquorice. Well balanced with elegant and rounded tannins.

2022 LA PETITE SYRAH BIO, IGP DU GARD

R

DOMAINE DE MOULINES, SAUMADE FRERES, Pays de l'Hérault ~ Organic

These wines offer an interesting stylistic contrast to the range from Mas Montel (q.v.) The Merlot & Cabernet Sauvignon have attracted the attention of a certain Robert Parker: they are darkly coloured, dense, rich, mouth-coating wines, almost New World in style. The vineyard is worked according to "culture raisonnée", whilst in the winery there is a traditional vinification with fermentation and maceration of 25-30 days, light extraction of fruit and ageing in tank. All the wines are unfiltered. Beautifully assembled, with just a whisper of garrigue, the Merlot is impeccably balanced, both elegant and pure. A sweet nose of bright red cherries opens to a plush, soft, round mouth of black fruits, fresh plums and blackberries and more cherries, with easy tannins and a bright acidity. Monsieur Saumade recommends this wine with gigot of lamb with ceps. The Cabernet Sauvignon has bitter fruit flavours, a nice dusting of grippy tannins and hints of paprika and black pepper.

2022 MERLOT

R

2022 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

R

Appellation – What's in a Name?

The notion of appellation was originally a charter, often a royal seal of approval. Appellation or "naming the wine" gave it an official legitimacy. The word has since – in many people's views – moved away from expressing the need to protect regional identity and to promote authenticity as well as supporting good practice towards more negative associations such as died-in-the-wool protectionism, restrictive and inflexible practice, and bureaucratic authoritarianism.

Appellation was never intended to stamp a homogenous identity on wine and winegrowers. It was meant to encourage wine growers to improve their working practices and inform consumers as to how such methods affect the way an appellation speaks through its wines. Typicity and diversity are not mutually exclusive; within each appellation there are myriad terroirs. Wine is a soft interpreter of the grape variety, the microclimate (the aspect, the soil, the vegetation, the sun, the heat and so forth) not to mention the technique in the winery – there are as many wines as there are variables each year. Diversity is therefore, by definition, a fact of nature. But a vigneron looking to preserve the subtlety and unique character of a specific place, to capture the essence of terroir, will never try to modify or homogenise his or her wine by driving out nature with a pitchfork.

Typicity and terroir mean simply this; that wine duly reflects where it comes from and changes according to the unique variables of each vintage, but the wine has an inherent identity, a singularity that tells us that it is a natural product from a "specific" place.

It is interesting finally to note that the quality charters of *La Renaissance des Appellations* and Slow Food France are based on philosophical and ethical convictions as to what constitutes terroir and good farming practice and are not legal frameworks. This highlights the problem with so many things in our world: people are bluntly told they can't do such-and-such when it should be explained instead why it would be a morally good idea for them to pursue a particular course of action.

Ideally, and from a consumer's viewpoint, appellation should be inextricably connected to quality. Quality can be determined by pinpointing origin of product and methodology or farming practice – these are objective measures – in conjunction with the subjective evaluation of tasting panels.



Why devote an extra page to one estate? Well, it could have been a chapter or even a book. However, the book of the story and the wine has already been most ably penned by Alastair Mackenzie and the vintages have been scrupulously chronicled by the redoubtable Michael Broadbent in his *Vintage Wine*. Daumas Gassac, a long-standing favourite, is one of only wine estates to merit a special chapter to itself (along with Musar and Vega Sicilia).

The story of Mas de Daumas Gassac is one of vision, enterprise, passion, and pride. When the Guiberts first purchased their farm (the *mas*) in the charming Gassac valley they little realised that they had a particular micro-climate which would give them the potential to make great wines. A visiting professor from Bordeaux, one Henri Enjalbert, identified a particular red soil that was common to certain great estates in the Médoc and Grand Cru Burgundies. Under the thick garrigue scrub and shrubs covering the Arboussas hills, he found some 40 hectares of perfectly drained soil, poor in humus and vegetable matter, rich in mineral oxide (iron, copper, gold etc). Formed from deposits carried in by the winds during the Riss, Mindel and Guntz glacial periods (ranging from 180,000 – 400,000 years ago) the terroir provides the three elements necessary for a potential Grand Cru: deep soil ensuring the vines' roots delve deep to seek nourishment; perfectly drained soil ensuring vines' roots are unaffected by humidity; poor soil meaning that vines have to struggle to survive, an effort which creates exceptionally fine aromas. Rock, scrub, and tree clearing began in 1971 and the first vines, principally Cabernet Sauvignon, were planted on the 1.6ha plot.

Soil is only one element in the cocktail that makes Gassac the great wine that it is. You need stand in the vineyards to engage with the subtleties of the micro-climate. The hill is thick with garrigue; strong warm scents of wild herbs imprint themselves in the air; the quality of light is fantastic. The vines are planted in small clearings, magical glades hidden in the dense, forest-like garrigue. The complexity of Daumas Gassac wines derives heavily from the scents of myriad Mediterranean wild plants and herbs: bay, thyme, rosemary, lavender, laburnum, fennel, wild mint, lentisque, strawberry trees... It's all part of the 'terroir' effect, a combination of soil, climate and environment that sets one wine apart from another, sadly an effect that is lost in modern monoculture, where huge areas are cleared of all vegetation except vines. At nightfall, the cold air from the Larzac (850 metres) floods into the Gassac valley, with the result that, even in the height of summer, the vineyards benefit from cool nights and moderate daytime temperatures. The northern facing vineyards accentuate the beneficial effect of this cool microclimate by ensuring they are exposed to less direct sunshine during the hot summers. The micro-climate also means that the vines flower some three weeks later than the Languedoc average; that's why the red grapes are harvested later – in early October. The micro-climate is a huge factor in creating the outstanding complexity and finesse of the red wines, most especially the splendidly fine balance of the great vintages' alcohol-polyphenol-acid content.

The cellars have been created in the foundations of a Gallo-Roman mill; they now house 400 Merrain oak Bordeaux barrels; one in seven is replaced each year. There are two cold water springs under the cellar's floor, nature's own air conditioning system, which slows the alcohol fermentation down to between 8 – 10 days. This slow process means the complex flavours have time to develop, something that doesn't happen with modern high-tech fermentation. You cannot talk about Gassac without mentioned Emile Peynaud who effectively came out of retirement in 1978 to mentor the Guiberts in their early wine-making endeavours.

The wines do not lie; they have natural elegance and a purity that marks them apart. Each vintage is truly a testament to a wine-growing season; one tastes the terroir rather than the technique.

MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC, FAMILLE GUIBERT, Haute-Vallée du Gassac ~ *Organic practising for domaine wines*

... Clarissa was passing me the bottle – a 1987 Daumas Gassac. This was the moment, this was the pinprick on the time map.

Enduring Love – Ian McEwan

We are not making Coca-Cola here.

Samuel Guibert

Exquisite and sublimely subtle wines that are unique for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the terroir is exceptional, the vines growing on a deep, well-drained soil formed by glacial deposits. Secondly, the upper Gassac valley has a cool microclimate that allows a longer growing season. Thirdly, the vineyards have been created in small plots or clearings surrounded by forest and garrigue. The wines consequently soak up the fragrances of the surrounding plant life of laurel, thyme, rosemary, lavender, arbutus, fennel, wild mint and lentisque. Fourthly, Daumas Gassac embraces an organic culture, eschewing chemical fertilizers, using only natural dung compost as well as tree and straw cuttings. Fifthly, yields are naturally low (35hl/ha), allowing the wine to express the terroir more than the grape variety & the vines are manually harvested. The vinification for the red wines is like that in Médoc; long fermentation (three weeks), ageing in wooden casks, light fining with egg whites and no filtering. The white grapes undergo skin maceration for 5-7 days followed by fermentation in stainless steel, whereupon the juice is transferred briefly to Burgundy oak casks where it is filtered with an alluvionaire filter.

The vineyard for the red wine is situated on a 40-hectare hill in the heart of the property and is planted with 80% of old Cabernet Sauvignon grafted onto rootstock R110 and 41B. The remaining 20% of vines are composed of 10 complementary grape varieties: Cot from Cahors, Merlot from Pomerol, Cab Franc from the Val de Loire, Syrah from Côte-Rôtie, Tannat from Madiran, Pinot from Burgundy, Nebbiolo from Piedmont, Grenache from the Languedoc, Tempranillo from Navarre, Voskehat and Kontorni from Armenia, Salte from Syria as well as the small (very small) presence of ancient grape varieties from Georgia. The white grape varieties are grown on the surrounding white lutetian limestone. This vineyard is composed of 20% each of the following grape varieties: Viognier from Condrieu, Chardonnay from Burgundy, Chenin from the Loire and Petit Manseng from Jurançon. The remaining 20% of vines include grape varieties from Georgia, Armenia, Madeira etc. Etc. As well as the slightly better known Roussanne, Marsanne, Clairette, Muscat. These wines are quite beautiful. Treat them with reverence and you will reap rewards. The Gassac Blanc should not be served too cold. Decant it and witness how the primary pear fruit Viognier aromas melt into the wine to be replaced by an impression of warm butter, pollen, and dried fruits. Roll the wine gently in your mouth and you will understand harmony. The Gassac Rouge is even more complex exhibiting a fantastic bouquet of crushed blackberries and mulberries along with an array of smoky-leathery notes and a silky finish you can taste for several minutes. It is no exaggeration to suggest that this wine outperforms many first and second growth clarets. The Emile Peynaud is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Aujourd'hui rien, but, in time, greatness. A wine of staggering potential. Start mortgaging the family silver. The Vin de Laurence is a vin de liqueur made from a double fermentation of Sercial with Muscat à Petits Grains (these grapes are harvested in October when roasted and shrivelled). Yields are a severe 10hl/ha. It is amber in colour and tastes of cooked oranges, sweet apricots, and cloves with a hint of garrigue honey. Superb!

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| 2023 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROSE FRIZANT | Sp/Ro |
| 2023 | MOULIN DE GASSAC CLASSIC BLANC | W |
| 2023 | MOULIN DE GASSAC CHARDONNAY VIOGNIER | W |
| 2023 | RESERVE DE GASSAC BLANC | W |
| 2023 | RESERVE DE GASSAC ROSE | Ro |
| 2022 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC BLANC | W |
| 2021 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC BLANC – ½ bottle | W |
| 2023 | MOULIN DE GASSAC CLASSIC ROUGE | R |
| 2023 | MOULIN DE GASSAC PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2020 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROUGE | R |
| 2019 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROUGE – ½ bottle | R |
| 2019 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROUGE – magnum | R |
| 2020 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROUGE “CUVEE EMILE PEYNAUD” | R |
| 2020 | VIN DE LAURENCE – 50cl | Sw |

The mysteries remain,
 I keep the same
 cycle of seed-time
 and of sun and rain;
 Demeter in the grass,
 I multiply,
 renew and bless
 Bacchus in the vine;
 I hold the law,
 I keep the mysteries true,
 the first of these
 to name the living, dead;
 I am the wine and bread.
 I keep the law,
 I hold the mysteries true,
 I am the vine,
 the branches, you
 and you.

Hilda Doolittle



Vineyards and garrigue

Older vintages of Gassac...

It is said that the red wines of Gassac begin precociously; despite the powerful tannins, the elegance of the fruit certainly makes them a pleasure to drink in the first year or so after release. Then, as with any great wine, comes a period of dormancy, perhaps three to five years, whilst the wine settles, matures and evolves. As anyone who has tasted verticals of the Gassac reds back to the 80s will attest, these wines have magnificent ageing potential and not only is the structure and balance evident, but the garrigue flavours become more pronounced, amply demonstrating that the wines are truly a product of their unique natural environment.

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| 2012 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROUGE | R |
| 2007 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROUGE- special release – stored in Gassac cellars | R |
| 2006 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROUGE | R |
| 2003 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROUGE | R |
| 1995 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROUGE | R |
| 1990 | MAS DE DAUMAS GASSAC ROUGE | R |

These vintages are only indicative. Other vintages may be available on request.

LIMOUX, COTES DE MALEPERE & CABARDES

This part of the Languedoc is centred around the city of Carcassonne and its spectacular medieval citadel. To the southwest is the town of Limoux with its tradition of sparkling wines: Blanquette and Crémant de Limoux. The traditional grape variety here is Mauzac but more recently Chenin, Chardonnay and red varieties have been planted. Blanquette is claimed as the oldest sparkling wine in France, predating Dom Perignon's happy accident by about half a century. The still wine whites of Limoux were given AOC status in 1993. The variety of microclimates and aspects has led to the definition of four different zones: Autan, Oceanique, Mediterranean and Haute-Vallée. This is a comparatively small region, although each of the sub-zones displays markedly different characteristics. The Cave Cooperative de Limoux is responsible for about three quarters of the production in the area; as well as making sparkling wines they produce Chardonnay from the four *climats*. The Haute-Vallée, from vines grown at 450m in altitude, reveals the tightest structure with marked acidity and the greatest ageing potential, and is, to coin a cliché, Burgundian.

The Côtes de la Malepère is at the frontier of the Languedoc and Aquitaine, what the French call *le partage des eaux*, the watershed between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. As Rosemary George writes in her excellent book "The Wines of the South of France" the vineyards are "a melting pot of grape varieties... Midi mingling with Bordeaux". Climatically, the Malepère has more affinity to the Atlantic, although the vegetation is mixed as is the terroir ranging from sandstone terraces of glacial origin, to slopes of clay and limestone to gravel. The primary grape varieties are Merlot, Malbec and Cinsault; Cab Franc, Cab Sauv and Grenache Noir are also present. Certainly, the Bordeaux varieties seem to be gaining favour at the expense of the Languedoc ones. The wines from this area of are good inexpensive examples of wannabe claret (though why would you wannabe claret) with sweet ripe fruit flavours, graceful pepperiness and quenchworthy acidity. That's the sort of Cabernet Franc that wins instant converts. Try it with lentils with bacon or cassoulet.

Accorded appellation status in 1998 Cabardès lies north-west of Carcassonne and is separated from the Minervois by the river Orbiel. This climate is locally described as *vent d'est, vent d'ouest*, where soft and cool Atlantic winds blend with the heat of the Mediterranean sun, where wheat is grown in the west and where lavender and thyme flourish in the south, where Bordeaux grape varieties live alongside those of the Languedoc. The name Cabardès originates from Cathar times referring to the local lords of Cabaret who defended Château de Lastours against Simon de Montfort in the 13th century.

TOQUES ET CLOCHERS, LES CAVES DU SIEUR D'ARQUES, Limoux

We call the Chardonnay our "petit Meursault". The élevage of the wine is in new oak, which confers complex flavours of melted butter, nuts, caramel, and toast. There is also a delicious lemony twist in the finish. Yet another wine where the accent is on terroir and minimal intervention. Ages wonderfully too. Watch out for the punt on this bottle, deep enough for a small sommelier to disappear into. The Toques et Clochers refers to an auction of exceptional barrels from the best parcelles on the Sunday before Easter every year. A gala dinner is cooked by a celebrity chef (hence the Toque – the chef's traditional tall white hat) whilst the proceeds of the auction go to a different Limoux wine village each year – to be used for the restoration of its bell tower (the Clocher).

2022 LIMOUX CHARDONNAY, TOQUES ET CLOCHERS

W

DOMAINE LES HAUTES TERRES, GILLES AZAM, Limoux – Organic certified

Gilles Azzam comes from the village of Roquetaillade in the upper valley of the Aude in the Limoux zone. This is the foothills of the Pyrenees, climatically at the junction of the Atlantic and Mediterranean influences. The village nestles in an amphitheatre, the vines are on surrounding hills, some covered with garrigue, others covered in woods, dry on the one side, moist on the other. The soil, called nummulites, is an ochre-coloured marly clay with sandstone containing plentiful fossils (this area was once under the sea). The organically farmed Chardonnay vines are on north and northeast facing slopes at between 450-600 metres, the better to preserve the natural acidity in the grapes. After cold settling the Chardonnay is fermented for a month in stainless tank before six months ageing in concrete vats. The malolactic is completed, the wine is bottled with a light filtration and a low amount of sulphur added. Louis is a blend of Chardonnay and Chenin, fermented with native yeasts and then matured in foudres for 12 months. Very mineral! The Chenin brings a fresh floral tone to the party (honeysuckle, linden leaves) whereas the Chardonnay displays ripe fruits (quince and apricot)

NV « JOSEPHINE » CREMANT DE LIMOUX

Sp

2022 HAUTES TERRES « LOUIS » BLANC ~ Chardonnay, Chenin

W

2023 VIN DE FRANCE BLANC « PANORAMA »

W

Drinkers May Be Divided Into Four Classes – with apologies to Samuel Taylor Coleridge

- Sponges, who absorb all they drink, and return it nearly in the same state, only a little dirtied.
- Sandglasses, who retain nothing, and are content to get through a bottle of wine for the sake of getting through the time.
- Strain-bags, who merely retain the dregs of what they drink.
- Mogul Diamonds, equally rare and valuable, who profit by what they drink, and enable others to profit by it also.

In order for the wheel to turn, for life to be lived, impurities are needed, and the impurities of impurities in the soil, too, as is known, if it is to be fertile. Dissension, diversity, the grain of salt and mustard are needed...

“French wines may be said but to pickle meat in the stomach, but this is the wine that digests, and doth not only breed good blood, but it nutritieth also, being a glutinous substantial liquor; of this wine, if of any other, may be verified that merry induction: That good wine makes good blood, good blood causeth good humors, good humors cause good thoughts, good thoughts bring forth good works, good works carry a man to heaven, ergo, good wine carrieth a man to heaven.”

James Howell (1594-1666)

DOMAINE DE ROUDENE, BERNADETTE & JEAN-PIERRE FAIXO, Fitou

In Occitan “fita” means border or frontier and Fitou sat on the border of France and Catalonia. The climate is Mediterranean with long hot summers and mild winters. The dry winds of the Pyrenees, like the Tramontana, help to make this region one of the driest in France. This is a land of magically shaped mountains, ravines, tablelands where shrubs scented with thyme and lavender grow, and the dizzy medieval citadels preside over an extraordinary countryside. Fitou, like other appellations, has a wonderful variety of landscapes, climbing from the sea and lagoons to the white schistose escarpments and the limestone plug of Mont Tauch. The wines show potential, although have yet to garner the critical plaudits of Minervois and Corbières, for example. Gnarled Carignan and wizened Grenache rule the cépage roost here, with Syrah and a tad of Mourvèdre adding spike and length to the typical blend. Syrah is gaining ground in the hills; it contributes a flowery note with hints of red fruits and juniper. The AOC area includes wines from selected parcels of the communes Fitou, Cascatel, Caves-de-Treilles, La Palme, Leucate, Paziols, Treilles, Tuchan en Villeneuve-des-Corbières.

Domaine de Roudène, located in the pretty village of Paziols, is divided into small parcels. Jean-Pierre is trying to rationalise the estate by inducing other growers to exchange bits of land for his own, but as Paul Strang writes: “in a country where the ownership of a particular plot has a symbolic importance beyond the quality of the purpose to which it is put, progress is slow”.

One superb wine from this consistent estate. The baby wine is from grapes grown on the terraces of argilo-calcaire and is a blend of Carignan (50%), Grenache (30%) and Syrah (20%). Everything is done traditionally; harvest is by hand when grapes have reached full phenolic maturity whilst a long cuvaison of twenty-one days and pigeage helps to extract all the aromatic components. The wine is bright and purple with blueish tints, with a fine complex nose of confit fruits, red and black berries suffused with peppery spices and notes of bay and clove. The feel of the wine in the mouth is fresh and lively and the tannins are fine and supple. And for food? Terrine of wild hare, persillade of ceps, boned baked shoulder of lamb, saltimbocca etc.

2020

FITOU, CUVÉE JEAN DE PILA

R

In Praise of Limestone – WH Auden

...Mark these rounded slopes
With their surface fragrance of thyme and beneath
A secret system of caves and conduits
That spurt everywhere with a chuckle
Each filling a private pool for its fish and carving
Its own little ravine whose cliffs entertain
The butterfly and lizard...

CORBIERES



CHATEAU OLLIEUX ROMANIS, ARTISANS PARTISANS, PIERRE BORIES, Corbières
100% organically grown grapes – certified AB France

Corbières is the largest of the appellations in the Languedoc-Roussillon with a large number of cooperatives and hundreds of independent growers. The region enjoys a history that goes back to the Greek settlements in the second century BC. This is Cathar country with a vengeance. The legacy of that terrible conflict lives on today and there is strong sympathy for those early rebels who reflect so much of the Languedocian temperament. In case you think this is a digression there still remains a strong independent spirit. The riots of 1907 when the vigneron took on the government have been echoed down the ages since when desperate farmers have taken the law into their own hands to protect a heritage that is their livelihood.

The Corbières region provides a diversity of terroirs and climates. In the Aude valley, from Lezignan and Boutenac westwards to Mont d'Alaric, the Carignan grape reigns supreme. The sheer diversity of the district and the designated eleven terroirs suggest that several crus will be created. Variety and contrast are noticeable also in the soil formation. The eruption of the Pyrenees has resulted in layers of different type of soil and subsoil. Erosion has contributed also. In the north there is red sandstone as well as pebbly terracing, while in the heart of the mountains there is marl as well as some shale, and, by the sea, coral-like chalk. The hot, dry climate ensures a long growing cycle for the vines, and the winds keep to a minimum the need for chemical treatments in the vineyard.

Ollieux Romanis produce classic Corbières wines that beautifully represent the unique and varied terroirs of Boutenac.

- *The Cuvee Classique Blanc is 30% Roussanne 30% Marsanne: 20% Grenache Blanc; 20% Macabeu on well-drained soils (pebbles and limestone). A refreshing blend of orange blossom, apple-skin, garrigue herbs.*
- *The Cuvee Classique Rose is a blend of Cinsault, Grenache Noir and Grenache Gris with short skin maceration followed by pressing and ageing in stainless tanks. We are not allowed to utter the word Provençale, but this is a superb pink wine where the Grenache Gris gives great personality of strawberries and pink grapefruit.*
- *The Cuvee Classique Rouge combines Syrah (40%) with Carignan (30%) and Grenache Noir (30%) from plots between 10 and 60 years old. 15 days in vat with 50% of the Carignan given a carbonic maceration. Lovely blend where the punch of the Syrah is complemented by the warmth of the Grenache with its notes of bay leaf & dried rosemary, and two parts of the Carignan, one juicy and red fruited, the other a touch darker.*
- *Alba Rose – Grenache Gris; Grenache Noir and Cinsault. The first vines to see the sun in the morning in Boutenac terroir, a special plot where the grapes achieve superb concentration. The juice remains on the marc for 48 hours which gives structure and minerality.*
- *Prestige Rouge is 45% Carignan; 25% Mourvèdre: 20% Syrah; 10% Grenache from plots between 40 and 100 + years old vines. Part carbonic for the Carignan, part aged in barrel and part in stainless. Rich and smoky, black cherries, balsam and liquorice.*
- *Atal Sia is a blend of 45% Carignan; 30% Grenache; 25% Mourvèdre – from some of the oldest vines (over a century old). A rich velvety wine with distinctive notes of cocoa, confit red fruits and silky tannins*

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| 2023 | CORBIERES BLANC CUVÉE CLASSIQUE | W |
| 2022 | CORBIERES ROUGE CUVÉE CLASSIQUE | R |
| 2022 | CORBIERES ROSE CUVÉE CLASSIQUE | Ro |
| 2023 | CORBIERES-BOUTENAC ROUGE CUVÉE PRESTIGE | R |
| 2022 | CORBIERES BOUTENAC "ATAL SIA" | R |
| 2023 | ALBA ROSE | Ro |



DOMAINE PIERRE BORIES, ARTISANS PARTISANS, Corbières

Pierre Bories's operation in Fabrezan is run organically (and certified) and is the antithesis of the mass farming model. Small yields prevail here, the wines are vinified using natural methods and the environment is respected. They are the Petits Fantets in red and white, wines for immediately pleasurable drinking. Brilliant value natural wines.

Lo Petit Fantet d'Hippolyte Blanc is Roussanne, Marsanne, Grenache Blanc and Grenache Gris. The grapes undergo a period of maceration on skins, ferment with their own yeasts and undergo full malo in tank. White fruits and crystallised citrus.

Lo Petit Fantet d'Hippolyte Rouge sees Grenache and Syrah fermented together with some Carignan blended in. On the nose there are notes of thyme, rosemary and black cherry with a hint of woody spice. The palate shows plenty of black fruits, with medium acidity, balanced tannins and a touch of minerality. The finish is smooth and lingering.

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| 2023 | « LO PETIT FANTET DE L'HIPPOLYTE » BLANC | W |
| 2023 | « LO PETIT FANTET DE L'HIPPOLYTE » ROUGE | R |

CHAMP LIBRE, ARTISANS PARTISANS, Corbières

A negoce project wherein the grapes are sourced from small artisan producers to make wines in the same idiom as the above wines. The farming uses organic methods and is in full conversion.

Cuvee Alice is 70% Carignan, 30% Grenache Noir. The wine is made in stainless tanks and majors on fruit – blackberries, strawberries and damsons, nice and easy-drinking.

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| 2023 | CORBIÈRES CUVEE ALICE | R |
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MINERVOIS

MINERVE

A jutting outcrop of burnished stone blotted against the blue of the sky, perched like the ark of the deluge on the spur of a plateau, precarious on the brink of the twofold precipice of the Cesse and of the Brian, a village above and beyond the world, ruling with fierce pride over a desert of brush and stones, scarred with gorges, pitted with caves, dotted here and there with ancient dolmens and isolated farmsteads, a steep steppe where the sun strikes, incandescent, against the dreaming spires and where the cruel light plays strange tricks upon the eyes – mirages that recall to life the hunters of prehistory, the march of Roman legions, the sly shades of visigothic archdeacons and of rapacious feudaries, the fearful fires of a vengeful Simon de Monfort and the horrors of charring human flesh and yet, through the clouds of acrid smoke one can, it seems, descry the dulcet features of fair young damsels, sprung from the lays of Ramon de Miraval, and, in their midst, the manly form of Raymond Roger Trencavel.

Adapted from Maurice Chauvet – Translated by David Bond

CLOS DE L'AZEROLLE (CHATEAU MIRAUSSE), RAYMOND JULIEN, Minervois

Located in Badens due east of Carcassonne in the southwest part of Minervois, Raymond Julien is a grower to watch. Le Clos de l'Azerolle is pure (and I mean pure) Carignan from fifty-year-old vines, sinewy yet supple, brambly chewy fruit with a most agreeable iron-earthiness. This is wine that sits up, barks and makes you take notice. Once you taste it you will buy it. One to stick your spurtle into. "Fruit to the fore and promising. Rich, dark berries and spice with sweet oak. Supple and full. Modern style but well done," says Decanter awarding it four stars. All wines experience varying degrees of carbonic maceration.

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| 2022 | MINERVOIS, LE ROUGE DE L'AZEROLLE | R |
| 2021 | MINERVOIS, L'AZEROLLE VIEILLES VIGNES | R |

DOMAINE JEAN-BAPTISTE SENAT, Minervois – Organic ~ Ecocert

Jean-Baptiste and Charlotte Sénat have been working this fifteen-hectare domaine in the heart of Minervois since 1996. They are located in Trausse Minervois in the foothills of the Montagne Noir. The soils here are limestone-clay and their mainly south-facing vineyards are set in the heart of the garrigue.

They are certified organic and carry out all work by hand. Vinification takes place with minimal intervention in a mixture of large and small casks (stored underground): natural yeasts, no fining, no filtration and only a tiny bit of sulphur are the recipe for living and drinkable wines. Everything is done by gravity to avoid pumping. La Nine has a cuvaizon of 16 days with pigeage and spends ten months in cuve and barrels before being bottled (by gravity) without filtration.

The exact composition of the blends changes from year to year but La Nine generally features a mixture of around 50% Carignan (100 plus year-old vines), 20% Grenache (including 60-year-old + gnarled gobelet vines), 10% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre and 10% Cinsault (40-year-old vines), a delicious wine with notes of spice over black fruits. Lovely equilibrium, elegant tannins and mellow mouthfeel. Mais Ou Est Donc Ornicar is a blend of the energetic 50-year-old Grenache (70%) 30-year-old Syrah (20%) and 40-year-old Cinsault (10%) vinified in whole bunches. Cuvaizon last twelve days and then the wine goes into used barriques. A more powerful effort reminiscent of macerated fruits and dark spices and one that requires a haunch of meat or several. This wine spends six months in barrique.

Mais Où Est Donc Ornicar is a mnemonic phrase containing the French conjunctions (mais, ou, et, donc, or, ni, car).

On many of their wines you can taste a familiar quality: blueberries, blackberries, grilled mushrooms, earth and always the garrigue aromas of wild thyme. Arbalette... is 80% Grenache from 20-year-old vines, 20% Syrah from 30-year-old vines. Super drinkable Minervois delivered with a bit of rock 'n' roll swagger. Cherry-red in the glass. Aromas of red berries, violets and sweet spices. On the palate, crunchy fruit meets with touches of spicy old-vines complexity. The name of the wines takes inspiration from 'Guns & Roses' – with a sprinkle of little poetic licence – translating literally as 'crossbow & poppies'.

"The terroir of Minervois is visually and functionally hardscrabble, and that probably doesn't help in the elevation of spirits. Staring at a field of rocks from which gnarled vines struggle to emerge and plump up a few angry grapes isn't like gazing over the verdant plains and hillsides of certain other regions, nor are many vines neatly trained into efficiently pickable rows. One can see the work that will be necessary, and the heartbreak that sprouts from the earth, and the indifference that droops from the leaves, in every beaten-down vine. And yet the region is absolutely carpeted with vineyards. That's a lot of despair to crush, press, and ferment. But it's a way of life, and that's not easily abandoned." (Thor Iverson)

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|------|--|---|
| 2022 | MINERVOIS ROUGE "LA NINE" | R |
| 2022 | MINERVOIS ROUGE "MAIS OU EST DONC ORNICAR" | R |
| 2023 | MINERVOIS ROUGE « ARBALETE & COQUELICQUOTS » | R |

CLOS DU GRAVILLAS, NICOLE AND JOHN BOJANOWSKI, St Jean de Minervois – Organic ~ Certified Ecocert*From the cradle to the Gravillas...*

The key to Gravillas is the fantastic terroir in Saint-Jean de Minervois and every year that passes one sees a sympathetic progression in the winemaking. One of the essential elements of terroir is soil, and Nicole and John Bojanowski specifically wanted “blinding white rock like that found at Aupilhac and Vosne- Romanée.” (Two places where Nicole worked previously).

The couple finally settled on the cute hamlet St. Jean de Minervois (population 44 and rising - or falling, as the case may be), in an area renowned for its delicious, grapey fortified Muscats. Gravillas means “gravel” in the local patois, and the white limestone gravel plateau that the Clos du Gravillas is located on has been used to grow grapes for hundreds if not thousands of years. The micro-climate assists the process of making great wines. Situated about 300 metres above sea level on slopes beneath the Montagne Noire the vineyards catch the cool evening breezes, allowing the grapes to retain more of their acidity.

The high summer temperatures of this region during the day add the necessary alcohol to balance the acidity, creating the structural depth and maximum grape ripeness required to make excellent wine.

Nicole and John started in 1996 by planting Syrah, Cabernet and Mourvèdre, but in 1999, the same year that they started making wine, when they discovered 2.5 ha (a little over 6 acres) of Carignan planted between 1911 and 1970 and a small parcel of old Grenache Gris vines. These were to form the basis of Lo Vieilh and L 'Inattendu respectively. Since then, they have acquired a veritable mixed portfolio of grapes, so to speak, no fewer than thirteen, so we're looking forward to the Languedoc's premium Châteauneuf-style field blend.

Comprising old-vine Grenache Gris and some Grenache Blanc (and perhaps some other varieties that have snuck in under my radar) and aptly named L 'Inattendu, or the “Unexpected,” this dry white AOC Minervois has been called “a sort of rosé manqué” in that the vinification is similar to that of a rosé, but the result is a white wine. After a light pressing, the grape must is chilled and allowed to settle naturally. From there the juice goes into Allier oak barrels, where it stays for 12 months resting on the fine lees. Dry and rich, with a good balance of green apple and mineral flavours, and an elegant mouth feel, L 'Inattendu is perfect for accompanying a fish dish or even a strong cheese (Comte is suggested). Early vintages revealed oxidation and distinct old woody quality that either charmed or puzzled, but now the wine unites richness with incisiveness. There is lovely custard apple fruit allied to dried apricot, vanilla, garrigue notes of herbs and all sorts of ginger and white pepper on the finish. The warmth of the alcohol does not detract but rounds the mouth; it is a textural wine with the reverberating minerality of terroir from those hot stones.

Sous Les Cailloux des Grillons, a wine that proves that it can be definitely cricket and crickety-boo (and refers to the ubiquitous crickets/grillons that lurk under the gravels and the night sky), is a delicious, savoury dark-and-red-fruit-filled blend of Syrah, Carignan, Cabernet Sauvignon, Mourvèdre, Counoise, Grenache Noir and Terret Gris. This wine always puts a smile on my face and is friendly as a welcome from Nicole and John in the beautiful hamlet of St-Jean de Minervois. Can be drunk by the glassful with a plate of charcuterie. Sur La Lune was originally created to be a Carignan in a different style to Lo Vieilh (qv) but has metamorphosed over the years into a Syrah and Carignan blend aged in tank. The nose is pure cassis with the element of menthol and eucalyptus, the palate has notes of bitter fruits and pepper. This wine is perfect with lamb tagine or a roast vegetable couscous or stuffed peppers. Lo Vieilh, aka the old one, comes from a couple of hectares of Carignan; the oldest vines should be receiving a telegram from the Queen next year. Aged in 400 litre Allier oak barrels, the wine combines power and purity, the fruit is dark and velvety and is truly delicious. Virtually no sulphur is used (the fermentation lasts around six months) and the wine seems to have soaked up a huge amount of minerals. The fruit is blueberry-ripe with liquorice swirls and hint of tobacco. There are also discernible meaty undertones. What wouldn't you eat with this? A steak cooked in the embers of a fire in a Languedocian restaurant, a shoulder of pork slow roasted in the oven, or breast of duck with griottine cherries – the choice is endless.

Muscat is what Saint-Jean de Minervois is renowned for. Douce Providence is as delightful as its name suggests being floral and fruity with whiffs of orange flower and honeysuckle combining with flavours of sweet pink grapefruit and mandarin. The finish has such a refreshing tang that you should drink à la mode as an aperitif, but it would take equally kindly to strawberries and fruit pastries.

John is a Carignan evangelist and Clos du Gravillas are at the forefront of www.carigans.com a website devoted to reviving the reputation of this grape variety. If you're jaded by the Merlot world (and we are, we are) and looking for a “vin d'ici” then Carignan is your man. We've chugged it in Chile, argle-gargled it in Argentina, sipped it in Spain and lapped it in the Languedoc-Roussillon, and we can say that the wines from these gnarled vines, in whatever country, deliver great terroir flavour and usually at fantastic value.

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|------|---|----|
| 2023 | EMMENEZ-MOI AU BOUT DE TERRET | W |
| 2023 | MINERVOIS BLANC “L'INATTENDU” | W |
| 2022 | A FLEUR DE PEAU MUSCAT | Or |
| 2023 | “SOUS LES CAILLOUX DES GRILLONS” | R |
| 2022 | “RENDEZ VOUS SUR LA LUNE” | R |
| 2021 | “LO VIELH” | R |
| 2023 | MUSCAT DE SAINT JEAN DE MINERVOIS “DOUCE PROVIDENCE” – 50cl | Sw |

SAINT-CHINIAN

I know your lady does not love her husband. / I am sure of that, and at her late being here / She gave strange *oeillades* and most speaking looks / To noble Edmond.

- *King Lear IV.iv*

DOMAINE THIERRY NAVARRE, Saint-Chinian – Organic - Uncertified

Thierry Navarre has a dozen hectares of vines planted on dark brown schist terraces around Roquebrun. The achingly beautiful countryside is an amphitheatre of small mountains clad in a sea of green, a forest of small trees and bushes and the familiar clumps of fragrant rosemary and thyme which captures the scented spirit of the high Languedoc. The culture in the vines revolves around the respect for the soil, the cycles, the seasons. No chemical products are used, simply composting, natural preparation, plant infusions and working the soil. The harvest is manual and carried out by a small team. The grape varieties are typical of Saint-Chinian, namely Grenache Noir, Carignan, Cinsault and Syrah with some other varieties thrown in such as Terret, Oeillades, Muscat, Clairette and Grenache Gris. Thierry also cultivates one of the truly forgotten ancient varieties of the Languedoc called Ribeyrenc (which I would love to try – calling Les Caves buyers of all things rare and wonderful). As Thierry would say each wine and each year is a lesson in humility. He speaks of pleasure and emotion of trying a bottle of wine after a period of time and tasting the sense of place.

Any wine that barely judders the alcoholic richter scale sets my heart all of a flutter. An organic wine from an impossibly beautiful estate Languedoc from a grape variety that I have only just heard of and clocking in at 11.5% would have to be the rankest pair of pantaloons to garner my disapproval. As I surmised the Oeillades is the gnat's spats. The Oeillades, however, is not to tarry over, but to surrender to its simple charms. Another traditional variety of the Languedoc it is a close cousin of the Cinsault grape. This is a vrai wine of the country, limber, fresh, all in the fruit, all in the glancing moment, naturally vibrant.

La Laouzil (named after Les Laouzes, the local name for the schist/slate soils) is more structured animal although still very friendly and wags a value-alert tail. A tripartite blend of very old Carignan vines with Grenache and Syrah on the brown shales, destemmed it is fermented in cement before ageing in an 8,000-litre wooden foudre for twelve months. This St Chi displays red fruits, liquorice tones and plenty of herbs and spice, yet is unforced, supple and fresh. The wine sings lustily of hot fractured terroir- in each glass a geology of wild flavours.

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|------|----------------------------|---|
| 2022 | TERRET (GRIS) | W |
| 2022 | VIN D'OEILLADES | R |
| 2022 | RIBEYRENC | R |
| 2022 | SAINT-CHINIAN "LA LAOUZIL" | R |

SLOW FOOD FRANCE – Terroir and Environment

Without wishing to delve too deeply into current breast-beating debates about appellation contrôlée it is worth looking at the manifesto of a group of French growers who are questioning the concepts and practices of the AOC and wish to contribute to a debate inaugurated by a steering committee set up by the French government a few years ago. Part of a proposed "new dynamic of French wine for 2010" was "to become leader in practices that are respectful of the environment".

The growers have a specific agenda beyond the vague accord of "respect". The primary tenet is that each wine shall be the full expression of its terroir; that each wine "be good, healthy, great and structured when the conditions permit this... above all, that these wines give people a desire to drink them, wines simply and solely made from the grapes of our (sic) vineyards, wines which have the peculiar characteristics of our grape varieties, of our particular terroirs, of our special characters... our common will is to work our soil while respecting nature, as craftsmen seeking harmony between nature and man..."

The expression "labouring the soil" recurs in the manifesto. Everyone has their different approaches and their own history as a winemaker, but all are linked by certain aims. Although the practices in the vines and the cellars could never be codified in a strict charter, there is a rational attempt to tie together essential common practice. The priorities are: the life of the soil; a search for terroir; selection massale; the attachment to historic grape varieties and the refusal of the increasing trend to plant standard varieties; the use of organic treatments; the search for good vine health through natural balance; the refusal of GMOs; the prudent use of chemical plant treatments; the search for full maturity; manual harvests; the respect for the variability of vintages; the refusal to chaptalize systematically; natural fermentations; a sparing or zero use of SO₂; minimum or no filtration; the refusal of standard definition of taste of wines by certain enological or market trends; the possibility of experimenting and questioning different aspects of work; respect of history, of roots...

Most of the growers in this list make wines in a specific context of geography, geology, climate, history and cultural specificity that leaves open the possibility for maximum expression of personality and individuality. Tasting, analytical and organoleptic examination, consumer acceptance panels, however, can stifle creativity and become a "guillotine to submit nature and the winemaker's personality to a rule". Instead of becoming an instrument for standardization, tastings must become an instrument to check the respect of diversity. This requires a massive philosophical shift on behalf of those arbiters of appellation contrôlée, as well as tasters, journalists and the public itself. By understanding and promoting typicity and by espousing natural or organic practices in the vineyard, the Slow Food growers are creating a sensible foundation for a renewed appellation contrôlée system, one that rewards richness of diversity and complexity.

FAUGERES

Faugères is similar to other Languedoc appellations in many respects but feels different in others. Firstly, the soil is almost entirely schist, hard and brittle, which flakes like pastry. The advantage for the wine grower is that it forces the vine-roots deep into the ground to search for moisture. The schist also retains and reflects back the heat of the sun. Secondly, Faugères has virtually no connection with the Church and, since the abbey was the original location of the vineyards, it is a region without a long viticultural history. In fact, Faugères was originally known for *Fines de Faugères*, a marc distilled from cheap white grape varieties such as Terret and Carignan Blanc. Finally, Faugères has decided to become involved in environmental issues within its appellation. An ambitious charter has been drawn up under the slogan "Careful cultivation protects the environment"; those winemakers who sign the charter will qualify for a seal of approval.

Soil Improvement and Use of Fertilisers: The winemaker agrees to improve his soil taking care to use possible natural products or those with slow degradability and weak solubility, so as to avoid polluting streams and underground water sources. He agrees also to carry out or to have carried out soil analyses in order to ensure that the fertility of the soil is maximized.

Weedkilling – working the soil: The winemaker agrees to gradually stop the use of residuary weedkillers. The practice of natural, controlled grassing and the working of the soil between the rows of vines are encouraged.

Phytosanitary Protection: The grower agrees to put into practice those viticultural methods which aim to decrease phytosanitary risks, such as moderate nitrate fertilisation, correction of soil deficiencies, aeration of the vine-trunks, pruning in accordance with the local rules. He also agrees to respect the treatment advice published by the Appellation offices, using those products least harmful to the environment. In certain instances of risk, or in circumstances beyond the individual's control, he may on his own initiative proceed to such treatments which he judges indispensable. Whatever the circumstances, the winemaker agrees to abandon the principle and use of systematic chemical disease prevention.

DOMAINE DU METEORE, VINCENT BALANSA, Faugères – Organic – Certified AB

The vineyards of Faugères are planted on steep-sloped schist outcrops of the Cévennes. This particular estate owes its name to a 10,000-year-old meteor, which can be seen at the base of the crater in Cabrerolles. The Léonides, described by Paul Strang as "one of the bargains of the appellation", is made from roughly equal quantities of Syrah, Grenache and Cinsault. The wine itself is a traditional meaty Faugères with its gorgeous deep colour, heady aromas of flowering shrub, bay, balsam and serious quantities of dark smoked fruits on the palate.

2021

FAUGERES "LES LEONIDES"

R

CLOS FANTINE, FAMILLE ANDRIEU, Faugères – Biodynamic – Not Certified

Bargain bloodhounds lift up thy snouts and truffle this terroir.

The estate is in the commune of Cabrerolles in Faugères. Two sisters and one brother run this vineyard, following the death of their parents. Whilst not holding a certificate for either organic or biodynamic farming, the vineyard is run with the utmost respect for nature. As Corinne Andrieu states: "We have always worked to respect what nature has to offer...

Our pleasure is to listen to nature, to watch nature, and to allow her to have the energy and strength to express herself. For this reason, their vines "grow like any other local plant, in a state that verges on the wild."

The red is 40% Mourvèdre with approximately 25% Carignan, 10% Syrah, and 25% Grenache. The Carignan is from 50-80 years old, whilst the Mourvèdre and Syrah are from 30-year-old vines. Terroir is crumbly schist, harvests are manual. Fermentation (with wild yeasts) and maceration last for thirty days with no temperature control and take place in cement.

There is no oak, no filtration, no fining and no sulphur.

Drinking this Faugères will make you feel close, or even closer, to nature. This is a crawl on the wild side; the fruit is meaty with game-and-gravy flavours and lots of garrigue notes of bay and roasted thyme and there is pronounced bonfire smokiness on the finish.

The Valcabrières is another Terret Gris from 80-year-old goblet vines. In Occitan it means "the mountain of the goat", which explains the striking image used for the label of a goat being milked of its wine into a wine glass. Unfiltered, unfining and unsulphured, ambient long temp wild yeast ferments, a wonderful burnished white wine with aromas of wild fennel and ripe citrus which also fill out a palate underscored by a certain mineral saltiness. This wine whilst enchanting those who speak in russet yeas and honest kersey noes, would probably be damned by the zoilist tendency - aka the crustifarians.

Certain defects are necessary for the existence of individuality. (Goethe)

2020

FAUGERES TRADITION

R

2019

COURTIOL ROUGE

R

COTEAUX DU LANGUEDOC

CHATEAU DE LA MIRANDE, MADAME ALBAJAN, Coteaux du Languedoc

‘A good Picpoul’, he expounds authoritatively, ‘should be crisp and full at the same time. That’s how the grape got its name: *pic* as in *piquer* – to prick – and *poul* as in *poul*. (A blank look from me.) ‘An old Occitan word meaning soft and rounded,’ he elaborates, as if he thought everyone fluent in the medieval language of the troubadour poets. But the closet etymologist soon gives way to the more familiar bibulous incarnation, when a second and a third bottle measures up to expectations.

Virgile’s Vineyard – Patrick Moon

Picpoul de Pinet is situated in the Languedoc roughly halfway between Béziers and Montpellier. Château de la Mirande is located in the commune of Castelnaud-de-Guers not far from the Bassin de Thau, a salt-water lagoon dedicated to the cultivation of oysters and mussels. The vineyard spreads through the Mediterranean garrigue with its thousand scents and is in part situated on slopes of red earth covered with pebbles which release the sun’s heat to perfect the maturity of the Picpoul. This is a deliciously understated wine, a touch of savoury brininess, a hint of white flowers, and before you know it, the contents of the bottle have disappeared into history. It is a watery wine in the best sense, thirst quenching and utterly appropriate with linguine of crab with chilli, garlic and parsley (which is what I had to eat last night). The terroir for the Mirande vineyard is a clay-limestone mix on south-facing terraces with the vines between 30-100 years old. Green harvesting and organic viticulture are part of the estate’s philosophy.

Picpoul (Piquepoul Blanc) itself is an ancient grape variety, which has the sort of green-tinged iodine fruit and crisp acidity one would associate with Muscadet or Gros Plant, but with more vinosity. This version has a spicy aniseed bouquet, green fruits and herbs, is quite resinous with an ample mouthfeel and savoury flavours of iodine, yellow plum and pepper, also a sharp prickle. It is traditionally consumed with the local oysters (huitres de Bouzigues) from the Bassin de Thau. A wake-up call to the jaded palate.

2023

PICPOUL DE PINET

W

An example of early food and wine matching advice from a wine merchant in (the caves of) Lascaux: Bison with white wine, Mastodon with red wine.

Oberon Kant’s Big Book of Wine



Avec
Picpoul de Pinet!!!

The juice of the grape is the liquid quintessence of concentrated sunbeams. (Thomas Love Peacock)

MAS FOULAQUIER, PIERRE JEQUIER & BLANDINE CHAUCHAT, Pic Saint Loup – Biodynamic (Demeter)

With its old stone farmhouse built over centuries Mas Foulaquier is situated at the northern edge of the designated Pic Saint Loup 'cru'. The farm overlooks a large plot of 8 hectares of sloping vines, similar to an enclosed Burgundy parcel. In addition to this lovely setting, the property is part of the exceptional Pic-St-Loup terroir: a pebbly landscape warmed by the southern sun and cooled by the climate of the lower reaches of the Cévennes

The limestone clay soil is pebbly and has both good filtering capacity due to the presence of stones and limestone fragments, and good water retention thanks to the red clay. The main plot slope faces south-southwest, which means the grapes ripen early.

The wide divergence between daytime and night-time temperatures is accentuated by the altitude of the vines (200m) and ensures that the wines are extremely refreshing on the palate. In 2003, Blandine Chauchat joined the Foulaquier team bringing with her three hectares of old vines in the plot known as Les Tonillières in Claret.

The method of viticulture is driven by love for this rugged environment, and respect for this magical and unspoilt landscape. The vines are therefore cultivated and treated with biodynamic preparations applied in accordance with the biodynamic sowing calendar. The grapes are harvested by hand, transferred into vats by gravity and fermented using only indigenous yeasts, without the addition of oenological products. No synthetic substances are used on the vines, nor any oenological products in the wine production. Weed control is mechanical or indeed manual. Harvesting is manual in small 20KG boxes. Application for organic certification was made in 2005, whilst conversion to biodynamic production started in 2006. Their work respects the rhythms of the biodynamic planting calendar, both in the vineyard and in the cellar. Mas Foulaquier use preparations such as horn manure, composted cow manure, horn silica and several plant or flower decoctions. These preparations are dynamised and then sprayed on the vines, which strengthens soil life and boosts the vines' resistance to disease.

Treatment of the harvest is manual without pumping. Neither sulphites nor yeast are added in order to allow the maximum expression of the 'terroir'. Vinification takes place in small concrete vats (50-80hl.) coated with epoxy, which encourages proper maceration of the grapes. Fermentation temperatures are unique to each vintage and vat according to the profile of the grapes. The aim is not to obtain maximum extraction, but rather elegance and fruit.

Individual grape varieties may be vinified separately or together in variable proportions, in order to promote a certain complexity for future blends.

Vat fermentation can vary from two to six weeks, sometimes with several days' maceration prior to fermentation, which allows the indigenous yeasts to begin working slowly and progressively.

Orphée, a 50% Grenache Noir and Blanc and 50% Syrah blend, is expressive of the attention to terroir and biodynamic practices. It opens dramatically with a bit of oxygen, the earthy and floral aromatics are balanced by rich dark blueberries, plum, pepper and violets on the palate. The finish is soft and has a stony minerality, but this wine has plenty of concentration.

Les Calades is Grenache/Syrah from relatively young vines grown on stony south-facing limestone slopes. The wine spends 24 months in foudre. A wine that shows that opposites attract, this is an intense infusion of dark and red fruits, herbs and spices and lovely balsamic notes.

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|------|---------------------------|----|
| 2022 | ORANGE A LA MER | Or |
| 2019 | LES MONTAGNES BLEUES | R |
| 2020 | PIC SAINT-LOUP « ORPHEE » | R |

Terroir – Earth Rocks

“**Terroir** has never been fixed, in taste or in perception. It has always been an evolving expression of culture. What distinguishes our era is the instantaneousness and universality of change. Before, the sense of a terroir would evolve over generations, hundreds of years, allowing for the slow accretion of knowledge and experience to build into sedimentary layers, like the geological underpinning of a given terroir itself. Today layers are stripped away overnight, and a new layer is added nearly each vintage.”

Jonathan Nossiter – *Liquid Memory*

What actually is terroir? Scientific definitions abound about the various liaisons between microclimate and soil composition, but they can only scratch the surface of the philosophy. One basic formulation is articulated by Bruno Parts in his article “The Terroir is Important” (Decanter 1983): “When a French wine grower speaks of a terroir, he means something quite different from the chemical composition of the soil... The terroir is the coming together of the climate, the soil and the landscape.” Even this definition seems conservative. In a wider sense terroir embodies the general notion of “respect”: respect for the land and the environment, respect for history, respect for culture. It concerns the wine’s interpretation of place as opposed to the concept of the varietal which tends to be about a nominated or fixed interpretation of a grape in order to obtain an instantly recognisable “international” style. Terroir is a progressive notion feeding on the positive elements of tradition, the age-old intuitive alliance forged between Nature and Man. As Nicolas Joly observes in his book *Le Vin du Ciel à la Terre* the creation of the first appellations contrôlées resulted in “*une connaissance intime de terroirs fondée sur l’observation et l’expérience de plusieurs générations de viticulteurs. Une expérience qui avait conduit à l’union de tel cépage et de telle parcelle. De ces justes mariages devaient naître des vins donc l’expression était originale car intimement liée à leur environnement et donc inimitable.*”

If, scientifically speaking, terroir is the interrelation of soil structure, microclimate, local fauna and flora, we should be able to dissect flavour components in a wine to the *nth* biochemical degree to see if we can discern whether the wine has physically interpreted its terroir. I believe that this approach goes against the grain (not to mention the grape). I am reminded of something Pierre Boulez once said about great art but could equally apply to wine. “A landscape painted so well that the artist disappears in it.” When we taste wine we get an overall impression, an aggregate of sensations. Terroir is the synergy of living elements; you cannot separate its components any more than you can analyse individually all the discrete notes in a symphony and compare it to the whole. In other words, terroir is greater than the sum of its parts. Experienced *vignerons* can often distinguish the flavour between one plot of vines and another, for the very reason that they have been brought up in the local countryside and know the fauna, the flora, the soil, when the wind is going to change and so forth. The alliance of instinct with knowledge is a kind of romantic inspiration, an intuition borne of living in the countryside which informs the activity of being a *vigneron*. So, when you taste a wine of terroir your senses will accumulate impressions, as if you were gradually becoming acquainted with a complex, organic thing. Wines lacking this dimension, no matter how technically accomplished, are cold shadows: they are calculations of correctness. Nicolas Joly uses an expression *sang de la terre*, where *sang* has two possible meanings: blood and kinship, implying a natural “blood-relationship” between man and terroir and that the earth itself is living breathing dynamic force. I suspect that many French growers would shudder if you called them winemakers; they prefer to see themselves as *vignerons* instinctively cultivating the potential of the grapes and faithfully perpetuating their cultural heritage. To return to our musical analogy the *vigneron* is the conductor who can highlight the grace notes of the wine by creating the right conditions for the vine to flourish; therein lies the art of great winemaking, not how much you interfere in the process but how sympathetically.

A New Reign of Terroir?

There will always be a vibrant debate between the technicians and holisticians, the boffins and the poets, but the wheel has begun to turn. I am optimistic that the new generation of winemakers is beginning to appreciate the value of interpreting terroir and comprehend that our palates may be tiring of synthetic homogeneity. Also, as more quality wine floods onto the market, there is a sense that terroir can be used to differentiate one wine from another, a sophisticated form of branding, if you like. Throughout the world growers perceive that the future is in the quality of their terroir and that technology should only be allowed to assist, not gloss over inadequacies nor reduce to a lowest common denominator. Wine truly is made in the vineyard.



ROUSSILLON

Greek traders planted the first vines in the 8th century BC in this region close to the border with Spain, nestling between Corbières and the Pyrenees. Today the wines are produced in 118 communes of the Pyrenees-Orientales. The region contains the most southerly and sun-drenched vineyards in France on a network of ancient terraces overlooking the picturesque fishing villages of Collioure (once summer home to Fauvists such as Matisse and Derain), Port Vendres, Banyuls and Cerbère. The vines, pruned in the gobelet fashion, are well adapted to the dry climate, wind and variable soils (limestone, schist, granite, gneiss etc.). Here, along the steep slopes of the Côte Vermeille, the full-bodied table wines of Collioure and the famous *vins doux naturels* of Banyuls have been produced since antiquity (and even praised by Pliny). The reds may be from Carignan, Grenache Noir, Syrah or Mourvèdre. More vineyards are to be found at the base of the Albères massif, in the foothills of the Pyrenees. Here castles and medieval watchtowers dominate the scarped landscape. To the west, between the rivers Tech and Tet, the vineyards of Aspres spread over the tumbling hinterland of the Pic de Canigou (the Mount Fuji of the Roussillon). Here, on the edge of the great fertile plain around Perpignan some excellent red, white and rosé wines are made. Finally, to the north of the department along the Agly river valley, the vineyards that back up against the Corbières massif, that separates the Roussillon from the Languedoc, produce a wide range of wines including the vin doux of Maury and Rivesaltes as well as the full-bodied reds of the four Côtes-du-Roussillon-Villages appellations.

DOMAINE LE ROC DES ANGES, MARJORIE GALLET, Côtes du Roussillon – Biodynamic (Biodyvin)

Le Roc des Anges is an estate of approximately 22 hectares in the village of Montner in the Agly valley (Pyrénées-Orientales, South of France, close to Spain), on the north exposed side of Força Réal mountain. Montner derives from Monte Negro (Montagne Noir) is so named because of the dark schists. The soil is composed of old rotten schists (which are the best sort of schists) and traditional grape varieties dominate the cépages. These decomposed flaky schists allow excellent drainage but encourage the vines to form deep root systems. The domaine comprises old vines of Carignan (50% of the red vines) and Grenache Gris (80% of the white vines), then Grenache noir, Syrah and Macabeu. The vineyards are a mosaic of 43 tiny parcels of land arranged in a variety of expositions on the north shoulder of the Força Real. The first vines were planted in 1903 and 55% are between 40 and 90 years old. Densities of 4000-plants/hectare on the old vines and 7,000-10,000 on the young vines encourage competition, thereby reducing vigour. Everything done in the vineyard is traditional from the use of local stone to create low walls to divide the parcels of land, all bound up in the notion of respect for the cultural heritage of the region. This is extended further into viticulture where respect for the environment is paramount. All work is based on seeking equilibrium for the vine and allowing it to find its "autonomie" (defined by vigour, yield, nutrition and natural defence), an essential factor in the expression of terroir. Other than leaf thinning and pruning of the vine to encourage the microclimate, operations in the vineyards are strictly non-interventionist. It is the light permeable soils themselves from where the wines obtain their unique texture and vibrancy. This is a work in progress, according to the vigneron; only a truly living soil will be able to liberate the essence of the terroir. In the cellar simplicity and authenticity are the watchwords. A traditional press is used, exerting the mildest of pressure, extracting limpid juice. Vinification is in concrete tanks ranging between 24 and 50hl, and the shape of the tanks and the level of the fill determine the appropriately gentle extraction. Ageing takes place in two types of containers; concrete – which exalts the aromatic purity and freshness of the wine – and wood (for about 10% of the élevage) in the form of one-to-three-year-old barrels.

The Segna de Cor comprises 50% Grenache, 30% Carignan and 20% Syrah. The relation between the Grenache and the terroir of Roc des Anges gives fruity and fleshy grapes. To balance this generosity, they are blended with old Carignan (60-80 years) and Syrah giving firm structure and dark colour and resulting in a tender (as the French would say) and fruity wine sustained by a real texture of tannins. Four 'S': soft, smooth, silky and smoky! Lively and fresh in the mouth, gentle flavours of red grape and berry, dried spices and roasted herbs. Clean, lingering finish. From the rock of the angels springs the blood (segna) of the heart (cor).

The Llum (meaning light in Catalan) Vieilles Vignes is a blend of old Grenache Gris and Macabeu vines fermented in foudres. The nose picks up notes of white and yellow flowers, the fruit flavours are particular and delicate, the finish mineral and persistent. Iglesia Vella (old church) is pure Grenache Gris from 80-year-old vines fermented and aged in 500 litre barrels. It is brilliantly pure and precise.

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| 2022 | VIN DE PAYS DES PYRENEES-ORIENTALES BLANC VIEILLES VIGNES « LLUM » | W |
| NV | ALQUIMIA VIN DE VOILE | W |
| 2022 | COTES DU ROUSSILLON VILLAGES ROUGE "SEGNA DE COR" | R |

Macabeu/Maccabéo

Long established in Roussillon, Macabeu, or Maccabéo, is a varietal of Catalan origin (some say that it is originally from Asia Minor). It is a vigorous vine, whose branches break in the wind, which is sensitive to drought (it doesn't suit dry soils) and doesn't like fertile and wet plains where its large, compact bunches rot easily. Its ideal soil is on slopes, not too stony, hot, well-drained and not too rich. That is undoubtedly the reason why it is quite widespread in the Agly valley. Late maturing and quite fertile, Macabeu is susceptible to powdery mildew. Its grapes are of average size, with a strong skin, and a light green colour, very sweet, with a sophisticated and delicate taste. The grapes are harvested in early September for the dry wines and carefully made into an original, colourful, quite full-bodied, delicate dry white wine with quite subtle aromas and a nose of ripe fruits. When it is mature, its high alcohol content lends a full-bodied quality to some blends of red wines. In red Vins Doux Naturels, it is a secondary but important varietal. In white Vins Doux Naturels, it is the main grape. When aged, mostly associated with Grenache Gris and Grenache Blanc, its qualities are accentuated, and it almost miraculously produces delicate and complex aromas that are truly phenomenal.

DOMAINE DES FOULARDS ROUGE, JEAN-FRANCOIS NICQ, Côtes du Roussillon – Organic certified
Défenseur des vins de fruit, de plaisir et de terroir, Jean-François Nicq incarne une nouvelle génération des Côtes-du-Roussillon. Sorry, I should be writing this in English. It's just that these wines liberate my inner terroir.

Jean-François Nicq took over the domaine in 2002. It was then ten hectares, and he planted a further two on beautiful schist and gneiss (very gneiss) slopes. In his first year he began the conversion to organic viticulture. In his previous job he vinified the wines at the co-op in the Côtes-du-Rhône (Estezargues) where he worked without sulphur and maintained this practice of natural winemaking at Foulards for his first vintage.

The terroir is Les Albères in the Pyrénées-Orientales, 10km from the sea and Collioure, where the maritime influence brings the freshness that enables the wines to reach phenolic maturity without excessive alcohol. The nor-nor –east exposition of the vines compounds this character and finally the soils which make up this ancient granitic area bequeath a delicacy and elegance to the wines.

The yields are kept low by the climatic conditions; successive droughts over the years have forced the vines to develop deep root systems to search for water and mineral nourishment. Depending on the parcel the yields range from 5-25hl/ha. Purity is the watchword here; the first thing you notice is the freshness of the wines, and dare one say, some pretty juicy fruit. Frida is from 50% Grenache and 50% Carignan (80-year-old vines) on shattered granite soils. The yields are a valiant 10 hl/ha (count those grapes) Viticulture is entirely organic. Grapes are destemmed and fermented at a low temperature on the wild yeasts for a month. No sulphur is added. Les Glaneuses is 70% Grenache and 30% Syrah from yields ranging between 5-15hl/ha (mad, I tell you, mad). Carbonic maceration for twenty days on the indigenous yeasts and no sulphur. Soif du Mal is made similarly except that it is a blend of Syrah 70% and Grenache 30%. If ever a wine tasted medicinal in a good sense, then this paregoric potion fits the bill and hits the spot. Check out that nick of thyme on the aftertaste. Soif du Mal Blanc is a medium-bodied summer white combining the usual Catalan suspects: Muscat, Grenache Blanc & Macabeu. Waxy fruit, seasoned with herbs and some crushed minerals is the order of the day. Oh, and it'll fizz in your mouth like sherbet popping candy.

Le Fond de l'Air est Rouge is another reference to the Nouvelle Gauche and refers to a Chris Markham political film from 1977. It was released in the US as A Grin Without A Cat. The wine itself is a pure and generous expression of Cinsault, irresistibly crunchable with all the lean red stone fruit flavours you could want. Drink in the Nicq of time.

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| 2023 | SOIF DU MAL BLANC | W |
| 2024 | OCTOBRE | R |
| 2023 | FOND DE L'AIR EST ROUGE | R |
| 2022 | SOIF DU MAL ROUGE | R |
| 2023 | LES VILAINS ROUGE | R |
| 2021 | FRIDA | R |

A Vindication – Li Bai

If heaven loved not the wine,
A Wine Star would not be in heaven;
If earth loved not the wine,
The Wine Spring would not be on the earth.
Since heaven and earth love the wine,
Need a tipling mortal be ashamed?
The transparent wine, I hear,
Has the soothing virtue of a sage,
While the turgid is rich, they say,
As the fertile mind of the wise.
Both the sage and the wise were drinkers,
Why seek for peers among gods and goblins?
Three cups open the grand door to bliss;
Take a jugful, the universe is yours.
Such is the rapture of the wine,
That the sober shall never inherit

DOMAINE DE VALCROS, ADVINI, Collioure - *Biodynamic*

J'ai bu l'été comme un vin doux – Louis Aragon

A small pretty Mediterranean seaside village just north of the Franco-Spanish border, Collioure is considered to have some of the finest wines in the south of France, an unsurprising fact when you realise that its yields are some of the lowest in France.

Collioure itself, once known as Banyuls sec, is a dark red wine, made from Grenache (60%) Mourvèdre (10%) and Syrah (30%), with heady aromas of over-ripe fruits and spices. This wine is from a selection of parcels on steep slopes with resulting low yields and is fermented in tank and aged in tank and cement beton. Try with Baixas fraginat (beef in a red pepper and tomato sauce). Banyuls is a vin doux naturel made predominantly from Grenache Noir grown on very steep terraces that can only be worked by hand. The region's schist soils compare to those of the Douro in Portugal. By law the grapes harvested for Banyuls must contain a potential of 254 grams of sugar per litre. The hand-selected grapes are then destemmed, fermentation is stopped by addition of grape brandy and the wine continues to macerate on the skins for a further five weeks with daily remontage to extract the aromatic compounds, before being aged in tanks. With its summer pudding and mocha flavours (not to mention dried herbs, prune and caramel) it marries well with cheese, chocolate and even with classic French savoury dishes such as rabbit, hare or venison braised with a chocolate sauce.!

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| 2023 | BANYULS RIMAGE | Sw |
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CHATEAU DE JAU, FAMILLE DAURE, Rivesaltes

The Muscat de Rivesaltes is a grapey delight with extra concentration from skin contact and mutage sur marc. This should be drunk very chilled, either as an aperitif, or with fruit or creamy desserts!

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| 2023 | MUSCAT DE RIVESALTES – 50 cl | Sw |
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| 2009 | RIVESALTES AMBRE – 50cl | Sw |
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DOMAINE BRUNO DUCHENE, Collioure – *Organic*
La Luna

*The moon meets the sun
Over an aquamarine sea
Painted by Dufy, Matisse, Derain
The art of wine
The wine of art.*

*Bruno's vines
Gnarled goblets
Rooted in shattered schists
Yield purple fruit
Summer's blood
Leaving stains upon the tongue.*

Bruno Duchene, an energetic vigneron, moved from the Loir-et-Cher to the Roussillon and is now based in Banyuls-sur-Mer. His vines are on the steep hills overlooking the sea and worked by horse and human. He works biodynamically and the red varieties are Grenache Noir and a little Carignan. La Luna is from several parcels of vines averaging 35-40 years old and undergoes a semi-carbonic maceration. Pigeage and remontage is according to the nature of vintage. The wine is full-bodied with warm strawberry and cherry cola aromas and confit fruits on the palate. The La Pascole (AOC Collioure) is from older vines (80 years), is vinified in a similar fashion but spends seven months in used barriques. It has greater intensity but is still a thoroughly elegant and tonic wine.

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| 2023 | COTE VERMEILLE "LA LUNA" BLANC | W |
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| 2023 | COTE VERMEILLE LA LUNA ROUGE | R |
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Carignan – so many prestigious wine writers (you know who you are) have had to gnaw the numble entrails of what they have written regarding this grape. Previously dismissed as “a workhorse variety”; “not capable of greatness”; “should be grubbed up in favour of Syrah”; “the bane of the European wine industry” and “only distinguished by its disadvantages”, it is now perceived as one of the signature grapes of the Languedoc-Roussillon, lending terroir character to blends, or standing out in its own right by expressing uniquely bold flavours. As Marjorie Gallet and Tom Lubbe illustrate magnificently it is not necessary to subject this grape to carbonic maceration to smooth out the rough edges and highlight the fruit: the same effect can be achieved by naturally low yields, gentle extraction and traditional vinification techniques. Carignan is a more efficient vehicle for terroir than Syrah and Grenache particularly on the poor schistous soils (worked by maso-schistes) that characterise much of the Roussillon and eastern Languedoc. As Andrew Jefford writes in *The New France*: “The greatest wines of the Languedoc never taste easy or comfortable; they taste as if handfuls of stones had been stuffed in a liquidiser and ground down to a dark pulp with bitter cherries, dark plums, firm damsons and tight sloes.” Carbonic maceration can, nevertheless, delightfully soothe the *sauvage grain*. Take Raymond Julien’s Clos de l’Azerolle. This is 100% Carignan, high-toned, smooth, silky and linear with superb poise. The grape variety is in no way compromised by the vinification and reveals that exhilarating freshness and fine structure are not mutually exclusive notions. Carignan really flourishes in Corbières, particularly in the zone of Boutenac which is a chaotic mixture of sandstone, schist, limestone and marl. La Forge, a tiny parcel of 100-year-old vines owned by Gérard Bertrand, is a notable amalgam of power and finesse, old-fashioned respect for terroir and grape allied to scientific know-how. Carignan is also being heavily promoted in neighbouring Fitou (a geological scrapyard – Jefford) – once again old vines provide the blood of the wine. Of course, Carignan is most often tasted in blends with Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre and Cinsault. Two viewpoints: firstly, the desire to express local terroir by using traditionally cultivated varieties, and, secondly, the incorporation into appellation rules of a higher proportion of “noble” varieties (in particular, Syrah and Mourvèdre). The theological debate will run for centuries; what is not in doubt is the resurrection, or rather the establishment of Carignan’s status as a grape capable of producing serious, challenging and rather wonderful wines, a fact that mirrors the rise of the reputation of the Languedoc-Roussillon.

LES CAVES DE CARIGNAN – THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

Fitou, Domaine de Roudène – 50% Carignan (Grenache/Syrah). 50–100-year-old vines, traditional vinification. Used oak.
Corbières, Domaine Ollieux Romanis – 40-60% Carignan (depending on cuvée) 50–100-year-old vines. 12-18 months in barrel
Minervois, Clos de l’Azerolle – 100% Carignan vines; 50 years old; carbonic maceration; stainless steel fermentation
Rendez-Vous La Lune, Clos du Gravillas – Carignan, Syrah, Cab Sauv; 90-year-old vines; stainless steel fermentation
Lo Vieilh, Clos du Gravillas – 100% Carignan, 100 + year old vines, large oak barrels.
Saint-Chinian, La Laouzil, Domaine Thierry Navarre – Old Carignan, Grenache, Syrah – 600 litre demi-muid
Faugères Tradition, Domaine Didier Barral – 60% Carignan; old vines; cement and old wood
Faugères, Domaine du Météore – 40+% Carignan (Syrah, Mourvèdre, Grenache); 40+ year-old vines; carbonic maceration; élevage in old wood
Côtes du Roussillon Villages, Domaine Le Roc des Anges – 30% Carignan (Grenache/Syrah) ; 80+ year-old-vines; fermented in concrete, aged in foudres
Frida, Côtes du Roussillon, Domaine des Foulards Rouges – 50% Carignan, 50% Grenache – 80 year old vines, tank fermented
Carignan Reserva, Villalobos – 100% Carignan, 70-year-old vines, wild vines
Populis Carignane, Living Wines Collective – 100% Carignan, 70-year-old vines, tank and barrel

DOMAINE LES TERRES DE FAGAYRA, MARJORIE GALLET, Maury – Organic

Les Terres de Fagayra is exclusively dedicated to the making of fortified wines with personality. The estate lies on three hectares of old vines located at the north border of the Maury appellation. In these wild lands nestled at the bottom of a limestone cliff, rain is more frequent, and temperature is lower; two climatic conditions that give elegant and balanced grapes. Two soils are present: pure schist and schist with limestone sediments. Root systems are deep. The white Maury is a blend of Grenache Gris and Macabeu on pure schist and limestone. The wine is aged for seven months in vat and then for a further four in bottle. The nose first reveals exotic and white fruit aromas followed by mineral notes upon further aeration.
Serve with tuna sashimi.

The red is old vines Grenache Noir grown on schist with limestone sediments. After a wild yeast ferment the wine is aged in stainless steel for seven months and a further four in bottle. A nose of dried red flowers and dried figs leads to an intense, full-bodied palate with a delicate, chalky, mineral palate. Enjoy with most cheeses and chocolate.

DOMAINE MAS AMIEL, OLIVIER DECELLE, Maury – Organic

Maury is surrounded by the Rivesaltes appellation. The mountains to the north denote the end of Corbières and of the Aude department. Maury is thus in Pyrenees-Orientales and thus Catalan in nature. As Paul Strang vividly writes: "It lives in the shadow of the Cathar stronghold of Quéribus, the massive profile of whose tower dominates the landscape for miles around. If you come down from these heights the soil suddenly changes. Everywhere there is black schist, sometimes as dark as coal; the vines brilliant green, their tufts flowing freely in the Tramontane wind, looks as if they have been planted in the ashes of the Cathar martyrs who were burnt alive for their faith in the mountains of the South".

The story of Mas Amiel begins in 1816 when Raymond Amiel won the deeds to the property from the Bishop of Perpignan in a game of cards. If the game were poker this would be quite a story – if you believe it – but what makes this event all the more remarkable is that the two were playing an early version of the classic card game 'Old Maid'. If only fate had taken a different turn that night, the bishop would have paired Monsieur & Madame Raisin the winemakers, Amiel would have been left, red-faced, holding the Old Maid, and the property in question would have fallen to the church. But thankfully there was no divine intervention on the night. The bishop left, fleeced of what could have been a prime source of communion wine, and Mas Amiel was born. After a chequered career the estate was purchased by a Charles Dupuy who cultivated it until his death in 1916. Charles's son, Jean took over and started to produce high quality wine under the Mas Amiel label. He extended the vineyard, digging up the hillside to plant new vines.

The Maury Blanc is from old Grenache Gris vines on schistose slopes. Yields are a miserly 15hl/ha, Vinification is at 18c followed by a mutage to adjust the alcohol. The wine is then aged in tank on the fine lees. It has a beautiful limpid colour with hints of green and a mineral stone evoking warm stones and orange blossom which develops further with aeration to unveil fresh brioche and pollen. In the mouth it is lively, round, and supple and unleashes panoply of flavours: boxwood, star fruit, mandarin and juniper to name but few. Thon mi cuit au sel de Guérande et fenouil, langouste tiède aux agrumes, soupe de fruits blancs au gingembre.

The Maury Rouge is made in the same style as the rimage wines of Banyuls. From 100% Grenache Noir grown on the south-facing broken schists and marne soils and yields of 25 hl/ha, the grapes are subsequently sorted, destemmed, and vinified in the normal way. The alcohol is added while the wine is still in the vat (mutage sur les grains), which slows down the final fermentation, allowing a longer period of maceration and thereby conferring greater richness. This Maury is ruby with violet tints and the nose eloquently expresses framboise, cherry and crème-de-cassis. It is smooth in the mouth, the red fruits reinforced by bitter chocolate and spice as well as fine tannins.

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| 2019 | MAURY ROUGE "VERS LE NORD" | R |
| 1999 | MAURY ROUGE OXYDATIF | Fort |
| 2021 | MAURY VINTAGE BLANC | Sw |
| 2022 | MAURY VINTAGE ROUGE | Sw |



Marjorie Gallet of Roc des Anges avec le pooch

TERROIR: The Soil & The Soul. Two Vignerons Explain...

*Tell me where is terroir bred
Or in the heart or in the head?
How begot, how nourished?*

In a recent paper Randall Grahm wrote: “*Terroir* is a composite of many physical factors – soil structure and composition, topography, exposition, micro-climate as well as more intangible cultural factors. Matt Kramer once very poetically defined *terroir* as “somewhereness,” and this I think is the nub of the issue. I believe that “somewhereness” is linked to beauty and that beauty reposes in the particulars; we love and admire individuals in a way that we can never love classes of people or things. Beauty must relate to some sort of internal harmony; the harmony of a great *terroir* derives, I believe, from the exchange of information between the vine-plant and its milieu over generations. The plant and the soil have learned to speak each other’s language, and that is why a particularly great *terroir* wine seems to speak with so much elegance.”

Continues Grahm: “A great *terroir* is the one that will elevate a particular site above that of its neighbours. It will ripen its grapes more completely more years out of ten than its neighbours; its wines will tend to be more balanced more of the time than its unfortunate contiguous *terroir*. But most of all, it will have a calling card, a quality of expressiveness, of distinctiveness that will provoke a sense of recognition in the consumer, *whether or not the consumer has ever tasted the wine before.*”

Expressiveness, distinctiveness: words that should be more compelling to wine lovers than opulent, rich, or powerful. He is talking about wines that are unique, wherein you can taste a different order of qualities, precisely because they encapsulate the multifarious differences of their locations. Grahm, like so many French growers, posits that the subtle secrets of the soil are best unlocked through biodynamic viticulture: “Biodynamics is perhaps the most straightforward path to the enhanced expression of *terroir* in one’s vineyard. Its express purpose is to wake up the vines to the energetic forces of the universe, but its true purpose is to wake up the biodynamicist himself or herself.”

Olivier Pithon articulates a similar holistic credo. “I discovered... the sensitivity to how wines can become pleasure, balance, and lightness. The love of a job well done, the precision in the choice of interventions, the importance of tasting during the production of wines and the respect for the prime material, are vital. It may sound silly, but it’s everything you didn’t learn at school that counts. We never learn that it’s essential to make wines which you love. They never speak to you about poetry, love, and pleasure. It seems natural to me to have a cow, a mare and a dog for my personal equilibrium and just as naturally comes the profound desire and necessity to fly with my own wings or to look after my own vines. Ever since then, I’ve had only one desire: to give everything to my vines so that then they give it back in their grapes and in my wine. You must be proud and put your guts, your sweat, your love, your desires, your joy, and your dreams into your wine. Growing biologically was for me self-evident, a mark of respect, a qualitative requirement, and a choice of lifestyle. It’s economically irrational for a young enterprise like mine but I don’t know any other way to be than wholly generous and natural.

I don’t do anything extraordinary. I work. I put on the compost. I use sulphur against the vine mildew and an infusion of horse tail for the little mildew that we have. This remains a base. As time goes by, through reading, exchanging ideas, wine tasting and other experiences, the wish to take inspiration from the biodynamic comes naturally. Silica and horn dung (501 and 500) complete the infusions of horse tail, fern, and nettles which I use. My goal is to make the wine as good as possible by getting as much out of the soil as I can, whilst respecting our environment and considering the problem of leaving to generations to come healthy soil: “We don’t inherit the land of our ancestors; we lend it to our children.”

Terroir – because one word is so freighted with meaning, because the critics perceive it as a “concept” appropriated by the French (the word is French after all, and a reflexive *mot-juste*!) and given a quasi-mystical, pantheistic spin, people will argue in ever-decreasing circles whether it is fact – or fiction. Who deniges it? As Mrs Gamp might enquire. If you are a New World winemaker, the word may have negative connotations insofar as it may be used as an alibi (by the French mainly) covering for lack of fruit or bad winemaking technique. The same people believe that terroir is solely associated with nostalgia for old-fashioned wines and a chronic resistance to new ideas. This is a caricature of the idea (terroir is not an idea), as if the term was invented to endorse the singular superiority of European growers. It is not old-fashioned to pursue distinctiveness by espousing minimal intervention in the vineyard and the winery, rather it denotes intelligence that if you’ve been given beautiful, healthy grapes that you *translate* their potential into something fine and *natural*. It is not old-fashioned to talk about spirit, soul, essence, harmony, and individuality in wine even though these qualities cannot be measured with callipers. The biodynamic movement in viticulture and the Slow Food philosophy are progressive in their outlook and approach. Underpinning all their ideas are the notions of sustainability, ethical farming and achieving *purity of flavour* through fewer interventions. And so, we return to the matter of taste. We say, as an intellectual truth, that every country or region naturally has its own terroir; however, not every vigneron has an intuitive understanding of it and, because of too many interventions – the better to create a wine that conforms to international models – the wine itself becomes denatured, emasculated, and obvious. Eben Sadie, a South African vigneron, articulates his concern about interventionist winemaking: ‘I don’t like the term “winemaker” at all’, he explains. ‘Until recently it didn’t exist. Now we live in a world where we “make” wines’. Eben continues, ‘to be involved with a great wine is to remove yourself from the process. In all the “making” the virtue of terroir is lost’. The final word goes to Samuel Guibert: “Firstly, you should remember that we do not make the wines. Nature makes the wines; in our case the Gassac (valley) makes the wines. And every year it is different. We should remember to be humble before Nature.” Terroir is about such respect for nature; you can obviously force the wine to obey a taste profile by artificial means and it will taste artificial. The great growers want to be able to identify Matt Kramer’s “somewhereness” in their wines, the specific somewhereness of the living vineyard. Yes, these wines have somewhat of the something from a particular somewhere, or to put it more reductively, they taste differently real. And we love ‘em!

“It is sad that few people understand naturally made individual wines. Technology has progressed to the point that far too many wines lack the taste of the place of their origin and resemble one another. Terroir, more than anything, is an expression of finesse and complexity.” - Gérard Chave (as quoted in Robert Parker’s *Wines of the Rhône Valley*, 1998 edition)

Green Harvesting – Chuck Berries

The Rhône presents a bit of a problem at the moment. There are some excellent wines at the cheaper end, but when you move into the top villages, only relatively small quantities from a handful of growers are available (such is the demand) and even those wines tend to be too young to drink. Nevertheless, we can offer a good selection of growers on top of their form. At one end of the spectrum is *Jacques Mestre*, whom we are determined to elevate to cult status – if you wish to taste great mature winter-warming Châteauneuf submit your taste buds to his mature tawny reds. In terms of vintage, it is often a boon to be behind the times! *Clos Saint-Michel* furnishes us with a white and red Châteauneuf of supreme quality and agreeably priced Côtes-du-Rhône in three colours. The Barrot family at *Domaine La Barroche* make opulent, spicy CNDPs which have garnered rave reviews. Fierce power and easy pleasure coexist harmoniously; warm waves of exotic flavour lavish the taste buds.

From old spices to baby spices. In the past couple of years, the Ferraud family and François Collard have surpassed themselves at *Château Saint-Cyrgues* and *Château Mourgues du Grès* respectively, so we strongly suggest you get your Rhône gear from the Gard. For value for money, the *Gard est le lieu* and miles better than much of the attenuated slop that masquerades under the Côtes-du-Rhône appellation. Serious and seriously good value reds are coming out of Ventoux as well. Our trio of Ardèche producers: *Vigneaux*, *Morlanche*, and *Mas de Libian* are disarmingly natural – fruit and more fruit with earth and stone. Our L’Ard des Choix.

FOOD AND WINE IN THE RHONE

The Rhône may be home to superb, flavoursome wines but its cuisine is rather less renowned. In the north it echoes the richer Burgundian style cuisine, whilst in the south the sunny influence of Provence prevails. Despite the plonky-iffy Côtes du Groan that you may encounter, everyday drinking rouge is arguably more versatile with food than tannic *vins des gardes* and can be guzzled slightly chilled with some crusty bread, cheese, and excellent ham. Red wine is the iceberg in the Rhône, but the “white and pink tips” are increasingly worth the detour, improving in aroma and freshness year by year as growers seek to achieve fruitier, zippier wines.

Spring/summer dishes and floral-fruity Viognier are synonymous. A typical light(ish) Rhône lunch might comprise a chicken liver terrine with Viognier or muscat jelly, followed by fillet of féra, a sweet and delicate fish fresh from a local lake, then quail wrapped in Swiss chard and garnished with peeled white grapes – all sublimely served by Stéphane Montez’s superb Condrieu. Continue the delightful spring theme with warm lambs’ tongue and spring pea salad, baby goat with asparagus and duck with fresh cherries. A chilled red with soft tannins would suit all these, as would a robust rosé. A richer red, such as Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages (still easy on the tannin) would favour julienned truffles in soft-boiled eggs, cod with ratatouille, pigeon with truffles and artichokes. Summer – one thinks pink and aches for Provence (maybe): tomato tartare, fillet of rouget (red mullet) roasted with olives and saffron-tomato sauce, rabbit with pistou and a refreshing bowl of strawberries splashed with rosé and splashed down by rosé. Other regional specialities include new potatoes stuffed with escargots, with omble chevalier (salmon-trout) with fava bean cream and a local speciality, ravioles du Royans, delicate little pasta packets (unless you put foie gras and cream on them!).

As in many parts of rural France meat is an essential part of the menu. Try daube of lamb spiked with rosemary, sage and garlic, the Provençal-influenced grillade de marinière (beef flavoured with anchovies) or civet of venison. Lamb is ubiquitous. It can be as saddle flavoured with herbs or chops grilled with thyme or cooked Provençal style with tomatoes or braised in gravy. Game is equally important in season: braised wild boar, partridge with cabbage and saddle of hare with juniper may be found on many menus. In certain houses you will find strong North African influences, for example, poultry cooked with vegetables or pulses and meat cooked with fruits. It goes without saying that with these meaty dishes one is looking for wines with a touch of acidity and a fair amount of tannin. The slow cooked or braised dishes particularly suit the warm Grenache-dominated wines of the southern Rhône such as Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Gigondas and Vacqueyras. The wines are full of spirit, jammy, spicy, packed with sweet fruit, sunshine, exotic flavour, and savouriness (that herby edge that gives definition to the weightiness) – the gravy to a lot of meat!

Of the various villages, Rasteau, just north of Gigondas, provides us with a sumptuous Châteauneuf-manqué from *Didier Charavin*. From Gigondas itself *Clos du Joncuas* is a wonderfully unpretentious Grenache-based wine, its earthy purity a testament to the benefits of no holds-barred organic viticulture. It’s not only a wine with nowt taken out; you’d swear they’d put things back in. From contrasting wines from Vacqueyras: in the traditional corner a warming gravy-browning brew from *Domaine La Garrigue* and fighting for the natural wines a booming Beaumes-de-Venise from the Jullien family (*Domaine Ferme Saint-Martin*)

As usual, there will be local microclimatic triumphs and mini-disasters – the diurnal rhythm of the vigneron. Grenache fares well in hot and dry vintages, whereas the more linear, reductive Syrah grape seems to thrive in cooler ones.

A Dance To The Music of Thyme

As mentioned elsewhere we are particularly fond of the underrated Grenache grape which seems to soak up the heat of the sun and express the flavours of the soil to such good effect. Many modernists wish to use new oak or a higher proportion of Syrah or extract greater colour. This might smoothen some of the rough edges but would surely stifle the unique signature of these wonderful southern Rhône red wines.

NORTHERN RHONE

DOMAINE DU MONTEILLET, STEPHANE MONTEZ, Saint Joseph

*Domaine du Monteillet is situated high on the plateau above the village of Chavannay. Since taking over from his father, Stephane has transformed the standard of winemaking at Domaine du Monteillet. The Saint-Joseph Blanc, never a commercial wine, is 100% Marsanne with typical mango flavours, almond blossom, and beeswax and his Condrieu, produced in tiny quantities (from 1.5 hectares of vines grown on Chanson and Boisse) is exceptional. (Le petit Dieu, Robert Parker, awarded this wine ***** in his recent book on the Rhône). To get the best out of it, try serving it cool cellar temperature and decanting it and see how the aromas develop magically in the glass. The Saint-Joseph Rouge, aged in old oak and foudre, is pure Syrah: it seems quite light at first, but then puts on flesh after it has been open for half an hour. A wonderfully aromatic wine breathing black cherries, green and black olives, violets and mixed garrigue herbs. From the oldest vines (40 years+) comes the late Syrah-harvested Cuvée du Papy which enjoys a new oak élevage of 18-24 months and throbs with sinew. The Côte-Rôtie is a eumorphous beast – let it rest or decant with prejudice. The wine with its high percentage of Viognier (15%) is strikingly floral: billowing sweet violets, wild rose and cherry blossom. The palate is equally perfumed revealing cherries and wild berries with firm yet integrated tannins bringing up the rear.*

| | | |
|------|---------------------|---|
| 2023 | SAINT JOSEPH BLANC | W |
| 2023 | CONDRIEU | W |
| 2022 | SAINT JOSEPH ROUGE | R |
| 2021 | COTE-ROTIE "FORTIS" | R |

DOMAINE ROMANEAUX-DESTETZET, HERVE & BEATRICE SOUHOUT, Saint Joseph – Organic

The Domaine Romaneaux-Destezet was created in 1993 by Hervé Souhaut. His holdings on the acidic granite soils of the northern Rhône and the southern Ardèche are a mixture of new and ancient vines—from 50 to 100 years old. Hervé Souhaut's holdings are minuscule, only five hectares, and he employs only organic and biodynamic winemaking techniques.

The Syrah grapes for his VDP cuvée come from a tiny parcel of land along the slopes of the Doux River and the vines are on average 40 years old. At the end of September, the grapes are harvested and then undergo a very long maceration at a low temperature. The wine is then matured on the lees in second-hand oak casks for six months and then bottled without being filtered. Cool climate Syrah tends to have very dynamic aromatics, and this gem has one of the most explosive noses I have experienced in quite some time. Violets, bacon fat, freshly roasted coffee beans, black cherry, wet stone, and vanilla bean all interplay nicely as they gradually unfurl off the rim of the glass. The palate employs many of the same flavours the wine contains on the nose, however, deep black cherry and juicy plum flavours meshed with candied violets and cool strawberry tones dominate. The tannins that gradually crop up on the finish are in the featherweight division and highlight the readily accessible fruity components this stellar Syrah possesses. Ideal with pigeon, guinea fowl, roast chicken, or pork.

The Souteronne is made from only old Gamay grapes. The vines are between 60 to 80 years old. The winemaking involves a long maceration at low temperature, without destemming the grapes and the juice is matured on the fine lees, in second-hand oak casks. It is then bottled without filtration. The SO₂ is less than 25mg/l when bottled. The depth of colour of this wine is sensational and the nose billows out of the glass to reveal fresh red and dark fruits. The palate is something else – this is a truly superb Gamay with a lovely mineral edge as if granite had melted seamlessly into a wine. Of the two red Saint-Josephs (neither of which has destemmed grapes) the Saint-Epine from one-hundred-year-old Syrah vines matured on the lees in used barrels combines exotic perfumed fruit and spice with glorious purity. The straight Saint-Jo called Cessieu is delightfully fresh, a reminder that this variety can possess real finesse.

The Blanc is a blend of 70% Viognier and 30% Roussanne, from yields of 20hl/ha, is directly pressed with maturation on the fine lees and bottling without filtration. It has aromas of apricot and waxy pear with some herbal notes and an agreeably mouth-filling texture.

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|------|---|---|
| 2023 | VIN DE PAYS DE L'ARDECHE VIOGNIER-ROUSSANNE | W |
| 2023 | SAINT-JOSEPH BLANC « ETRATI » | W |
| 2023 | VIN DE PAYS DE L'ARDECHE "SOUTERONNE" | R |
| 2023 | IGP D'ARDECHE SYRAH | R |
| 2023 | SAINT-JOSEPH ROUGE "CESSIEUX" | R |
| 2022 | SAINT-JOSEPH ROUGE "SAINT-EPINE" | R |

DOMAINE ALBERT BELLE, PHILIPPE BELLE, Crozes-Hermitage – Organic – Certified AB France

This family estate in the Northern Rhône has forged an enviable reputation for supple, generous wines. Previously a member of the local co-op, the Belle family have rapidly made a name for themselves as a producer to watch. The domaine extends to 19 hectares in 4 communes and two appellations, Crozes-Hermitage and Hermitage. Low yields in the vineyards (30-35 hl/ha) and, of course, the wonderful climate helps produce grapes of exceptional quality. The red wines are produced traditionally using whole bunches of grapes and extended maceration. They are then matured in oak for between 12 and 18 months with 20 to 25% new barrels each year.

Fermentation of the Les Pierrelles is in temperature-controlled stainless-steel tanks and the wine has a twelve-month élevage in old oak barrels. Aromas of warm tar, marmite and wood-smoke greet you, then a palate which is initially dry and herby with a mint edge opens out to reveal layers of blackcurrants, peppered plums, and prunes. Cuvée Louis Belle is a selection of 50+ year-old vines with the Syrah partially fermented in oak casks then aged for 12 months in 25-30% new oak barrels. Sumptuous Crozes with copious jammy black cherry and cassis fruit and a silky finish. As the Crozes flies it doesn't get any better than this.

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| 2022 | CROZES-HERMITAGE ROUGE "LES PIERRELLES" | R |
| 2023 | CROZES-HERMITAGE ROUGE "LES PIERRELLES" – ½ bottle | R |

DARD ET RIBO, Crozes-Hermitage – Organic

Wake up and smell the Crozes!

René Jean Dard and François Ribo have acquired a cult following amongst those who frequent the natural wine bars of France, and they are also revered in Japan, the second home of great low sulphur wines. Their 7.5 vineyard holding is split around seven villages on a variety of terroirs comprising different soil types. The winery is located near Mercurol (a short distance east of Tain l'Hermitage). They use two types of pruning, goblet and tie-up, depending on the slope and other terrain conditions and practise organic viticulture. We are taking four whites, two Crozes and two Saint-Josephs. The straight Crozes is a blend of Marsanne and Roussanne, whilst the Karrière is from a parcel of Marsanne vines on caolin (white clay soils). The Saint-Joseph meanwhile is pure Roussanne. All the whites manage to bridge the gap between being golden, honeyed, spicy yet defiantly mineral. The Karrière deserves an extra mention. The rhyme of this ancient Marsanner fills the mouth with creamed apricots, sun warmed soil, humus, walnut oil and lanolin. It comes in waves: you think it has dropped off the end of your palate into the oblivion of your gullet then the flavours ping back, echoing incense. The two reds share a common purity of fruit. The Crozes, from red clay soils with gravel and alluvial stones, is almost salty with notes of violets, olives, dill, blackberry, and leather, whilst the Saint-Joseph, from vines on decomposed granitic soils, is round and smoky. "What we like is natural wine because it's alive, wine that does not necessarily have to be kept – just drunk and drunk again". These wines remind me of Kafka's advice to start with what is right rather than what is acceptable. The Printemps is a demolishable wine at the generous fruit end of the spectrum with other bits mixed in. Wild blackberry-purée pits, stems and all, wafting violets, Provençale olive notes (more like tapenade made with crushed wild thyme), flecks of pepper and granite back notes. In a velvet jacket.

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|------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 2021 | CROZES-HERMITAGE BLANC | W |
| 2021 | CROZES-HERMITAGE "KARRIERE" | W |
| 2021 | HERMITAGE BLANC | W |
| 2022 | CROZES-HERMITAGE ROUGE "PRINTEMPS" | R |
| 2021 | CROZES-HERMITAGE ROUGE | R |
| 2021 | CROZES-HERMITAGE ROUGE "PE DE LOUP" | R |
| 2021 | SAINT-JOSEPH BLANC | W |
| 2021 | SAINT-JOSEPH BLANC "LE PITROU" | W |
| 2021 | SAINT-JOSEPH ROUGE | R |
| 2021 | SAINT-JOSEPH ROUGE « LES CHAMPS » | R |
| 2021 | HERMITAGE ROUGE | R |

We receive a very small allocation of these wines and, alas, have to allocate them ourselves.

You people. You think you can just buy your way into this. Take a few lessons. Grow some grapes. Make some good wine. You cannot do it that way. ... You have to have it in your blood. You have to grow up with the soil underneath your nails, and the smell of the grape in the air that you breathe. The cultivation of the vine is an art form. The refinement of its juice is a religion that requires pain and desire and sacrifice.

Gustavo ~ Bottle Shock

DOMAINE BALTHAZAR, FRANCK BALTHAZAR, Cornas – Organic

Franck Balthazar took over from his father René in 2003. Located in Cornas, the earliest to ripen of the three great appellations of the northern Rhône, the estate encompasses just two hectares of extremely low-yielding, 90-year-old Syrah planted on the sunny slopes of the village's granitic hillside amphitheatre. Franck works organically and still ploughs with a horse. Fermenting in cement vats he raises his wine completely in 600-litre old demi-muids for eighteen months and then bottles without fining or filtration and with very low sulphur. These are attractive, undeniably artisanal wines. Seductive perfume of red and dark berries, kirsch, lavender, and violet, with a bright iron-mineral element. Spicy cherry and blackcurrant flavours combine richness and sinewy-sappy vivacity, picking up exotic floral pastilles on the finish. This has wonderful freshness and finishing cut.

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| 2023 | SAIN-PERAY BLANC | W |
| 2023 | VDF GRINGET ~ on allocation | W |
| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE ROUGE | R |
| 2021/22 | CORNAS "CHAILLOT" | R |
| 2021/22 | CORNAS SANS SOUFRE | R |
| 2021/22 | CORNAS CASIMIR | R |



DOMAINE DES MIQUETTES, PAUL ESTEVE & CHRYSTELLE VAREILLE, Saint-Joseph– Organic

Domaine des Miquettes was created by Paul Estève and Chrystelle Vareille in 2003 in the village of Cheminas, a small village located on the high plateau above Tournon and Secheras, two towns located in the southern part of the Saint Joseph appellation. Paul and Chrystelle took over the farm from Paul's family and turned one of the small farm buildings into a cramped and low-tech wine-making facility. In total, the domaine consists of five hectares. At the property in Cheminas, Paul & Chrystelle have planted one hectare of Syrah and one of Viognier which are classified as Vin de Pays des Coteaux de l'Ardèche. They also have three hectares in Saint Joseph with 2.6 planted to Syrah and .4h planted to Marsanne. Paul had been working the Saint Joseph vineyard for the previous owner and when the owner decided to retire, he decided to take over the three hectares. The Saint Joseph vineyard is in the high hills above Secheras at an altitude of around 350 metres. It is planted on a steep hillside with soils of granite mixed with mica schist and its exposure is east/southeast. The vineyards, both in Saint Joseph and the Coteaux de l'Ardèche are certified as organic farms. The vineyard rows are worked throughout the year with either a tractor or horse-drawn plough which is used on the more difficult terrains. All harvesting is done by hand and the fermentations occur with natural yeasts and little or no temperature adjustments. Both white and red wines are matured in large casks, "demi-muids" for a year before bottling. Since 2014 he makes both his red Saint-Josephs in terracotta clay as well. All the wines are sans soufre. Paul started to plant the Madloba vineyard 13 years ago and choose an old clone of Syrah, selection massale. This steep terraced vineyard facing west towards Crozes-Hermitage has a much stronger wind then their other Saint Joseph vineyard on the top and the wines really ends up differently. The wine is fermented for six months in amphora, pressed, and then aged for a further six months in same. 12 years ago, they also planted 0,5 hectares of Syrah in Ardèche, just above the village of Arlebosc. The first vintage made was 2015 Paul's another grower who has been bitten the Georgian bug – I have a hazy memory of him being pulled out of a qvevri on a trip to that country, so he has immersed himself in the most literal sense in their wines. Madloba (the name of one of his cuvees) means thanks in Georgian. The reds have that almost unrealistic sheen of youthful purple as per Seamus Heaney's Blackberry Picking:

*... its flesh was sweet
Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it
Leaving stains upon the tongue*

| | | |
|------|------------------------------|----|
| 2021 | TT' BLANC | Or |
| 2021 | TT' ROUGE | R |
| 2020 | SAINT-JOSEPH ROUGE | R |
| 2019 | SAINT-JOSEPH ROUGE "MADLOBA" | R |

And, in the autumn, when you gather the grapes of the vineyard for the wine press, say in your heart:
 “I too am of the vineyard, and my fruit shall be gathered for the winepress,
 And like new wine I shall be kept in eternal vessels
 And, in winter, when you draw the wine, let there be in your heart, a song for each cup;
 And let there be in the song a remembrance for the autumn days, and for the vineyard, and for the winepress.
 From the Prophet ~ Kahlil Gibran

SOUTHERN RHONE

Continued...

“Take, for example, the *garrigue*, the wild brush that grows on the rocks and hillsides of Provence, the southern Rhône, and the Languedoc. This is composed of bunches of herbs including thyme, rosemary, and oregano. It is a taste archetype of the region and tends to be more pronounced in wines from very ripe grapes with low acidity and is especially evident in Carignan and Grenache. Old-fashioned wine making is sympathetic towards bringing out the *garrigue* character: ageing the wines in old oak foudres results in a kind of positive oxidation that brings out all the latent aromas of the terroir.” (A Digression Concerning Terroir)

LES CHAMPS LIBRES, DARD ET SOUHAUT, Ardèche – Organic

No lard-di-da numbers these but ‘umble natural wines co-scripted by the René Jean Dard and Hervé Souhaut team. The proof is in the cheerful drinking. The white Lard is a choice Grenache Blanc whilst the red is a chillable and eminently gluggable blend of Gamay and Syrah weighing in at a slimming 11.8%. The former is golden-yellow and vinous; fleshy fruits dominate the nose and mouth, in particular, poached pears and roasted pineapple. The finish is dry, waxy, and spicy. The red effortlessly combines frivolity (imagine just crushed red grape juice) and cheeky terroir notes of black olives and pepper. The Pierro strips off and reveals those beautifully eloquent primary Syrah aromas: sweet violets, orange blossom, juicy black olives and silky blueberry fruit mingled in the glass. In terms of drinkability let’s just say that the gradient of the glass projecting the wine down one’s throat steepens appreciably.

2020/21 CROZES-HERMITAGE “FREDERIC PIERRO”

R

LES VIGNERONS D’ESTEZARGUES, Côtes du Rhône

This chirpy convivial red comes from the pebble (galets) strewn clay terraces of the Gard between Avignon and Nîmes. This super little co-op works according to the principles of Terra Vitis using no chemical treatments other than a little sulphur. The grape blend varies, but usually features Grenache (roughly 50%) with Syrah and Carignan in equal measure. Very much a natural wine with no filtering or fining. Bottled in spring after the finish the wine is very juicy with a soft, slightly cloudy purple colour and gentle flavours of blackberry, liquorice, pepper, and nutmeg.

2022 VIN DE PAYS DU GARD “LES GALETS”

R

2022 VIN DE PAYS DU GARD “LES GALETS” – 5 -litre BIB

R

2022 COTES DU RHONE « LES OLIVIERS » BIO

R

2022 COTES DU RHONE « LES OLIVIERS » - ½ bottle

R

2022 VIN DE FRANCE ROUGE – 20-litre key keg

R

2023 COTES DU RHONE ROSE - 20-litre key keg

Ro

CHATEAU SAINT-CYRGUES, JEAN-PIERRE & LOIC FERRAUD, Costières de Nîmes – Organic – Certified AB

Costières de Nîmes is an appellation in transition. It received full AC status in 1986 and although notionally in the eastern part of the Languedoc, it shares the same topography, soil and climate as the southern Rhône (alluvial terroir of galet stones and sandstone). Château Saint-Cyrgues is beginning to produce quality wines across the board. In the vineyard natural remedies are encouraged and work is done by hand. The murrey-hued violet-scented Saint-Cirice

Rouge is for those who enjoy gutsy spicy wines – fabulous concentration for a wine at this level. This blend of Grenache and Syrah pleads for barbecued leg of lamb. The Costières de Nîmes Blanc is a mini-Châteauneuf, being a blend of Roussanne (75%) and Grenache Blanc (25%). Flavours here of ripe apricots, pulped pears, green herbs and lime leaves and the characteristic southern Rhône “oily” mouthfeel. Try this with fruits de mer, grilled lemon sole and even young Roquefort.

2023 CHATEAU SAINT-CYRGUES, COSTIERES DE NIMES BLANC

W

2023 SALAMANDRE ORANGE

Or

2023 SAINT-CIRICE SYRAH-GRENACHE, VIN DE PAYS DU GARD

R

2022 SALAMANDRE ROUGE

R

SOUTHERN RHONE

“I don’t like the word winemaker. It doesn’t mean anything to me. You make shoes; you don’t make wine. I prefer to call myself a “wine helper” You help the wine make itself. That’s how I consider my job. That’s the way to keep a low profile – under nature, under the climate, under the fruit. Wine is a great gift.”

Louis Barruol, quoted in *The New France* – Andrew Jefford

CHÂTEAU MOURGUES DU GRES, ANNE & FRANCOIS COLLARD, Costières de Nîmes – Organic – Certified AB France

Mourgues was originally a Provençal name for Ursuline nuns, the farm originally having belonged to a convent near the village of Beaucaire. With Mont Ventoux visible from the top of the vineyard slopes this is a region that feels closer to Provence or the Rhône than the Languedoc.

We are delighted to be able to distribute this eye-opening, gob-enlightening range of Rhône-ettes.

When much generic Côtes-du-Rhône is so pallid that it won’t even leave a stain in your carpet anymore, these Syrah-drenched wines will roll back the rug and form an enticing purple lagoon. The vineyard site is made up of flat pebbles called Grès and is planted with a mixture of Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Roussanne, Viognier and Grenache Blanc. Les Galets refer to the large stones (also found in Châteauneuf) which heat up during the day and release their warmth at night, perfect for ripening those reds. The baby white, Galets Dorés, is Roussanne, Grenache, Vermentino and Marsanne, expressing white flowers and ripe citrus fruits. The Galets Rouge is predominantly Syrah with Grenache and a touch of Marselan. Notes of violets and bubbling with aromatic red fruits. The Syrah vines are more than forty years old; advantageous in hot years such as 2003 and 2005 when the well-established root systems could probe the clay calcareous marl in search of moisture. The saignée rosé punches well above its weight and even the whites, so often a flabby irrelevance in southern France, are taut in structure and rich in fruit, especially the Terre d’Argence (from the older vines on the Costières) which displays a positively indecent amount of flavour, a pornucopia of supple melons, sweet apricots and other explicit fruits as well as glorious, honeyed tones – Roussanne, Viognier and Grenache voluptuously combine. The Terre d’Argence Rouge, from those old, exposed Syrah vines, is a wine of profound concentration and equal elegance, displaying strong flavours of blackberries, dried black olives and oriental spices. The motto of the estate, taken from an old sundial outside the house, is sine sole nihil (nothing without sun). The sun is in these wines.

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|------|---|----|
| 2023 | COSTIERES DE NIMES BLANC, GALETS DORES | W |
| 2022 | COSTIERES DE NIMES BLANC « TERRES ‘ARGENCE » | W |
| 2022 | COSTIERES DE NIMES ROUGE, LES GALETS | R |
| 2020 | COSTIERES DE NIMES ROUGE « TERRES D’ARGENCE » | R |
| 2023 | COSTIERES DE NIMES ROSE, LES GALETS | Ro |



Legs (Tears, Arches) – having swirled your glass observe how the liquid clinging to the sides after the wine has settled. This viscosity may be due to the extract, the level of alcohol or the sugar content of the wine, or a combination of these factors. May be described as vast and trunkless if you are in poetic mood, or like Betty Grable's for those with black-and-white memories. Legs have replaced tears and arches appear to have fallen out of favour. All arches, by the way, must be gothic.

DOMAINE GRAMENON, MICHELE AUBERY-LAURENT, Côtes-du-Rhône – Biodynamic (Demeter)

*Nunquam aliud natura, aliud sapientia dicit
(For wisdom ever echoes Nature's voice – Juvenal trans. Samuel Johnson)*

These are wines that we have long admired deeply for their purity. Located not far from the village of Vinsobres, Michèle Aubery & her son, Maxime-François, makes some of the most beautiful and compelling Rhône wines. Made with gloriously ripe fruit and bottled by hand without fining or filtration, many of the cuvées are also bottled without the addition of any sulphur to keep the yeasts and microflora alive. This is non-interventionist, minimalist wine-making par excellence. Not only are the vines old (there is one parcel of 120-year-old Grenache, but the traditional cellars contain no high-tech equipment with the wine descending by means of gravity to the tanks (to use a pump apparently "stresses the yeasts") and the ageing of all the cuvées of red wines is in old cask and demi-muids. We begin with the white wine called "Vie On Y Est". An initial impression would suggest that this is a powerful, alcoholic, oily Viognier, neither particularly aromatic nor mineral. This is not the case at all. A second glass reveals a softening of the edges; the power is there, but warm fruit begins to emerge. As the wine reaches room temperature the transformation is astonishing; the alcohol is converted into luscious pollen-dusted fruit, scents of warm brioche and yoghurt appear with some crunchy freshness care of a dollop of Clairette. Poignée des Raisins is a glorious carbo-style "fistful of grapes". Juicy, pure, vibrant fruit aromas of black fruit compote...blackberry, black plum and black cherry fruits virtually burst out of the glass with dashes of higher-toned blue fruits sitting in the background. There are hints of earth/stone, dried flowers, jasmine, pepper, spice box, red liquorice, ginger cake and a touch of green tobacco leaf.

Sierra du Sud, named after the ancient Syrah clone, is indeed 100% pure Syrah. Amidst the power is delightful delicacy: cassis mingled with tapenade, Provençal herbs, minerals, and flowers. La Sagesse is a blend of 95% Grenache and 5% Syrah, an expansive, intensely fragrant Côtes-du-Rhône with a chewy texture and a medicinal flavour. Ceps Centenaire is a real rarity from the oldest vines. It is a huge, sumptuous mouthful, bursting with bright kirsch-laden fruit. To taste Vins du Raisin, wines of natural grace, perfume, and subtle depth, you have to look into yourself as well as into the glass. These are living, mutable wines constantly confounding expectation; sometimes shy, austere, fugitive, sometimes lush, floral, and bold.

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| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE "VIE ON Y EST" | W |
| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE "POIGNEE DE RAISINS" | R |
| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE "LA PAPESSSE » | R |
| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE « SIERRA DU SUD » | R |
| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE "LA SAGESSE" | R |
| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE « LA SAGESSE » magnum | R |
| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE "LA MEME" CEPS CENTENAIRE | R |

Natural wine... and wabi-sabi

The term wabi-sabi suggests such qualities as impermanence, humility, asymmetry, and imperfection. These underlying principles are diametrically opposed to those of their Western counterparts, whose values are rooted in the Hellenic worldview that values permanence, grandeur, symmetry, and perfection. ...

Wabi-sabi is an intuitive appreciation of a transient beauty in the physical world that reflects the irreversible flow of life in the spiritual world. It is an understated beauty that exists in the modest, rustic, imperfect, or even decayed, an aesthetic sensibility that finds a melancholic beauty in the impermanence of all things.

DOMAINE LA FERME SAINT-MARTIN, GUY JULLIEN, Beaumes-de-Venise – Organic – Certified

Domaine Ferme Saint-Martin is situated in Suzette in the upper part of the Beaumes-de-Venise. The vineyard work is free of chemicals and the estate has organic certification. Their philosophy is encapsulated thus :

“Cela veut dire que nous labourons nos vignes bien sûr, et que nous n'utilisons pas de produits de traitements issus de synthèse. Mais surtout, que tous les travaux que nous réalisons à la vigne et sur le domaine, sont faits dans le but de produire des raisins sains, tout en gardant une vie dans les sols et un équilibre dans la nature qui nous molécule entoure. Le travail du sol et l'absence de produits de synthèses permettent donc le maintien d'une faune et d'une flore diversifiées autour de la vigne.” The quality of grapes is paramount and determined by triage in the vines and on a table at the winery.

All wines are fermented with natural yeasts. The Terres Jaunes is from vines grown on the Triassic limestone that dominates the terroir of Beaumes-de-Venise. The yields are a moderate 35-38 hl/ha of Grenache (75%) and Syrah (25%).

After a tri de vendange, and total destemming there is a 15-20-day maceration. After a short period in vat, the wine is bottled unfiltered with a very small dose of sulphur. It has an intense ruby colour and powerful garrigue-scented nose of pepper and spice and typically mouth-filling flavours. The Côtes du Ventoux vineyards are situated on gravel soils in St Hyppolyte le Graveyron. The south-facing vines are 20-45 years old. La Gérine (Grenache/Carignan blend) undergoes a semi-carbonic maceration without sulphur and using indigenous yeasts. The grapes are lightly trodden by foot, and, after élevage, the wine is bottled without filtration and with a very light dose of sulphur. An elegant racy wine that reveals lovely purity with dark berry fruits on the nose and aromas of wild bay-leaf and roasted herb to give the palate an extra

dimension. The baby Côtes-du-Rhône, Les Romanins, is produced in the commune of Suzette from parcels of vines not classified as Beaumes de Venise and from young vines just entering production. The yields are still relatively low (45 hl/ha). A blend of 80% Grenache and 20% Cinsault, this is a wine very much on the fruit with soft confit fruits and a gentle dusting of pepper.

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| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE “ROMANINS” | R |
| 2023 | VENTOUX “LA GERINE” | R |
| 2021 | BEAUMES-DE-VENISE “TERRES JAUNES” | R |
| 2023 | VENTOUX ROUGE « SUR LE FIL » | R |

DOMAINE LA GARRIGUE, PIERRE-ALBERT BERNARD, Vacqueyras

This typically Provençal 65-hectare estate has been in the same family since 1850. Grenache (from 50-year-old + vines) forms 75% of the blend (the remainder shared between Syrah, Mourvèdre and Cinsault); the upbringing is traditional (24 months in cement vat, without filtration). As you can imagine this is “take-no-prisoners” southern Rhône. Impressions of undergrowth, musk and leather are evocative of the garrigue from which the vineyard derives its name. The strong, rich flavour is finely structured, the tannins are powerful yet well integrated, the fruit is brandied cherries, and a firm grasp of pepper seasons the palate. A winter wine for roast partridge with cabbage or duck with olives.

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| 2021 | VACQUEYRAS | R |
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DOMAINE DE LA CHARITE, CHRISTOPHE COSTE, Côtes du Rhône – Organic certified

Christophe Coste must be the most dynamic winemaker in the newly elevated Côtes du Rhône Village of Signargues.

Apart from being president of the syndicate there, he makes a range of stunningly good wines. In just ten years, Christophe has expanded the vineyard including a holding in Châteauneuf, the range has developed and includes several excellent boutique wines, and everything is now recognised as fully organic. Domaine de la Charité is in Saze, west of Avignon. It was founded by Christophe's grandfather in 1970 at which time there were just 5 hectares (ha) producing grapes which were sold to the local cooperative. In 1974, Christophe's father left the cooperative and built the cellars. Now, under Christophe's management, the estate has expanded to 45 ha of vines and some more with olive trees. The rosé is a blend of Syrah (80%) and Cinsault (20%) and is appropriately crunchy.

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| 2022 | ST CECILE COTES DU RHONE ROSE BIO– 5-litre BIB | Ro |
|------|--|----|

CHATEAU VALCOMBE, LUC & CENDRINE GUERNARD, Ventoux- Organic – Certified AB France

Situated in the foothills of Mont Ventoux Château Valcombe” covers 28 hectares. Luc and Cendrine (and their team) are ecologically minded, respectful and aware of the natural assets of the terroir. The vines are supported by a high wooden trellis. The labour is traditional, without using chemicals. Leaf removal and destemming are performed manually and there is no pollarding of the vines. The average age of the vineyard is of more than 50 years, the resulting wines are powerful with all the energy focused in a few grapes. The vineyard surrounds the gravity cellar of the domaine. The grapes do not have far to travel after harvesting so they do not get crushed and thus the aromas are allowed to develop fully. The wines mature in barrels of 400 and 600 litres until ready for bottling. Nothing is rushed. Cinq Puits comes from a vineyard situated in the town of Mazan, on southeast facing slopes on clay and limestone soils. The blend is 70% Grenache, 15% Syrah and 5% Carignan, all old vines and all manually debudded with green harvest. Grapes are handpicked. The wines are matured in “demi muids” used six times previously. Bright cherry red with ripe fruits the wine has discreet aromas of undergrowth and warm brick. In the mouth this Ventoux red is fleshy yet elegant with aromas of kirsch, raspberry, cherry and dark chocolate and some roasted notes. The peppery finish binds the whole. Epicure Rouge comes from a vineyard situated in the town of St Pierre de Vassols, at an altitude of 250 metres, on north-west slopes, facing the Dentelles de Montmirail. The soil is clay, limestone and sand based, grey-brown with a yellowish hue, pebbly and gravelly. The silt lies on dark ochre fine sand which itself lies on gravels. Some areas sit on oxidised gravels. The blend here is 60% Grenache, 25% Carignan and 15% Syrah. The winemaking process involves racking and returning with maturing on the lees in concrete tanks. Predominant notes of ripe fruit, cherry, in the mouth the wine is unctuous and round yet perfectly balanced with freshness, great structure and smooth tannins on the finish. The aromatic palate spreads from ripe fruit to more aromatic liquorice flavours finishing with notes of stone and plum.

2020

EPICURE ROUGE

R

Biodynamics – Earth Calling

Of course, I don't believe in it. But I understand that it brings you luck whether you believe in it or not. (*Niels Bohr on a horseshoe nailed to his wall.*)

Biodynamics goes a step further than organic farming although it shares many of the practical approaches. It assumes philosophical holism, articulating almost animistic and Gaian values and allies to its own scientific analysis and observation. I think science is too often confused with technology: its applications might be represented in the metaphor of a pill. What the pill contains is a chemical solution to a problem that tends, by definition, to be a short term one. There may be alternative therapies such as acupuncture or homeopathic remedies which may achieve the same effect as the pill. Faith-healing and hypnosis can alleviate certain illnesses because they can stimulate the brain to send out signals to create antibodies. Biodynamics starts from a different perspective and posits a unified methodology insofar as it is not treating the vine as a patient but creating a healthy environment for the vine to exist in. Rather than being a reactive form of farming, it is prescient, intuitive and intelligent.

Incorporated within this philosophy are such diverse matters as the importance of a planting calendar, seasonal tasks, epedaphic conditions, the waxing of the moon (and how it corresponds to high pressure) and the role of wild yeasts. The dynamic of the vineyard mirrors all the cycles. The seasons are a necessary part of the great natural balance, the constant process of decomposition, dormancy and recomposition. Nature is about a series of transformations, and biodynamics analyses the different states and exchanges of matter and energy that operate in the growth of the vine: between the mineral and the roots; the water and the leaf; light and the flower; heat and the fruit, a series of metamorphoses which can be seen not as different states, but ascendant and descendant ones. This is a radical way of looking at plants (although it was proposed by Goethe as early as the 1800s before being elaborated by Rudolph Steiner and Maria Thun.)

The vineyard then is worked through the cycles of natural peaks and troughs. Autumn, the time of decomposition, the sun in its descendant phase, is marked using compost and diverse animal and vegetable preparations to nourish the soil. Spring witnesses the time of regeneration, photosynthesis, the ascendant sun, and crystalline formation. All activities in the vineyard will mirror these rhythms. The lunar calendar meanwhile is used as a timetable indicating when the best time is to prune vines or to rack the wine from barrel to barrel.

Is biodynamic wine better? Perhaps this is not the question we should be asking. Andrew Jefford quotes Nicolas Joly's credo: “*Avant d’être bon, un vin doit être vrai*”; in other words, a wine should ultimately be *true to itself* – this is the “morality of terroir.” Biodynamic viticulture is the ultimate endeavour to realise terroir.

For an in-depth analysis of the philosophy and methodology of biodynamics Monty Waldin's *Biodynamic Wines* published by Mitchell Beazley is an invaluable guide.

CLOS DU JONCUAS, FERNAND CHASTAN, Gigondas – Organic

WHERE'S THE BEEF? Asked an American president famously. Well, it all went into this particular wine – lock, two stock tablets & smoking gravy essence not to mention a fine additional cultural whiff of death-in-venison. It is a pleasure to find a grower who can achieve aroma, power yet finesse and elegant fruit in a wine. Although weighing in at a hefty (and, for Gigondas, seemingly mandatory) 13.5%, this Gig. Compared favourably in a tasting against the fiercely tannic monsterpieces from the appellation, this is drinking beautifully now.

From a terraced vineyard, this is a blend of Grenache (80%) the remainder being equal parts Mourvèdre and Syrah. The grapes are harvested at the beginning of October, trodden in the traditional way, and, after a cuvaison of 18 days and regular remontage, the wine is put into foudres. No filtration, nor fining, from the vineyard where strictly organic practices are observed to the sympathetic treatment in the winery, this is southern Rhône red at its purest.

2021 GIGONDAS

DOMAINE JACQUES MESTRE, CHRISTOPHE MESTRE, Châteauneuf-du-Pape

One cannot be precise and still be pure – Marc Chagall

Cue Ennio Morricone music: this is the domaine with no name. Consult the guidebooks and you will find a glorious blank.

Old-fashioned Châteauneuf from a quirky grower who ages his wines in enormous oak foudres and releases them to order. The soil is pebbly red clay with galets (pudding stones). Green harvesting in the vineyard, lutte raisonnée, organic viticulture and low yields (below 35hl/ha) help provide the raw ingredients. The blend is reassuringly southern Rhône: 60% Grenache, 10% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre and 5% Cinsault and the remaining odds and curious sods making up a baker's dozen à la

Château Beaucastel. This vintage has the usual animal aromas, game-and-gravy, plus olives, tamarinds, oranges, and a mahogany smoothness derived from maturity, in other words, a right old roister-doisterer. With heart, mind, and lots of body – a really pukka wine as a formerly young TV chef might say. Buy some now – for now – and buy some now – for later – it's got legs to burn. Recent vintages see a touch more Syrah and have a touch more backbone as a result. They still march to the drum of sun and the garrigue.

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| 2012 | CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE, CUVÉE DES SOMMELIERS | R |
| 2020 | CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE, CUVÉE DES SOMMELIERS – ½ bottle | R |
| 2017 | CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE, CUVÉE DES SOMMELIERS – magnum | R |

CLOS SAINT-MICHEL, OLIVIER & FRANCK MOUSSET, Châteauneuf-du-Pape - Organic

The red is a chewy Châteauneuf with smoky roasted meat character, black cherries and kirsch, pepper, herbs (bay leaf, rosemary) glycerine fruit. Rich, deep and generous, with a compelling sweetness of fruit and a lush, pliant texture. Finishes with firm but sweet tannins and a note of dark chocolate. This estate destems about 50% of its grapes, aims for high extraction and ages in foudres for about 12-16 months. If you seek characterful Côtes-du-Rhône in the embryonic "Neuf" idiom then the supple Mathilde, (80% Grenache, 20% Syrah from 15-40-year-old vines) all juicy jammy fruits (strawberry, plum and orange) with a hint of bitter olive, delivers the smoky bacon. The white Châteauneuf is just sublime: aromas of acacia and wild mint jostle with honey, beeswax and vanilla, a mouthful of subtle pleasure. This is a didapper palate, a wine whose flavours seem to disappear only to bob up again like a nervous dabchick. Grenache 30%, Clairette 30%, Roussanne 20%, Bourboulenc 20%, all the grapes being manually harvested and fermented separately in 225 litre oak casks. After twelve months, and after a rigorous selection process, the wines are blended. Both colours of Châteauneuf will age happily for ten years or more.

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| 2022 | COTES-DU-RHONE BLANC "MATHILDE" | W |
| 2022 | CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE BLANC | W |
| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE MATHILDE ROSE | Ro |
| 2021 | COTES-DU-RHONE ROUGE "MATHILDE" ROUGE | R |
| 2020 | CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE ROUGE CUVÉE SPECIALE | R |
| 2013 | CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE ROUGE CUVÉE RESERVE | R |

Glowing with pride

Growers in the Rhone have been rejoicing since they have been given permission to change the name from Coteaux du Tricastin with its connotations of the local nuclear power plant to the more poetic “**Ile des Trois Mîles**”.

DOMAINE LA BARROCHE, CHRISTIAN & JULIEN BARROT, Châteauneuf-du-Pape

In the 17th century Alexandre Barrot purchased the first plot of land and founded a domaine. After him followed Pierre Barrot and, after a lot of begatting, Eugène Gabriel Barrot. After him the domaine was divided between four sons, one of them was Marcel Barrot. His son Christian Barrot resumed the estate and called it “Lou Destré d’Antan” “the press of yesteryear” in memory of his grandfather.

The current domaine comprises 12.5 hectares in AOC Châteauneuf-du-Pape producing only red wines. The average age of the vines is 60 years old, but 1/3 of them are 100-year-old-plus nubbly-knobly Grenache bush vines, notably the 1.6 ha vineyard at Grand Pierre, a small pebble-free parcel planted on sloped sandy red soils, the 0.8 hectare at Terres Blanches (stony, limestone soils) and a 2.3-hectare plot at Palestor with some more centurion Grenache vines.

Julien is also very fond of his 0.5-hectare parcel at Pierre à Feu with 60-year-old Cinsault.

The Châteauneuf Signature is the cuvée that most naturally expresses the subtlety of the terroir. It embodies both the fullness and the finesse of many complex aromas. It is at once an invitation to travel and a heightening of the senses. The result of blending 100-year-old Grenache to Mourvèdre, Cinsault and Syrah varieties it offers a subtle mixture of spices and well-ripened red and black fruit flavours, mingled with cocoa-coated dry fruit overtones. Think raspberry, incense, mineral and lavender with fine grained tannins, a stony-garrigue cocktail of flavours.

The winemaker writes: “We have developed this wine with the greatest of care, considering the effects of both the earth and sky on the grapes and wine. While in the vineyard, we only use organic fertilizers, manually harvest the fruit, and meticulously select our grapes. Once in the cellar, we gently handle our wines, which are regulated according to a gravity-feed system.” Soft extraction methods are used, juices are gently handled and manipulations in the cellar are done according to the lunar calendar and weather conditions. Wines are matured in foudres and only bottled when they begin to reveal their personality (anywhere between one and three years)

Pure is, as the name suggests, something special, a wine meant to reveal an alliance between tradition and terroir. Imagine a corner of land filled with century-old vines and the purest, sandy soil. The resulting wine, 100% Grenache, pays due homage to historical Châteauneuf-du-Pape and its most celebrated grape varietal. It embodies delicacy, an escape, a synthesis of subtle flavours: strawberries, black cherries, liquorice, and a hint of toasty spice. Pure fruit and muscular minerality, beautiful texture and length with supple tannin. It signifies the perfect balance between kindness and strength.

Only a handful of vintages made, and the “R” (Rayas) word has already been mentioned.

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| 2021 | CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE “PURE” BLANC | W |
| 2021 | CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE | R |
| 2021 | CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE “PURE” ~ on allocation | R |

DOMAINE DES VIGNEAUX, HELENE & CHRISTOPHE COMTE, Coteaux de l’Ardèche – Biodynamic certified

Domaine des Vigneaux is a third-generation family business located in Valvignères, halfway between Montélimar and Aubenas, Ardèche. This 13-hectare vineyard is planted with Chardonnay, Viognier, Syrah, Grenache, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon and run by Hélène and Christophe Comte. The domain received AB organic certification in 2001 but has adopted biodynamic methods as early as 2009 – Ecocert certified. The soil is worked lightly, enriched with organic fertilizers, and sprayed with plant concoctions, which helps to minimize the use of copper. It also stimulates the vines’ self-defence mechanisms and the microbial life of the soils. The goal is to find the right balance and bring out the subtleties of the terroir in each cuvee. Hélène and Christophe have adopted non-interventionist winemaking methods using neither additives nor any sulphur. A lovely juicy Syrah bursting with healthy smiling purple colour and exuding a warm nose of ripe cassis fruit. The Viognier is rich with aromas of waxy orchard fruit and roasted white spices. The acids are soft, the wine mouthfilling. The Pinot Noir has bold red and dark blue fruit flavours and soft spices.

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| 2023 | RIVALES VIOGNIER | W |
| 2022 | SYRAH | R |
| 2023 | COMPLICE SYRAH GRENACHE | R |
| 2023 | BOUT DES DOIGTS | R |

From the ripened cluster brandished by its tormented stem, heavy with transparent but deeply troubled agate, or dusted with silver-blue, the eye moves upward to contemplate the naked wood, the ligneous serpent wedged between two rocks: on what, in heaven's name, does it feed, this young tree growing here in the South, unaware that such a thing as rain exists, clinging to the rock by a single hank of hemplike roots? The dews by night and the sun by day suffice for it – the fire of one heavenly body, the essence sweated by another – these miracles...

Colette – *Earliest Wine Memories*

MAS DE LIBIAN, FAMILLE THIBON-MACAGNO, ST MARCEL D'ARDECHE – *Biodynamic (Demeter)*

Mas de Libian, a working farm (cereals, fruits, and vines) since 1670, has remained in the hands of famille Thibon for its entire history. Hélène a remarkably energetic member of the family took over the viticulture and winemaking in 1995 and convinced her family to bottle their own wine rather than sell to local négociants. Her farming is entirely biodynamic since the 1960's when her grandfather ran the farm, and the vines (averaging 40-45 years-old) are pruned for low yields and concentration. Nestor, a Comtois workhorse, joined the team for her ploughing prowess. The terraced vineyards, composed mostly of galets rouges, in St-Marcel d'Ardèche (the west bank of the Rhône) provide stunning views of Mont Ventoux, the Alpilles, and the Dentelles de Montmirail. Hélène is in her late 20s and in June this year she was selected by the French Wine Review as one of its Young Winemakers of the Year. She makes her wines in a traditional fashion following organic principles, and the vineyards have 'pudding-stone' soil like that found in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. The stones reflect sunlight during the day and retain heat during the cold nights, thus making the vines work harder to extract water and minerals from the soil. One should drink Vin de Petanque (a 75/25 Grenache/Syrah blend) chilled while playing petanque (or crown boules) – preferably. The vines are grown on clay-limestone with lauzes (flat stones), and some rolled pebbles. Grapes undergo strict manual selection, are destemmed, lightly crushed, and given a five-day maceration. Dark ruby colour, aromas of blackberry, myrtle, and gentle spices. The palate is warm and digestible with olive notes that recall the Rhône origins. Slap the tapenade on the lamb cutlets and get the barbie fired up. Bout d'Zan refers to bits of liquorice; it was also a nickname for Helene's father in his youth alluding to his small stature and tanned skin. Now it refers to the liquorice flavour of the wine. From clay-limestone terroir, the gobelet vines yield only 40hl/ha. The wine is vinified without sulphur and 30% of it spends seven months in foudres.

Black cherry, peppery spice, earthy notes, and did I mention the liquorice? Cave Vinum is a blend of Viognier, Roussanne and 80-year-old Clairette on clay-limestone soils with large pebbles. Floral aromas of honeysuckle merge into sweet hay and herbs – the wine is like an ethereal vermouth.

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| 2023 | CAVE VINUM BLANC | W |
| 2023 | VIN DE PETANQUE | R |
| 2023 | COTES-DU-RHONE ROUGE "BOUT D'ZAN" | R |
| 2022 | COTES-DU-RHONE ROUGE « KHAYYAM » | R |

DOMAINE MORLANCHE, BRICE BANCHET & LISA VAVAGNE, ARLEBOSC, Coteaux de l'Ardèche – *Organic certified ~ Natur en Progrès*

Morlanche, a small estate located in Arlebosc, in the Doux Valley in the north of the Ardèche. They currently produce red wine from old Gamay vines, a historic grape variety from this Valley, which at the start of the 20th century had around one hundred hectares. They cultivate nearly 3-hectares of vines, vines from 50 to 90 years old, as well as young plantations.

As the old vines cannot be mechanized, we maintain them by hand and it has always seemed obvious to us to do so without weedkillers or chemicals and in a way that respects the soil, biodiversity, and the cycles of the vine. Yields are limited and the harvest is manual. The wines are produced as naturally as possible, they are neither yeast nor fined or filtered. La Mouna, a wine made from different small plots located at a place called La Mouna, in Empurany, a neighbouring town of Arlebosc.

Vines aged about sixty years on average, on sandy soils for a supple and fruity wine!

Tintamarre: The first harvest from the young vines that we planted in 2018 and 2019. And a blend with old vines from La Mouna, for a wine of character and concentration. Morlanche, the plot of the house, the vineyard of the grandparents! A vine of at least 80 years, planted and maintained since always by the family but whose grapes were sold until 2015. Old vines, on a stony ground, for a wine of character

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| 2020 | LA MOUNA | R |
| 2020 | MORLANCHE | R |
| 2020 | TINTAMARRE | R |



*And there, in the sunshine, the world began to glitter; everything took on tone and colour...
Is this the beginning of my happiness?*
Gustav Mahler

After Matisse
picnics beneath olive trees;
the Sunday cuts shadows
like painted paper

Beignets, Socca, Bagne Cauda:
tastes bright as bougainvillea

Adrian Henri – *A Propos de Nice*

I'm not sure whether it is the terroir or it could be just romantic association, but Provence wines are so, well, Provençale. Andrew Jefford says the wines tend to sell on the purchaser's memory of "love on a bed of pine needles rather than the lure of raw flavour". The best examples, however, are sun-burnished and exude magical Mediterranean aromas and will coo to your *Coeur*, the reds, particularly from Bandol, reveal dominant nose-notes of pine-trees, sandstone, resin, terebinth and leather, and the Mourvèdre grapes, being from vines adjacent to the sea, give a salty-herby green-olive flavour to the palate.

Just as we are a two "Marcillac" list, we are also a "two Bandol" list. Since the latter wines are not supposed to travel, we are hoping for some mild evidence of global warming this summer and for the burgeoning of an *al fresco* culture that fondly imagines itself on the promenade at Nice or Cannes sipping pink wines and watching the world drift by. If only we could introduce a rigorous culture of *mañana*!

It's the *eye of the partridge*, it's the juice of the grapes,
Rising up to the challenge of our palates,
And the last known imbibor drinks his fills, gawps and gapes,
And he's watchin' us all – in the eye of the partridge.

After Survivor

CAPDEVIELLE & GINTER, Côtes de Provence

The grapes for this rosé are sourced from vineyards situated in the commune of La Londe in a valley surrounded by the Massif des Maures on sun-drenched slopes and a landscape of rocks of schists with veins of quartz. In the summer the location of the valley near the sea allows cooling breezes which leads to a slower and more progressive maturation of the grapes, giving the wines fine aromatic structure. Yields are 50 hl/ha and organic manures are used. Harvests are completely manual over the course of six weeks, always in the morning when temperatures are cooler. The estate waits until there is an optimal balance of sugars, acids, and polyphenols before starting the harvest, parcel by parcel. The blend of the rosé is Grenache, Cinsault and Syrah. The colour is the spirit of Provence, pale, crystalline, and limpid. The nose is pretty, unveiling floral aromas of bergamot and sweet jasmine as well as bouquet of exotic and red berry fruits, whilst the palate picks up notes of mango and lychee with a more savoury edge of peach-stone and citrus.

2023 COTES DE PROVENCE ROSE "CUVEE ELEGANCE"

Ro

CHATEAU D'OLLIERES, HUBERT & CHARLES ROUY, Coteaux Varois-en-Provence

Located 30m east of Aix Château d'Ollières comprises 35 ha of vineyard on clay-limestone soils surrounded by five hundred hectares of forest and garrigue and enjoys a remarkably cool micro-climate. Quality is assured by a variety of approaches: short pruning to control yields, "travail des sols" to aerate the soil and encourage microbial activity, using organic manures, and harvesting by hand in small cagettes. The blend is 50% Grenache, 40% Cinsault and 10% Syrah; this perky pink has good freshness, delicious floral fruit, and refreshing spiciness.

2023 COTEAUX VAROIS ROSE

Ro

2023 COTEAUX VAROIS ROSE – magnum

Ro

PROVENCE

DOMAINE LES TERRES PROMISES, JEAN-CHRISTOPHE COMOR, Coteaux Varois-en-Provence – Organic – Certified AB Ecocert

Made from 20 – 40-year-old vines the Apostrophe Rosé is 40% Cinsault, 35% Grenache and 25% Carignan. Comor lightly presses the grapes right after harvest to ensure freshness and vitality. It has a beautiful pale pink hue, with strawberry, blackberry, spice and garrigue on the nose. The palate is all kinds of cherry – juicy, sour, and even macerated. A little watermelon and citrus round things out and continue through the long, crisp finish. L'Antidote is 100% Carignan, hand harvested from a 2-hectare parcel of organically farmed old goblet-trained at 343 metres altitude vines on limestone clay. The wine is vinified in semi-carbonic maceration. Indigenous yeasts, tiny bit of sulphur, no filtration, no fining – natural wine.

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| 2023 | L'APOSTROPHE ROSE | Ro |
| 2023 | L'ANTIDOTE ROUGE ~ Carignan | R |

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses, a box where sweets compacted lie.

- George Herbert

Chateau Butlins

Epicureans and hedonists have been cancelling their holidays abroad in favour of sojourns at Britain's favourite holiday camp. From now on it will be destination Minehead instead of hola Madrid, bravo Bognor and buenas noches Barcelona. Punters will be swanning off in their droves to sunny Skeggie rather than slumming it in rain-spattered Sicily and they'll be keenly checking out the Coats of Red rather than the Cote d'Azur. The reason for the new-found allure of England's coastal camps is nothing else but a revolutionary new bargain fine wine list devised by a food and beverage (f.a.b.) consultant for Butlin's. And prices will not be sky "high-de-high", campers!

A spokesperson for Butlins announced: "We've decided to change our offering completely and swapped Lambrini ladies for a Ladoucette culture designed to appeal to families who are not afraid to bare their Alsaces in public. Instead of the Rainforest Adventure you can experience the "Loire of the Jungle" and, instead of X factor rejects singing for your supper, you will be able to listen to the corks-a-popping Rock-Steady Krug or enjoy a 50s theme day where you can Rioja around the clock. And don't forget the Glamorous Grannie Cru competition, where leading clarets will be paraded before a panel consisting of Simon "Cowell's of Chelsea", Robert Parker and his incredible farting dog."

He added: "From now on Butlins will be the go-to place if you like your bubbly jubbly, your Burgundy buttery and your irony free of charge. These are world class wines at bargain bucket prices that don't take the mickey."

The wine list is characterised by highly humorous tasting notes that describe one Champagne as "like diving into a pool... of battery acid", whilst a Faustino Reserva Rioja is compared to Roger Moore's acting being "charming, old-fashioned and completely wooden".

PROVENCE

Continued...

DOMAINE HAUVETTE, DOMINIQUE HAUVETTE, Les Baux-de-Provence –Organic certified, Biodynamic practising

Domaine de Trevallon lovers pin back thy lugs – this concerns you! Dominique Hauvette's wonderful wine appeared on our list three years ago. We couldn't flog it to a Peter Mayle zombie if we tried. Since then, because of a pickled peck of high Parker scores, the reputation of Mas Hauvette has soared into the Provençal cerulean (and the price has risen commensurately). As with Trevallon this is a seriously bosky infusion of Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache, but what gives the wines their superb individuality and paregoric purity is an adherence to organic principles in the vineyard for qualitative reasons. The culture biologique involves spraying distillations of herbs instead of insecticides, ploughing back leaf cuttings to aerate the bauxite-rich soil. The wine is rich in natural aromas: the classic bouquet des garrigues of lavender, rosemary, and thyme as well as more animal nuances of smoked beef and reduced gravy. The palate is gripping; like all great wines there seems to be something different in every mouthful.

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| 2017 | DOLIA IGP ALPILLES BLANC | W |
| 2018 | DOMAINE HAUVETTE, LES BAUX DE PROVENCE "CORNALINE" | R |
| 2017 | DOMAINE HAUVETTE LES BAUX DE PROVENCE – magnum | R |

Here is wine,
 Alive with sparkles – never, I aver,
 Since Ariadne was a vintner
 So cool a purple.

“Pibarnon is a wine that unveils its qualities beginning in its youth, with an early fruitiness that is exceptional. But it is with cellaring of 5 or 6 years that the wine expresses all of its breed. It is a truly great wine moulded by harmony, at once modern and anchored in tradition. This unique blend represents the ensemble of its terroir, which is not the least tour de force of this emblematic growth.”

Revue des Vins de France

Oh frabjous joy – it’s back ! As usual small quantities only from the “Petrus of Bandol”. Pibarnon’s greatness owes much to the passion of Comte de Saint Victor who bought the property when he fell in love with its wine on holiday and subsequently restored the 13th century 83rborio (a Provençal country house) and the vineyards, which were in disarray. Château de Pibarnon is located to the north of Bandol on the Télégraphe hill, which was once part of the Toulon-Paris optical telegraph system.

He enlarged the estate carving new terraces out of the calcareous soil. The hill whereon the vineyard parcels are located is a geographical oddity, containing Triassic limestone – very different to the granite and other soils in the region. This and the altitude to 300 metres explain Pibarnon’s great elegance and aromatic finesse. The Mourvèdre vines are protected from the fierce Mistral by the semi-circular amphitheatre of terraces. Vineyards tasks are carried out by hand: severe selection means low yields. There is rigorous adherence to quality in the vineyard, including careful (and traditional) gobelet training, green harvesting (removal and disposal of some bunches of grapes from the vine before ripening begins) and keeping yields less than 40 hl/ha. The vines themselves are predominantly Mourvèdre, this grape dominating the red wine that is the only such wine produced by the château – no super-cuvées here. In addition, there is a fine rosé produced by the saignée method (bleeding the juice off the red grapes following sufficient contact to impart the pink colour) from young Mourvèdre and Cinsault vines, as well as a white wine, produced from the traditional varieties of the region; Clairette, Bourboulenc, Marsanne, Roussanne and Petit Manseng. This white is mellow and vinous and develops a wonderful freshness that delights the palate, accentuated with flavours of white flowers (jasmine, lime flowers and hawthorn) and fruits (such as pear and peach). The winemaking for the red is traditional with three weeks vatting and daily pigeage to obtain dark colour and long potential lifespan. The wine is then matured in large oak barrels for eighteen months with up to fourteen rackings to air the Mourvèdre. Initially, Pibarnon is vibrant with stone-fruit, blackberry and violet aromas, but subsequently develops sophisticated secondary aromas of tobacco, leather, pine, and dried fruits. “From Bandol, tart in the finish, a little too flinty for my companion, but my teeth appreciate a hint of limestone in a grape. There is something manly and voracious in it somehow, as though one is drinking the rocky underpinning of the planet.” (Howard Jacobson). Unique, tongue-larruping wine to be tried with grilled meats, venison, hare, truffles, and goat’s cheese. Alternatively, put this in a dark corner of the cellar and forget about it for five years. The rosé will accompany red mullet, dishes with saffron, curried food and blue cheese.

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| 2023 | BANDOL BLANC | W |
| 2021 | BANDOL ROUGE | R |
| 2022/23 | BANDOL ROSE | Ro |

Older vintages are occasionally available

DOMAINE LA SUFFRENE, CEDRIC GRAVIER, Bandol

Although he has only been bottling his wines for a few years, Cedric Gravier is already a superstar in the making. Domaine La Suffrène extends over 45-hectares across the communes of La Cadière d'Azur and Castellet. Vineyard practices are traditional from gobelet-trained vines to the strict vendange vert which keeps yields low, optimising quality and contributing towards concentration in the grapes when harvested. The harvest itself takes place from the end of September into October according to the maturity of the grapes and is done by hand. A further selection is done at the tables before the grapes are received into the winery. After a partial or total destalking there is a cuvaizon for 15-20 days with remontage twice daily, whereupon the wine is transferred to foudres undergoing malolactic fermentation. The traditional red is from 50- year-old vines, a Provençale bonne-bouche. The white and rosé are worthy of consideration also. Grape varieties? Ugni Blanc (30%) Sauvignon (5% - for aromatic bounce) make up the white wine with Clairette (the grape that makes vermouth) giving typically resinous pastis notes, Ugni Blanc and Sauvignon providing the acidity and aroma. It all makes perfect sense with a bouillabaisse. Mourvèdre (predominantly), Grenache (20%), Cinsault (15%) and Carignan (10%), in the red and rosé. The 2001 Bandol Rouge is a mastodon, weighing in at a burly 15 degrees of alcohol and is hugely concentrated and wildly aromatic with spices, pepper, sandalwood, coffee, and leather. All the red wines undergo malolactic fermentation and none of them sees any new oak instead spending time in foudres. A natural with wild boar, saddle of lamb with herbs and truffles. I seem to recall a faux-historical documentary series in the 1970s called "You are there" hosted by the gravel-voiced Walter Cronkite. He would establish the mise-en-scene of a famous historical event at the beginning of the programme, then turn to the camera, fix you with a senatorial stare, and intone in a voice like a stately foghorn: "Remember – YOU ARE THERE". Whenever I smell this red Bandol, I make that similar leap of imagination to be there in Provence, amongst what Sybille Bedford memorably described in Jigsaw as: "the sun-baked, cicada-loud, ageless country of scrub and terraced hills... the archetypal Mediterranean landscape of rock & olive, wild thyme, vineyards, light".

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| 2020 | BANDOL ROUGE | R |
| 2016 | BANDOL ROUGE – ½ bottle | R |
| 2023 | BANDOL ROSE | Ro |

"... when he opened the heavy door, the warm swallows of rosemary and wine, olive and garlic soared out of there, and their wings fluttered over my nose until I grew dizzy with pleasure".

Meir Shaley – *Four Meals*

Pretty In Pink

We've probably endured enough whimsical articles about "la vie en rosé" and how we should be "tickled pink" by surprisingly drinkable rosé wines, but that's not going to stop this miniature pink peroration. Perhaps it's global warming, perhaps the adoption of an al fresco lifestyle, wherein at the first watery glimmer of the sun, tables are hurled willy-nilly onto pavements and all the coffee chains start serving frappacinos, or the fact that Mediterranean cuisine has become so popular both in restaurants and in our homes, or perhaps praise Ryanair and Easyjet for transporting us at the drop of a penny (plus taxes) to sunnier climes where any blushing wine (usually consumed in an impossibly picturesque location) forever trills the romance of *abroad*, a romance that only rosé can reignite in our veins, but... we are undoubtedly consuming more and more of the *frolic wine*. Rosé is oddly the only one of the three colours (quick digression, I'm trying – and failing – to imagine a cheerful Kieslowski film: *Three Colours – Pink*.) that has been the subject of intensive marketing campaigns primarily due to brands such as Mateus and Blossom Hill – shudder – which are predicated on the notion that we choose to drink rosé – almost as a statement of who we are. I prefer to attribute the growth of rosé-drinking to all the reasons listed above plus one other: the inability to choose between red and white! Underlying this facetious point is a more serious one: rosé is the classic modern "compromise wine," a kind of superior house/Pinot Grigio default wine.

Rosé is a by-product of red winemaking and will be either be guzzled by the grower's family and friends or sold to local hosteleries, but there are wines that are good enough to be considered on their own merits. Provence is the spiritual home of pink wine producing pale or pearly-pink wines scented with wildflowers, fennel and herbs and often as dry as the rocks from which the vines spring. Nor are the wines, except for powerful, menthol-intense wines of Bandol, particularly alcoholic; their delicacy makes them a pleasure to quaff uncritically, but also provides excellent accompaniment to oily fish such as mullet, sardines and is a dream with saffron-drenched, garlic-heavy fish soups and works equally well with stuffed aubergines, courgettes, and tomatoes.

No matter the improvements in winemaking these are still wines to drink in the first flush and blush of youth. Elizabeth Barrett Browning might have been describing the effects of age on a bottle of pink wine when she wrote: "O rose, who dares to name thee? No longer roseate now, nor soft, nor sweet, but pale, and hard, and dry, as stubblewheat – Kept seven years in a drawer, thy titles shame thee." While the wine is still alive with beaded bubbles winking at the rim it lifts the spirits and makes one think of sunshine, summer, or holidays.

Is it any better in Heaven, my friend Ford/ Than you found it in Provence?

- William Carlos Williams, *The Wedge: 'To Ford Madox Ford in Heaven'*

DOMAINE DE LA TOUR DU BON, AGNES HENRY, Bandol – Organic practising

The Tour du Bon estate, located in the extreme north-west of the Bandol appellation, faces the sea. This garrigue-scented landscape is washed with a very special, fantastic, dazzling light, so often captured by the world's great painters. Here the dry wind from the north flirts gently with the southern breeze. Aleppo pines spread luxuriantly, supplanting the dominant tree, the oak, which has had a rough time because of repeated assaults by the scourge of the region, forest fires.

Fortunately, in this natural arena, between the mountains and the sea, the arid site is tempered by the gentle marine climate. The altitude combines with the effect of the mistral to ensure that the land is cleansed, from a plant-care point of view. The slopes of Castellet and Brulat rest on a relatively homogeneous geological substratum made up of marls and limestone.

Truly the "blood of the earth", the Bandol Rouge requires the whole of the fruit in its production. It follows the course of time and the interaction between nature, the vine, and man.

Yields are about 27hl/ha, harvest is by hand. 90% of the grapes are destemmed. Maceration lasts for fifteen days, and fermentation takes place with indigenous yeasts with remontage and pigeage. The wine is neither fined nor filtered and spends eighteen months in foudres.

The blend of this wine is 55% Mourvèdre, 25% Grenache, 15% Cinsault, 5% Carignan). It has great aromatic complexity associated with the three or four grape varieties it contains. A high proportion of Grenache lends cherry notes as a counterpoint to the spicy, pepper accents of Mourvèdre, with Cinsault uniting the whole. On the palate, the tannic framework can be powerful in youth, mellowing to silky meatiness with age.

This wine may be enjoyed now with peppered rib of beef, a prune tagine or, after a few years, with a leg of lamb with broad beans.

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| 2023 | BANDOL BLANC | W |
| 2023 | BANDOL ROSE | Ro |
| 2021 | BANDOL ROUGE | R |
| 2022 | "EN SOL" | R |

CORSICAN FOOD – A Tale of Chestnuts, Cheese, and Animals Grazing the Maquis

Corsica is wild—Balzac's “back of beyond”; a seabound granite precipice where vendettas and feuds, not lawsuits, are the rule; an island where free-range animals live side by side with free-range people—who would rather hunt and gather than farm and fish. (Why grow wheat when chestnuts fall from trees?) Although Corsica has been under French control since 1768, its fiercely independent inhabitants have always kept central government at arm's length.

Wherever you look you see the famed *maquis corse*, or Corsican scrub—a dense, fragrant underbrush of oak, juniper, thorn, heather, and wild herbs and flowers that covers much of the island. Its bittersweet lemon-pepper aroma described as “akin to incense” by English anthropologist Dorothy Carrington in her award-winning *Granite Island* has earned Corsica the sobriquet The Perfumed Isle. The food bears witness to the wilderness and is heartiness incarnate: unctuous stews and soups, wonderful smoked and roasted meats, powerful cheeses—derive their unmistakable character from the maquis. The scrub also provides ideal grazing for game as well as for free-range pigs, cows, sheep, and goats—all which forage at their leisure, resulting in especially aromatic and flavourful meats and milks. And Corsica's industrious cooks utilize this bounty to the fullest.

Consider a goat stew, *storzapreti*—gratinéed cheese dumplings with mint and egg—and *soupe corse*, this last a local favourite, a mountain soup, also called *soupe montagne* or *soupe paysanne* which includes a meaty ham bone—*schincu* in Corsican, an archaic mix of Latin and Italian—olive oil, garlic, potatoes, noodles, and heaps of vegetables and herbs.

Cheese is still an enormously important part of the Corsican diet. Until a few years ago, cheesemakers often worked out of their shepherd's farm buildings, usually a small stone or wooden hut. New French laws now prohibit this. Brocciu, a light fresh ricotta-style cheese with a flavour of the maquis, plays a part in many Corsican dishes, including *storzapreti*, omelettes, and beignets, and is commonly eaten at breakfast seasoned with salt and pepper or topped with jam. The island's cheese industry is composed mainly of small producers, who specialize in a single type of cheese. However, reflective of Corsica's independent, often rebellious nature, cheeses here—unlike those in the rest of France—do not usually have specific names. When dining out in restaurants or people's homes, the choice is likely to be simply *brébis*, from sheep, or *chèvre*, from goats. Corsican cheeses are generally salty with an assertive taste and smell. Two of the classic ones are the soft and creamy *bastelicacciu* (a *brebis*), from the Ajaccio region, and the sticky, tangy *niolu* (which may be either sheep's or goat's milk), from the village of Casamaccioli.

Chestnuts are another story. Used for everything from flan to beer, they have been a staple on the island since the Middle Ages. With Corsica's steep terrain unfavourable to the cultivation of wheat, the chestnut has filled the void and shown remarkable versatility in the process. Dubbed *l'arbre à pain*, which literally means “bread tree”, the chestnut tree is valued not only for its fruit but also for its wood, which is used to build everything from traditional Corsican houses to coffins. The famed *Farina castagnina* (chestnut flour) is made by drying whole chestnuts, gathered in the fall, over a chestnut-wood fire for about three weeks, until they are sapped of nearly all their water. After the shells and skins are removed, the fruit is slowly baked for about a day until it partly caramelizes. Finally, it is milled into flour. Darker and sweeter than wheat flour, chestnut flour is used in cakes, beignets, crêpes, cookies, and more. It is also the basis of *pulenda*, a dense, earthy substance—not to be confused with commel polenta—that traditionally accompanies goat stew, roast lamb, and other hearty dishes. Cooking *pulenda* is a little like mixing cement: Chestnut flour is sprinkled into boiling salted water and stirred until it is nearly solid (needless to say, weak arms need not apply). It is then placed on a flour-covered cloth, patted down, and sliced with string or thread.

Corsica's *prisuttu*, or smoked ham, is on a par with Italy's *prosciutto di Parma* and Spain's *jamón serrano*. Also noteworthy are *coppa* (salted and peppered pork loin) and *lonzu* (preserved pork loin served in paper-thin slices). One of the great local earthy delicacies are *ficatelli*—small sausages made of finely chopped pigs' livers that have been marinated in wine, garlic, and peppercorns, then stuffed into casings and smoked. These dark, aromatic beauties are served raw, sautéed, or grilled.

Corsican wines have a very distinct identity, initially due to a long tradition and knowledge of winemaking. Six centuries before Christ, the Greeks were making *Alalia* wine (from *Aleria*), one of their favourite drinks. In 35 BC Virgil mentioned the wine of the *Balagne*, ruby-coloured and agreeable to the palate. During the centuries of trouble and invasion which followed the fall of the Roman Empire, the vines survived, awaiting the return of peace, and of winemakers. From the 11th century, the Pisans, who had become the administrators of the island, put Corsican wine in the vessels of their priests and the goblets of their nobles. A century later, the Genoese, having replaced the Pisans, did the same. After 1769, French sovereignty did not put an end to wine-making activity and to wine exports to Italy. But, after 1850, first *oidium*, and then *phylloxera* ravaged the vines. These blights were, however, overcome. By the end of the century there had even been a renewal in sales overseas, and the development of several important domains. However, from the early years of the twentieth century a general collapse in wine prices halted this expansion, and the Great War completed the decline, killing, with the same weapon, the men, the vines, and the commercial links. There remained only a few marginal sectors of production. Fifty years were to pass before the island's viticulture became again a valid sector of the economy.

Just One More Thing...

(The most famous Columbo quote)

Rich in tradition, the identity of Corsican wine is also one of variety and quality. These attributes are the result of a selection of native grape varieties (principally Sciaccarellu, Niellucciu and Vermentinu) and of imported ones (Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Grenache, Syrah, Chardonnay) as well as of a variety of natural conditions (soil, relief, and climate). The AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) wines are, in fact, determined by the localisation and proportion of the native grape varieties and by the special nature of each producing region.

There are nine Appellations, at three levels: Corse, Village and Cru. The Appellation Corse is applied to the whole of the island, but mainly concerns the east coast and the Golo valley. The character of this Appellation comes from the high percentage of imported, Mediterranean varieties (Grenache, Cinsault, Carignan). The Appellation Corse-Village is given to five regions: Calvi, Cap Corse, Figari, Porto Vecchio and Sartène. In these regions the proportion of native Corsican grape varieties is higher. These are mainly Sciaccarellu and Niellucciu, except in Cap Corse where Vermentinu predominates.

The Appellation Cru is applied to two regions: Ajaccio and Patrimoine. Sciaccarellu is the predominant variety in the former, whilst Niellucciu characterises the latter. Niellucciu is the variety which gives the wines of Patrimoine their renown. It produces a full-bodied wine of a deep red colour, supple and rich, said to have "un nez de fourrure de lièvre et de réglisse": a nose of "hare-fur" (a term used to describe its subtle gamey bouquet) and liquorice. These wines also have scents of red berries, violets, spices, and apricots. Studies carried out in the 1980s have shown that the Niellucciu grape is no other than the Tuscan variety, Sangiovese, of the famous Chianti Classico. Sciaccarellu is the black grape variety characteristic of the granite areas of the island. It is considered apt for producing wines suitable for ageing, and produces wines of great distinction, with a peppery nose. In its bouquet one finds aromas of red fruits (blackcurrants, raspberries, and redcurrants), almonds and charred wood, and flavours of peach and almonds.

Vermentinu is the white grape variety of Cap Corse. This grape comes from the Malvoisie line, the great Mediterranean variety. Vermentinu produces white wines which are among the best of the Mediterranean. They vary in colour from pale and transparent to golden-yellow. These wines are characterised by floral aromas, lightness, and freshness. The golden-coloured wines are more aromatic than fruity, and have an aftertaste of almonds, hazelnuts, apples, and honey. If today they are less highly prized than the pale wines, they are the only ones which can be aged.

CLOS CULOMBU, ETIENNE & PAUL-ANTOINE SUZZONI, CALVI, Corsica – *Biodynamic conversion*

"A glass of Corsican wine and I'll climb the Stromboli" – Tuscan Proverb (not a compliment!)

Founded in 1973 by Paul Suzzoni, this vineyard covers 39 of the 95 hectares that comprise the estate. Since 1986, Etienne Suzzoni, Paul's brother, has been at the helm of the enterprise. Le Clos Culombu is situated between the Gulf of Calvi and the Montegrossu mountains, whose peaks reach 2000 metres, and the vineyard has direct southern exposition; there are 15 hillside parcels and vines are planted in arena-shaped granite formations on terraces of clay-rich soils. Situated only 2 kilometres from the sea and 8 kilometres from the mountain peaks, the vineyard enjoys a very particular micro-climate. The varieties planted (in keeping with the island's traditional practices) are Vermentinu, Sciaccarellu, Niellucciu and Elegante. The soil is worked in the traditional manner and minimal weed killer and chemicals are used. The yields are kept low to maintain quality by de-budding and bunch-thinning of grapes.

Both Vermentinos are typically aromatic combining notes of citrus, fresh grass, herbs, and almonds with a crisp and acidic framework. The Domaine Culombu Blanc is softer in the mouth with a touch of verbena and lime, whilst the Clos Culombu Blanc, which undergoes a maceration pelliculaire, has more structure and fine mineral notes plus leesy creaminess, apricot, and white chocolate undertones.

The Domaine Culombu rouge "Tribbiera" is an attractive blend of 30% Grenache, 30% Niellucciu, 10% Sciaccarellu, 20% Syrah and 10% Cinsault with pre-fermentation cold soaking for five days followed by a twelve-day cuvaison, with "elevation" on fine lees. Unwooded, it is ruby red, with an intense nose of fresh summer fruits and a hint of fleurs de maquis and classic Grenache strawberry-and-cherry fruit. The more extracted Clos Culombu (granitic sand over clay) from 80% Sciaccarellu, 10% Minustellu, 10% Carcaghjolu undergoes a pre-fermentation cold soaking for six days, followed by twenty-six-day maceration with "pigeages". Indecently purple, with a complex nose of red fruits, spice, jam, and liquorice it fills the mouth with rich fruit flavours and reveals a good tannic structure.

Serve the reds with grilled pork with rosemary, beef tartar, thin-sliced carpaccio of beef with basil, civet de lapin—rabbit cooked with thyme, laurel and garlic and Corsican cheeses with herbs – but not necessarily at the same time all together.

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| 2023 | VIN DE CORSE, DOMAINE CULOMBU TRIBBIERA BLANC | W |
| 2023 | VIN DE CORSE, CLOS CULOMBU BLANC | W |
| 2022 | VIN DE CORSE, DOMAINE CULOMBU ROUGE « TRIBBIERA » | R |
| 2023 | VIN DE CORSE, CLOS CULOMBU ROUGE | R |

ANTOINE ARENA, PATRIMONIO, Corsica – Biodynamic

Antoine Arena, like most Corsicans of his generation, grew up in a family that earned a modest living working the land on an island largely unknown to the outside world. As soon as he could he joined the mass exodus of Corsicans to the French mainland, in search of jobs and what they thought to be a better life. Several years later in the mid-1970s, with a promising career on the mainland, the Corsican independence movement exploded with violent confrontations between nationalists and French government forces, leaving Antoine stunned.

In his shock and anger, he moved back to the family farm and decided to reverse the trend and remain on the land, as his own form of protest. Many others soon followed his lead, and for the first time in over a century, the emigration from the island ebbed and Corsicans came back home to reclaim their land. "I became a farmer by protest," he says. It might have been political activism that detoured him from a law career into agriculture, but Arena soon was passionate about turning his father's 3-ha domaine into one of the island's leading vineyards. Biodynamics, it seems, come naturally to him, with his dislike for large agrochemical companies equal to his strong attachment to his island. "There's a sign I remember seeing in the 1980s," he says: "Jettez les pelles, et mettez l'herbicide." This translates roughly as "Throw away your shovels and put down weed killer." The Arenas use just 800 grams of sulphur per hectare to treat their vines for powdery mildew according to Jean-Baptiste, Antoine's son. That's just a fraction, he explains, of the four kilos per hectare that the biodynamic regulations permit.

To survive off the land, Antoine knew he would need to show the world outside of Corsica what Patrimonio was capable of. And so, his mission began to make the best out of the land; he started identifying the best parcels and vinifying them separately and was one of the first growers to work the vines organically and vinify without any added sulphur.

Now Antoine is joined by his two sons, Antoine-Marie and Jean-Baptiste who share Antoine's spirit and continue to work the land and make the wine naturally, as taught from their father.

The Carco vineyard is on an eastern facing slope, cleared of its maquis, and planted in 1987 by Antoine. The name of the parcel, Carco, dates to at least Napoleonic times, and in Corsican means "busy," most likely because it was covered in densely planted olive trees at that time, before being abandoned. Two different wines come from this vineyard: the Patrimonio Carco Rouge, from Niellucciu (1ha) and the Patrimonio Carco Blanc (2ha), 100% Vermentinu. (Vermentinu arrived in Patrimonio well before Niellucciu, although the date of its arrival is still unclear).

From low-yielding hand-harvested vines this Vermentinu is fermented naturally with low sulphur in cement cuves and take place a long time (6-8 months) on the fine lees. It completes its malo naturally and then is bottled without filtration or fining.

The colour is straw and clear with a shimmer of trapped gas. Aromas of salted roasted nuts give some indication of the extreme ripeness of the wine, stone/mineral, plump, sweet fruit flavour in the vicinity of green bananas and mushy ripe pears. Throw in some preserved lemons and oranges, maybe a little mint. These are punctuated with fennel and sweet herb flavours. Think heat, think rocks, think garrigue.

The Morta Maio vineyard was planted in 2001 with only Niellucciu. There is just a single cuvée from this parcel, the Patrimonio "Morta Maio" Rouge. This is often the most approachable of the reds when young—dark, earthy, chewy, and juicy. Morta Maio translates as "The Eldest Myrtle." Morta = Myrtle in Corsican, the shrub that makes up the bulk of the maquis in Patrimonio. (In other parts of Corsica, they spell Morta as Murtha, where you can see more of the resemblance to the word Myrtle). Maio = The Eldest, or the oldest. This parcel, which has belonged to the Arena family for over 400 years, immediately surrounds their house and was used as brush pasture for the donkeys who worked the vines. Since the parcel has been in use for so long (longer than the 400 years it has belonged to the Arenas) the term "Maio" was added to it. This Niellucciu is fermented in cement cuve with its own yeasts and without temperature control and is aged for a further period in concrete before bottling without filtering or fining.

Niellucciu is Sangiovese with a Corsican rustic twist. Vividly fresh, infectiously juicy ripe cherry mingled on a satiny palate with nut oils and steeped with fruit pit, lavender, fennel, rosemary, and white pepper. As this opens to the air, a mouth-watering savour of roasted red meat and pan scrapings joins the wine's downright refreshing as well as invigorating juicy fruit and pungent herbal essences. Handle with thick kid gauntlets.

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| 2022 | CARCO VERMENTINU |
| 2020 | MORTA MAIO ROUGE |

W
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“... the river that moves sideways, boldly challenging the psychic cartography which decrees that everything about France is aligned north to south.”

The Loire, for our purposes, rises in the heart of France (Gamay country) and meanders northwards before turning west and ending its journey in the Atlantic Ocean, 1000 km hence. It is a region of great diversity, an amazing array of soils and microclimates. It is not so easy to grow grapes in this marginal climate though; and recent vintages have been heavily compromised by frost, hail, rain and mildew with drastically reduced yields. Nevertheless, the Loire is the home of biodynamics in France with Nicolas Joly and Mark Angeli leading the way and many other growers following suit, as well as (arguably) the world centre of natural wine. La Dive Bouteille brought the first vigneron who worked in the natural idiom together; since then, it has grown and grown, carrying the flag for the natural wine movement throughout the world.

Loire wines provide the perfect antidote to palates jaded by bloated oak and hammer-extracted fruit. If you seek the some of the world's greatest Sauvignons, some grassy, slatey Cabernet Franc, delicate Pinot Noir, refreshing sea-breezed Muscadet, and above all, great Chenin, from the austere dry wines of Anjou to the fabulous nectars of Bonnezeaux, Vouvray and Coteaux du Layon, start reading now.

The Allure of the Loire

Imagine sitting outside a restaurant on the banks of the Loire with the sunlight glinting off the water, lazily picking at a plate of heaped crayfish with a glass of the local Saumur (or Anjou) Blanc. Does not the austerity of the wine melt away, this product of air, soil, and water around you? Your mouth tingles as the pungent acidity slides around touching every corner and impressing itself on your memory buds. And you drink and you eat, and the wine seasons the food, and the food seasons the wine, and the sun and the scenery season your mood.

Liaison d'Anjou Rosé?

Invest in summer joy, weather permitting, with a wonderfully frivolous example of this much-reviled appellation (Rosé d'Anjou to be precise) and consider anew for easy quafferama the pale Pinots from Delaillie, Puzelat and Pellé, fair weather reds without the pocket pain of Burgundy. Meanwhile, our existing stalwarts – Champalou, Laroche, Germain, Daguenau, Bourgeois, Luneau-Papin and Villemade go from strength to strength – transcending the limitations of difficult vintages.

Sauvignon Blanc or Sauvignon Bland ?

If the description “cat’s pee” sugars your gooseberry you’re probably an avid fan of the Sauvignon grape. Uncork a bottle and a bouquet of flowers, crisp green vegetables and tangy citrus fruits will instantly mug you – truly a grape that refreshes the parts of the nose that other wines cannot reach! These wines, at their best, exemplify the vibrancy and sappiness of a spring morning, and, expressing a cool youthfulness, are dry, zesty, and mouth-watering. Conversely, the joy of sexy Sauvignon is usually an ephemeral one: it is the ‘wham bam thank you ma’am’ of grape varieties, raucously promising more than it delivers. The initial dramatic aggressive impact is never bettered: the wine will rarely develop in the glass nor acquire complexity with further age, surely the sign of a noble grape. As the bard says, “Present mirth hath present laughter... youth’s a stuff will not endure”.

And yet... In the Upper Loire the vein of Kimmeridgean limestone extending through Chablis to the Champagne region provides the perfect terroir for Sauvignon to express its taut energy. The vineyards of Domaine Henri Bourgeois are situated on a range of soils, each of which lends the wines particular nuances. Tasting Sancerre Jadis or Sancerre d’Antan is a back-to-the-future experience. These are wines made from low yielding old vines (50+ & 70+ years respectively) on tiny plots of organically farmed land, labours of love and acknowledgements to the rhythms of the past, yet they also reveal the potential of the Sauvignon grape when released from its primary role as nose-piercing thirst-quencher. With their complete structure and fine mineral edge these wines will age more than thirty years proving that Sauvignon can be a real pleasure when it’s serious.

*Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup
And I'll not look for wine.
Sweet Chenin tho' sense from soul doth
prise,
It is a drink divine;
When this, Jove's nectar, I do sup,
I think I prefer the wine.*

(With apologies to Ben Jonson)

FIEFS-VENDEENS

DOMAINE SAINT-NICOLAS, THIERRY MICHON, Fiefs-Vendéens – Biodynamic (Demeter)

It was in 1960 that Patrice Michon settled in Brem-Sur-Mer, inheriting several acres of vines belonging to his father. Slowly but surely, he bought more vines to increase the value of his wine heritage which is now over 32 hectares. In 1970 he moved to Ile d'Olonne and built a winery. He was joined in 1984 by his two sons Thierry and Eric who have broken with wine-making tradition in Vendée and are now making their mark with these very special wines of Domaine Saint – Nicolas. Due to its proximity to the ocean, Domaine Saint-Nicolas benefits from a micro-climate: sea, woodland, and the marshes of the Ile d'Olonne. The vines are planted facing south-west for the Pinot Noir, Gamay and Cabernet and south-east for the Chardonnay and Chenin on clay and schist soils. The domaine extends to some thirty-seven hectares and each one of them farmed biodynamically! It is a major undertaking to keep the soil, and hence the vines, healthy. Thierry's job is also made more difficult due to the range of different grapes he tends here. Whilst the vignoble is planted with the standards such as Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Pinot Noir and Gamay, there is also Cabernet Franc, the obscure Négrette and the equally obscure Grolleau Gris. The Négrette ends up in his baby red called Reflets Rouge which normally sees 40% of Pinot Noir blended with 20% each of Gamay, Négrette and Cabernet Franc. Grolleau or Groslot Gris adds a touch of spiciness and excitement to the salty, white wine called Les Clous which is a blend of Chardonnay, and Chenin Blanc.

For Thierry Michon, the gregarious force behind one of the Loire's best-kept secrets, it's all about the soil. Working on schist and silex a flint stone's throw away from the Atlantic, Thierry is the prophet of biodynamics in this tiny viticultural area. His vineyards never see a non-organic product. He raises his own cows simply for the manure they produce which he religiously spreads between the vines. He has slowly purchased buffer zones all around his property to prevent chemical products from other winemakers from seeping into his parcels. For him, biodynamics isn't just a pragmatic consideration, it's a religion.

Grapes are harvested by hand and are sorted on a mat and de-stemmed. Whites and rosés undergo pneumatic pressing and partial pelliculaire maceration followed by cold settling and temperature-controlled fermentation at 18/20°C on the indigenous yeasts in stainless steel tanks. For the reds elevage is either stainless steel or wood tank maceration, punching down, fermentation and ageing in oak barrels.

Les Clous is a blend of Chenin, Chardonnay and Grolleau Gris from clay schist soils. Beautifully distinctive with aromas of the forest and the sea, the wine has flavours of candied fruit with a wet rock element. It finishes almost dry and has the hallmark refreshing acidity of cool-climate wines. Le Haut des Clous is pure Chenin with average age vines of 25 years, planted on clay/schist soils. Slight slopes which are exposed south-east, cultivated biodynamically since 1995, ploughing, mechanical and manual hoeing, vines treated with sulphur, spraying with Bordeaux mixture, herb treatments (nettle, etc...) Fresh and lively, with light-weight floral, persimmon, green almond, apple, and pear notes stretched over a bright, elegant frame. You can smell the marsh in the aromas present, manifesting as heather, lavender, and almond. Good tight, crisp palate.

Gammes d'Été is Pinot Noir, Grolleau Gris and Négrette with average vine age of twenty years, planted on clay, schist, and quartz soils. Gloriously pale pink colour with berry aromas with a savoury dry finish. You can drink it any time of the year and it goes very well with salmon tartare and red mullet.

Lastly, a Pinot Noir from vines planted in the mid-1970s, manually harvested and 80% destemmed grapes made in the Burgundian style. Fifteen months elevage in big (400-litre) casks (hence the name, "Grande Pièce" which means big cask). Whether it is the schist soil or the micro-climate, this Pinot Noir is one of the Loire's best, exhibiting a strong hit of raspberry allied to a vibrant saltiness, alluding to its maritime origins. It may be that this is the only littoral Pinot Noir planted on schist in the world, but if you know different - - answers on the back of a tweet.

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| 2023 | VIN DE THIERRY ~ Chenin, Grolleau | W |
| 2021 | LE HAUT CHEMIN | W |
| 2020 | GAMMES D'ETE ROUGE | R |
| 2022 | VIN D'ANTOINE ~ Gamay, Negrette | R |
| 2022 | LE BEAU CLOU | R |



DOMAINE PIERRE LUNEAU-PAPIN, Muscadet – Organic (Ecocert) & Biodynamic Conversion (Biodyvin & Demeter)

One of the unusual features of Muscadet, according to the Hachette Guide, is that it is not named after a geographical or historical area, but that the name probably dates from the Middle Ages when Muscat grapes from Cyprus acquired a reputation at feudal courts. After the great frost of 1709 the vineyard was replanted with a Burgundian grape variety, Melon. Lees are the deposit or sediment left at the bottom of the tank after the wine has fermented. Although the gross, or coarse, lees are eliminated, many Muscadet producers choose to leave the wines on the fine lees to impart aromatic substance and richness to the wines. The *sur lie* designation contrary to supposition is not given solely to rude French producers, but to Muscadets that have been kept on the lees for more than four months and have not been racked or filtered prior to bottling – which takes place before the last day in June in the year following the vintage. Pierre Luneau studied with the renowned Emile Peynaud and Ribereau-Gayon and has been making superb Muscadet for as long as we can remember. He keeps a variety of thoroughbred Muscadets in his stable and on his table, terroir differentiation being the name of the game. The vines may be grown on sands and gravel, on granite and gneiss mica, schist, or volcanic gabbro, but the mineral, salty nuances are always present and the capacity to age built into the steely structure of the wines. *Le Verger*, from the schists of Landreau (20km southeast of Nantes) reminds one of Petit Chablis: white flowers, stones and water. Wonderful bread/yeasty nose and a smooth buttery palate with good concentration. Even on this commercial wine the production is largely organic (organic manures, lutte raisonnée, controlled yields). A far cry from la lavasse served up in many bars. *Clos des Allées* is low-yielding old vines Muscadet, a mightily mineral taste bud tingle that's serious enough for food. Laverbread, said Matthew Bradford, (a man who knows his (sea)weed) as he was nosing this, and certainly it is reminiscent of all things littoral. The concentration is achieved by hand-harvesting, maceration pelliculaire and seven months *sur lie* before bottling. If you want to freak your friends out purchase a bottle of the “L” d’Or – it’s Muscadet, but not as we know it, Jim. You’d be ready to bet it was butt... Burgundy. From 50-year-old+ vines in the terroir Vallet (comprising granitic micas) this also undergoes a maceration followed by nine months on the lees. Hmm (strokes chin quizzically) is this the only list where the Muscadet is older than the Vin Jaune? And did you know that Pierre Luneau is at the forefront of a movement to make Grand Cru Muscadet? Top quality Luneau-cy all round. And here it is: *sur schist* and *sur lie* (24 months thereon) – *Le Clos des Noelles*, Muscadet in excelsis. The poet Andrew Marvell wrote “Stumbling on melons, as I pass...” We warrant he never stumbled across a melon like this! This single vineyard Muscadet has an amazing, almost exotic nose of acacia-blossom and lime-flower and fills the palate with layer upon layer of “bread-and-butter” fruit. The yeasty sour-dough smokiness lingers hauntingly, and the length would grace a premier cru Burgundy. Possessor already of superb single and cru locations, they have now brought a spectacular new vineyard on stream. Finally, La Butte de la Roche – planted on the exposed slopes of a hill that rises steeply out of the marshes the vines are on a fascinating iron-rich serpentinite and magnetite soils caused by gradual metamorphic transformations. This terroir imparts terrific complexity to the wine which is initially taut with cool oyster-shell notes before unveiling more complex aromas of salt butter, gorse blossom and river stone and a palate bound together by soothing acidity. Truly the DRC of Melon de Bourgogne, the 1er Mousquetaire of Muscadet.

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| 2023 | PM & M FOLLE BLANCHE | W |
| 2022 | PM & M GARANCE MUSCADET DE SEVRE ET MAINE SUR LIE | W |
| 2022 | PM & M MUSCADET DE SEVRE ET MAINE SUR LIE – ½ bottle | W |
| 2013 | “L” D’OR DE LUNEAU “GRANITE” | W |
| 2020 | MUSCADET DE SEVRE ET MAINE « EXCELSIOR » GOULAIN | W |
| 2022 | MUSCADET “TERRE DE PIERRE” DE PIERRE-MARIE | W |
| 2022 | MUSCADET SUR LIE « VERA CRUZ » | W |



A dozen native oysters and a gallon of Muscadet, Mrs Miggins

DOMAINES JO LANDRON, Muscadet – Biodynamic (certified Biodyvin)

Jo Landron, a graduate of the École d'Agriculture in Briacé, which counts a good number of the leading winemakers of Nantais amongst its alumni, has been ensconced at Domaine de la Louvetrie in La Haye-Fouassière for more than twenty years. His wines, in truth like their master, speak very clearly; these are fine, minerally efforts, sometimes rich, always interesting and, in the case of the top cuvées, wines worthy of cellaring. Unlike their master the wines do not sport a luxuriant 'tash.

Domaine de la Louvetrie was established by Pierre Landron in 1945, and it was not until the 1980s that his son, who goes by the name of Jo, joined him, having first finished his studies. In 1990 Pierre handed everything over to Jo; he now farms about 36 hectares at Domaine de la Louvetrie, although he also tends two other domaines, Château de la Carizière and Les Grand Houx, bringing the total up to about 48 hectares. It was under Jo's direction that the vineyards were converted to 100% organic viticulture in 1999, gaining full certification from Ecocert in 2002. In 2008 he took the leap to full biodynamic viticulture, gaining Biodyvin certification. The use of chemical fungicides and other such methods were totally abolished, fertilisation is with biodynamic compost, and the vineyards are ploughed to reduce competition from weeds. The vines see leaf-thinning to aid drying and discourage rot, and Atlantic breezes also help with this task. The vines, which range in age from 15 years up to about 70 years, are planted at a density of 7000 vines/ha and pruned to eight buds to bring yields below 50 hl/ha, although in the vineyards with a more favourable exposure a green harvest may also be employed, bring yields here below 40 hl/ha. Of course, such numbers can at times be academic; in frost-bitten vintages such as 2008, yields have been much lower.

The fruit is harvested by hand before transport to the cuverie where it undergoes a pneumatic pressing. The must is then allowed to settle and ferment naturally in glass-lined temperature-controlled cement vats, before resting on its lees for between six and twelve months, after which it is bottled. Jo, like many growers in the region, likes to express the particularity of the multi-faceted terroirs. One such site-specific wine is Amphibolite Nature, which might be considered Landron's entry-level cuvée, being a lively little number intended for earlier drinking. The wine is named for the aforementioned amphibole, a local stone of metamorphic origin with a beautiful green hue.

The Amphibolite Nature has lovely, bright, fresh, and minerally nose, with a slightly herby element. Quite precise in style, well defined, with firm acids and a balanced texture and weight. Very zippy, with lots of fabulous appeal, and easy to drink. Amphibolite Nature rings with tastes of green and red apple, lemon rind, and white flower, and then add on a little oyster shell and sage for a smart finish.

Landron's vineyards display many of the terroirs that can be found across the Muscadet appellations, including gneiss and orthogneiss, and even sandstone. Thereafter comes Le Fief du Breil, a wine from clay, flint and orthogneiss soils. A similar mix of rocks and soils, including clay and flint, with the addition of schist and mica-schist, characterises the soils of Chateau de la Carizière.

Château La Carizière displays an intense minerality with a very floral style again. The palate is sappy and shows some good substance, and there is certainly some grip and structure evident too. Nicely composed, with an elegant acid backbone, and it is quite long too.

While this wine is lighter in body than the granite or gabbro-based wines, Fief du Breil is aromatically extremely pretty and has a shimmering mineral character making it a superb accompaniment to oysters or Dover sole with a butter sauce. Lemon, almond, stone and truffle aromas and stony anise-tinged flavours on the palate.

Melonix is where Asterix naturally meets Musca-tache. Indigenous yeasts, no sulphur and bottled without fining or filtration. The 'hands-off' approach also facilitates malolactic fermentation. It has a very expressive nose, very floral and minerally too, elegant but also open and accessible. The palate shows a very deep and sappy character, with a floral expression like that on the nose, alongside a white fruit character. A richly styled Melon, no doubt the malolactic contributing something here, with citrus fruit elements such as tangerine, and white grape. Yes, it has le crunch in abundance. Getafix of Melonix! (You know what I'm talking about).

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| 2024 | MUSCADET "GRAINS DE RAISINS" | W |
| 2022 | MUSCADET AMPHIBOLITE | W |
| 2021 | VIN DE FRANCE "MELONIX" | W |
| 2022 | MUSCADET DE SEVRE ET MAINE SUR LIE CLOS LA CARIZIERE | W |
| 2018 | MUSCADET DE SEVRE ET MAINE SUR LIE LE FIEF DU BREIL | W |

DOMAINE DE LA PEPIERE, MARC OLLIVIER, REMI BRANGER & GWENAELLE CROIX, Muscadet – *Biodynamic ~ certified Biodyvin*

Marc Ollivier of Domaine de la Pépière is an example of a winemaker who has grown with his vines. In the early 1980's Marc, who was an engineer at the time, decided to move to the country for a slower pace of life. His father owned some vineyards in the cool Atlantic-influenced zone of Muscadet-de-Sèvre-et-Maine but was not a winemaker. Marc took over his father's vineyards and bought a parcel called Clos de Briords from an elderly neighbour. Marc's first vintage was 1985 and his primary goal as a winemaker at the time was to simply complete fermentation. As such, he began fermentation using cultured yeasts and finished the wine off with a dose of SO₂. As Marc matured as a winemaker, he experimented with ambient yeasts and began bottling with minimal amounts of SO₂. The results were extraordinary; the wines showed greater depth, richness, and complexity. Encouraged by his success, Marc began transitioning all his vineyards to organic and continued his minimalist approach in the winery. His racy, lemon-tinged, mineral-driven Muscadets have since become the benchmark for the region and have opened a world of previously unknown potential in the area. Marc's success is combination of good fortune (his vineyards were never touched by wine consultants encouraging new, higher yield clones) and an open minded, experimental approach to making the best possible wines. Some points: Many of Marc's vines are 40+ years old and some of his vineyards are planted on granite soils, a rarity in the region. All the vineyards are from original stock: Ollivier is the only grower in the Muscadet who does not have a single clonal selection in his vineyards. The domaine hand harvests (still a rarity in the region) and uses only natural yeasts for fermentation. Extended lees contact, often till April or May of the following year, adds added depth to the wines, The Muscadet from Pépière is an excellent example. The wine is lemony, stony, and bracing on the palate. The Clos des Briords is from an 80-year-old-vine parcel. The sandy clay soils are rich in granite de Thébaud, a type differing from granite de Clisson in in its higher feldspar and clay content; it is cooler, holds water well and ripens the fruit more slowly. The farming is certified-biodynamic and the vineyard work including harvest is manual. As for the all Pépière wines, the fruit is direct-pressed, and the juice settled naturally for 12 hours. It is then fermented in stainless steel tanks with natural yeasts; the wine is aged on its lees in large, underground, glass-lined cement tanks for 7 to 8 months. La Pepie is a little Côte from younger vines, between 6 and 11 years of age, a vibrant, bright and fruity wine with excellent texture, freshness and balance. Flowery (violets) on the nose, soft juicy raspberry fruit on the palate with good tension from the acidity. Uncomplicated yet utterly enjoyable. 100% tank fermented.

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| 2023 | MUSCADET SUR LIE | W |
| 2022 | MUSCADET SUR LIE VIEILLES VIGNES "CLOS DES BRIORDS" | W |
| 2023 | IGP LA PEPIE COT ROUGE | R |

DOMAINE DE LA SENECHALIERE, MARC PESNOT, Muscadet – *Organic (Ecocert)*

The domaine comprises approximately 13 hectares of vines, mostly Melon de Bourgogne although in recent years Marc has also been working with Abouriou (q.v. Elian da Ros and Marmandais). The soils are schistose, and many of the vines well over 50 years of age; for Miss Terre the vines are up to 80 years old. He works organically, labouring the soil and opting for essential oils and copper treatments over synthetic products. This 'natural' feel continues into the cellar where he uses a minimal amount of sulphur, with a single addition of about 20 mg only at the time of bottling.

What distinguishes the Miss Terre from the rest of his portfolio, however, is malolactic fermentation; not a process generally associated with Muscadet. Therefore, it has a lower acidity than we might expect from Melon, as indicated on the label where Marc has written "Ce vin est sec, mais pas acide". The wine is initially muted on the nose, but it soon opens out to reveal some delightfully well-defined and grippy fruit characteristics, with scents of pear and citrus pith, alongside elements of white pepper and also a very faint seam of bright, perfumed almond. The palate is quite exhilarating, with a deep texture, piles of almost sherbet minerality and a rich, flavoursome substance. Underneath it all there is moderate acidity in keeping with the malolactic, and it is the bite of the mineral component that contributes most to the structure of the wine. The fruit has a savoury vein, and the wine a bright, vibrant, pithy finish, with an appealing bitterness to the fruit here.

La Bohème is dynamic and delicious, another wine that transcends apparently melony mundaneness. Grapes are harvested by hand at their maximum ripeness & destemmed. The fruit undergoes a slow manual pressing & the wine rests on the lees in temperature controlled stainless steel tanks for at least nine months. This is a pure & natural expression of old vines Melon and the schist terroir they thrive in. Cloudy straw in the glass with pretty notes of white flowers, pear, green apple & pounded stones. The palate is broad & creamy with elegant white fruit flavours boosted by succulent minerality & a creamy dash of vibrant acidity. Pesnot harvests his Folle Blanche grapes from 60 to 80 years old vines when they are ripe by lowering yields and not by adding any sugar. The wine is floral and delicious and made without any additives bar a little SO₂. The fermentation often lasts up to 6 months (with wild yeasts) which gives one an idea of why the wine is so different when you consider the usual 8 days needed by the commercial wineries around, using added lab yeasts.

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| 2022 | FOLLE BLANCHE VIEILLES VIGNES | W |
| 2022 | VIN DE FRANCE MELON BLANC "LA BOHEME" | W |
| 2022 | VIN DE FRANCE MELON BLANC VIEILLES VIGNES "MISS TERRE" | W |

“White wine is like electricity. Red wine looks and tastes like liquid beefsteak.”

— James Joyce

DOMAINE LA ROCHE AUX MOINES, TESSA LAROCHE, Savennières – Organic (certified Ecocert)

Savennières is a tiny but justifiably celebrated appellation just south-west of Angers where white wines of immense nerve, concentration and longevity are made from the Chenin Blanc grape – locally called Pineau de la Loire. The AOC lies south-southwest of Angers on the right bank of the Loire on sandy schist soils and the lieu-dit of Roche-aux-Moines occupies a mere 6.85 hectares within it. Vineyard practices are designed to protect the environment, yields are low, organic fertilisers are used. Thermoregulated stainless steel vats and a pneumatic press ensure that pure fruit quality and gentle extraction are the order of the day. There is also a “petit chai” with twenty-five oak barrels in which the best selections of each vintage are either fermented or aged, although the object is not to acquire a woody flavour in the wine. In exceptional vintages a doux or slightly sweet wine is produced. Get vertical – and horizontal – with the duo of vintages that we are listing. The younger Sav is a powerhouse with diamond bright acidity and a beeswaxy texture, a breath-taking vintage that leaves you on your knees, the ripeness of the fruit balancing the muscular minerality of the wine, truly an unfiltered philtre. Try this with grilled wild salmon, andouillette, rabbit in white wine or veal chop à la crème. The more grizzled vintage flaunts secondary aromas of medlar and bruised plums with notes of honey, mushroom and humus.

And... New Chenin! Because a world of Chenin is not enough. Berceau des Fées (Cradle of Fairies) from Domaine aux Moines in Savennières. Young Chenin on volcanic soils – zero SO2 added. The wine is super smart, piercingly pure.

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| 2022 | BERCEAU DES FEES | W |
| 2022 | SAVENNIERES-ROCHE AUX MOINES | W |
| 2018 | SAVENNIERES-ROCHE AUX MOINES | W |

DOMAINE JEAN-CHRISTOPHE GARNIER, SAINT-LAMBERT-DU-LATTRAY, Anjou – Organic (Bureau Veritas)

Chenin you crazy diamond!

Jean-Christophe Garner is based in St Lambert-du-Lattray, 11 km due south of Savennières, on the south side of the Layon River; a town technically in the AOP Coteaux du Layon. Originally from Brittany, J-C worked as a sommelier and naturally became captivated with fine wine. Ultimately, he migrated into wine production. He had a stage with Marc Angeli, who helped him get settled in the region. When several small plots in Anjou became available, he grabbed them. And we’ve grabbed some of his wines.

Meet some fantastic old vines Chenin from Anjou region plus one red from middle-aged vines. His electrifying whites obey cider house rules – as with many natural versions the wines major on apple and quince fruit of the gently-bruised timbre, but their lickety-split acidity strikes the taste buds and carves a clear path for the fruit to cascade over the tongue. Orthodox wine lovers might roll their eyes at the bold texture jolts, but I love a wine that tickles my ribs whilst staying several steps ahead of my palate. Unsheathing sharp darts of spiky lemon, grapefruit, and yellow peach La Roche unleashes sizzling white blossoms in the mouth then unveils layers of apple, quince and ripe greengage, brine and chalk minerality, finishing persistently with musky florality, anise, angelica, and subtle bitterness of herbs, alkaline minerality, and fruit skin. La Roche Bezigon reveals its terroir-specific origin, and this wine reveals a touch more warmth to the fruit whilst covering all the angles in the mouth, whilst Les Dreuilles is more oxidative with a rich and buttery texture. The red called Les Tailles remains in quaff territory, half each of the two Cabs contributing to medicinal flavours of peppercorn and dried currants.

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| 2021 | ROCHE BEZIGON | W |
| 2023 | LES JUSTICES | W |
| 2021/22 | LES TAILLES ROUGE | R |
| 2023 | AUNIS LES NOUETTES | R |

Now let you and me buy wine today!
 Why say we have not the price?
 My horse spotted with five flowers,
 My fur-coat worth a thousand pieces of gold,
 These I will take out, and call my boy
 To barter them for sweet wine.
 And with you twain, let me forget
 The sorrow of ten thousand ages!

Li Bai – An Exhortation

GETTING SAVVY

Taste these wines. One might describe them without too much fancy as an invigorating blend of fermenting apples, soil, mulch, wild honey, almonds and dry sherry marked by perfect incisive acidity carrying the wild flavours across the palate, wines of tremendous length and brio and seigniorial rusticity. You might equally say that they taste oxidised and faulty. Well, how do you like them apples? Can one reconcile these views? Who is right and what is right and by whose normative standards are we judging? Do we criticise a sunset for not being romantic enough; do we mark trees out of ten; does a disfigured person have less of a soul than a perfectly formed one? Chagall once observed: “one cannot be precise and still pure”. When I have drunk great Savennières (and these are great Savennières), I have rarely experienced such purity and depth of flavour in a white wine, for my imagination has been engaged and my senses enraptured. And, like the living thing it was, the wine changed in the glass: the aromas multiplied, became richer and more complex. Generically, Savennières wines are not easy; they resist facile comparison but are true to themselves and to the vintage. We believe that it is a good thing that growers are occasionally unable to control all the parameters that go into the making of wine because it is precisely this element of uncertainty and imperfection and surprise that helps to forge the character of the wine. We are not aiming to discover a good, but standardized wine, which with the help of certain chemicals would be the same year in, year out. I refer elsewhere to Tennyson’s description of Maud “faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null” as a good definition of the orthodoxy of homogeneity. Rather, we are looking for a wine that reflects the context in which it was grown. Each year brings a lot of uncertainties, and it would be useless to try to ignore them. Indeed, we should try to learn from the whims of weather to understand that with a bit of enthusiasm and by acquiring knowledge we can stand out in a market that is increasingly standardised due to globalisation.

A French winemaker once told me: *I understand deacidification, reacidification, oak chips. I have seen it done and I understand why it is done. But that is not my choice. Wine is made in the vineyard. We do not call him or her “the winemaker” but rather “the vigneron”, the conductor not the creator. There is a subtle difference. We also say that wine is le sang des pays, the blood of the earth.* It is a romantic notion that wine makes itself or that the winemaker is benignly neglecting his or her vines. You must work hard to achieve purity, an unmediated expression of character. Nature presents the choices; the vignerons must act accordingly.

Without the *vigneron* there would be no wine, but one might argue, the greater the interference the more one gets away from the genius of nature. If the sole purpose of wine is to transform blocks of grape juice into a chemically stable product, then aesthetic criteria are fundamentally irrelevant. Character is irrelevant. Provenance is irrelevant. The test tube can effectively replace the womb. The wines from Domaine aux Moines are truly singular. In a brand-driven, supermarket-dominated world let us celebrate their funky quirkiness (yes, I know that’s a tautology!).

DOMAINE VINCENT OGEREAU, EMMANUEL OGEREAU, Anjou – Organic – Certified Ecocert

*Plus mon Loyre Gaulois, que le Tybre Latin,
Plus mon petit Lyre, que le mont Palatin,
Et plus que l'air marin la douceur Angevin*
Joachim du Bellay

Ogereau is currently considered one of the outstanding producers from this dynamic region of the Loire Valley. This appellation, in the region around the medieval city of Angers, produces its high-quality white sweet wines from grapes grown along the Layon River. The climate, soils and grape type are ideal for producing some of the world's finest sweet wines. The early morning fog rising off the Layon River creates the high humidity necessary for developing Botrytis Cinerea, the famous "Noble-Rot" which makes great sweet white wines such as Sauternes. The warm afternoon sun and long harvest season allows full ripening of the grapes, which shrivel and concentrate the sugars. At a top domaine like Ogereau, the harvest is conducted in a series of tries, or passes through the vineyard to select only the ripest grapes. Chenin Blanc is king here, matching perfectly with the clay-schist soils of the region. The village indication "Saint Lambert" on the label indicates a higher level of quality. The viticulture is completely organic chez Ogereau and only natural yeasts are used for the fermentation. The harvest, from October through the end of November, is performed manually in selected pickings called tri, to ensure gathering the grapes at their maximum maturity. The grapes for the sweet wines go directly from harvest to press, where they undergo a long but gentle extraction for 12 hours. Fermentation takes place very slowly in 500-litre oak demi-muids for at least 6 months, up to a year for the top cuvées, which helps stabilize these sweet wines. Like all great winemakers, Ogereau works by taste, not analysis. The cornerstone elements of his sweet white wines are acidity, sugar and alcohol. When all three are in balance, he stops the fermentation by racking, lightly sulphuring and filtering at bottling. In this way Ogereau gets the most out of those shrivelled berries without any of the bitter elements.

Vincent and Catherine Ogereau were joined by their son Emmanuel a few years ago and after having worked quite traditionally for many years. They are now in conversion to organic (the wines are certified with the 2019 vintage) and are starting to implement biodynamic preparation this coming spring. They also use indigenous yeasts and have lowered their use of sulphur over the recent years.

L'Enjouée is made from 70% Cabernet Franc 15% Grolleau 15% Pineau d'Aunis on the left bank of the Layon River in the village of de Saint Lambert du Lattay.

In their third year of organic conversion, the soils are ploughed, they use organic compost and practice bud removal, leaf thinning and green harvest. The grapes are hand-picked at full phenolic maturity, the Grolleau and the Pineau d'Aunis are vinified whole bunch in a semi-carbonic fermentation, while the Cabernet Franc is destemmed and infused for 6 days (very soft extraction), the juices are then assembled in tiled cement tank where they do the malolactic fermentation and spend a few months. Finally, there is a light earth filtration followed by bottling in February.

A bright wine with crunchy red berries and spices on the nose and a mouth that is light fresh and tonic.

Seekers of heavenly pleasure will instantly be drawn to Ogereau's Coteaux du Layon called Le Saint-Lambert, a nectar marvel of dried fruits, spices and honey. This is celestial, nepenthean Chenin with overtones of wild honey – the finish seems to go on forever, amen. Apparently, Ogereau plays music to his wines whilst they are maturing in cask – on this evidence it would have to be the Ode To Joy.

The Quarts de Chaume is a bright, energetic, and luminous dessert wine. On the nose - intense notes of orange peel, roasted apricots, dried roses and spices. The finish is taut with the great acidity of this Quarts de Chaume terroir and bursting with the complexity of flavours.

"We were given the opportunity to cultivate the La Martinière vineyard in Quarts de Chaume exclusively in 2015. We are thus fortunate to be among the privileged estates sharing the only Grand Cru in the entire Loire region. Quarts de Chaume is a unique place. The tenured land of Chaume is a hillside on the right bank which juts out like a promontory above the Layon.

The lords of Haute Guerche, tenants of the Chaume vineyards, owed the abbess of Ronceray d'Angers "a quarter of the harvest hanging on the back of the hillside facing south". This is how the Quarts de Chaume came into being. "

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| 2023 | L'ENJOUÉE BLANC ~ Chenin | Demi |
| 2022 | L'ENJOUÉE ROUGE – Cabernet Franc, Grolleau, Pineau d'Aunis | R |
| 2023 | PINEAU D'AUNIS | R |
| 2023 | COTEAUX DU LAYON LE SAINT-LAMBERT | Sw |
| 2016 | QUARTS DE CHAUME GRAND CRU « LA MARTINIÈRE » ~ 50 cl | Sw |

Spot the deliberate mistake?

“We are becoming besotted with the notion that wine must be biodynamically grown, made in small batches by hands and feet...”
 Provided it doesn’t involve the addition of anything illegal or harmful, I am in favour of using whatever techniques are legally permissible to make a wine better, at whatever price it might be intended to sell.” ...Take technology and interference away from wine and you get vinegar.”

Jeremy Oliver – Australian Wine Writer of the Year 2005 (Wine Selector Magazine)

DOMAINE COUSIN-LEDUC, OLIVIER COUSIN, Anjou – *Biodynamic methods (certified organic Natur en Progrès)*

These wines, to quote Alice Through The Looking Glass, are as “large as life and twice as natural”. We first made the acquaintance of the Chardonnay one lunch time in a small bistro-à-vins in Paris. We’d spent the previous evening destroying one of the finer lists in the city in search of a wine – any wine – that would jolt us upright and beat a natural taradiddle on the tastebuds. Everything seemed hollow and confectioned as if someone had sucked the corks out of the bottles and drawn out the very souls of the individual wines themselves. Then this Chardonnay, a vin de table, almost trembling with volatility, reeking of bruised apples and honey, so alive that the flor seemed to be at war in the wine. Nature red in tooth and claw, the skin of the grape, the air, the climate, the mulched soil, the binding of biological flavours through a purer form of chemistry, herein a wine that wore its guts for garters. Situated in Martigné-Briand south of Angers the domaine extends over 12-hectares planted to Gamay, Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Grolleau and Chenin. The Angevin climate, tempered and regulated by the Atlantic and the Loire River, the preservation of regional organic, natural elements such as micro-flor, the selection of grape varieties and traditional methods of viticulture and winemaking is what gives these wines their powerful identity.

Cousin’s wines are of the nowt-taken-out-and-nowt-added-to-them brigade. “Les traitements contre les maladies ou la pourriture risquent d’anéantir toute flore levurienne naturelle et de laisser des résidus qui se retrouveront dans le vin. Une culture raisonnée, voir biologique est plus respectueuse du milieu”. Pierre Casamayor (L’Ecole de la Degustation) – this is the credo of Olivier Cousin. This credo produces wines from organically grown grapes, it is a philosophy derived from a paramount desire for quality and the fruit of real conviction rather than a statement of fashion. These wines are free of enzymes, artificial yeasts or added sulphur. By the way he ploughs the vineyards with the help of his trusty horse, Joker. He does this because he loves the companionship of animals.

Grolleau (or Gros Lot), a variety now virtually only encountered in Rosé d’Anjou, is properly the subject of withering scorn from all manner of wine journalists. Its name is derived from an old French word “grolle” meaning the raven, a bird with plumage as black as the grapes of this vine. According to my research this grape truly has croaked along with similar anachronisms such as Aramon, Alicante Bouschet etc. And yet from such ugly corbies something gentle and rather fine can occasionally emerge. Cousin’s version is a still a vin de copain, but it does have the benefit of being from sixty-year-old vines and undergoing carbonic maceration. Flavours of violets and sweet red fruits allied to soft tannins and fresh acidity make this a friend to the ice bucket. The exotic label will have you asking: “Who’s the daddy longlegs?” Le Cousin, naturellement.

The Anjou red is pur Breton by another name. Very herbal on the nose with a mossy undertone it has a very medicinal quality. A silky texture and cherry flavours complete the picture. We’ve added a couple of other Cousin humdingers. Pur Breton – not to be confused with the structured Cab Franc mentioned above is a pot-pourri of ripe plum, juicy cherry, red apple core and chalk tones with a secondary naughty whiff of mushroom and undergrowth. Crushed strawberries mixed with invigoratingly fresh bing cherry and red apple explode on the palate. Joie de vivre. The Gamay combines that carbo fruitiness and freshness with blood sausage and herb flavours. These wines have plenty of poke for your pig. There is, in my fond imagination, a desert island populated by plutocratic lotos-munchers who feast on honeydew and drink the milk of paradise who lunch on DRC with Chateau d’Yquem for dessert. Cousin’s Gamay is a welcome taste of raunchy reality. Sure, it would spook the effete drinker in their luxury cups, but it is immensely satisfying and lifts the spirits. Humble wines can compete with the best, if not on reputation but in the matter of what is in the glass. This is the ugly goose that goosed the goose that laid the golden eggs.

2021

PUR BRETON ~ Cabernet Franc

R



“It’s hard to be a diamond in a rhinestone world.”

- Dolly Parton

DOMAINE BENOIT COURAULT, Anjou – Organic certified

Two wines for the table, one to appeal to white vin man, the other to red vin girl. How easily one falls into these reductive tropes. Benoit took over the 6.5 ha vineyard in 2006, having cut his vinous teeth in Chambolle-Musigny and in Tavel with the one of the archbishops of natural wine, Eric Pfifferling. Farming is organic and the non-interventionist philosophy extends into the winery. The Gilbourg (name of the plot) is pure, but not so simple, Chenin. Sixty-year-old vines, very low yields, slow pressing, wild yeast ferment without temperature control and maturation for twelve months in three-to-five-year barrels, makes for a rich, earthy style of wine with bruised orchard fruit. Imagine ripe apples rolled in honey-coated green leaves then add cinnamon and musk and some spiky acidity for definition. The wine moves, sometimes more mellow and textured, sometimes sharper, and delineated. To say that not much of this is made is an understatement. Not that the Tabeneaux is churned out by the barrel-load. This Cabernet Franc/Grolleau blend (60/40) from old vines is an unadulterated soiffer, unfiltered, unfinned and unsulphured. A piffing 11.5% means that you can drink a magnum before the neo-Prohibitionists and their witchfinder generals cotton on to what you are doing. In short, this is a profoundly delicious wine that doesn’t need to be profound. New to our Courault mini range is “Eglantine Pet Nat Rose” a superbly crunchy blend of Cab Franc and Grolleau Gris. These boules rule.

2023 TABENEAX ~ Cabernet, Grolleau
2023 LE VERGER DE L’ETANG

R
R



“It wasn’t the wine, murmured Mr Snodgrass, in a broken voice. It was the salmon.”

- *Pickwick Papers*

DOMAINE STEPHANE BERNAUDEAU, Anjou – *Biodynamic*

Stéphane trained in the Loire region to be a ‘bûcheron’ (lumberjack/ logger/woodman.). It was not ok, so he ended up working for the great Mark Angeli in the village of Thouarcé. In 1999, he started working for himself, farming a few acres before acquiring a patchwork of parcels, partly rented and partly purchased. Currently he has a total of 2.5-hectares of vines consisting of three parcels of Chenin, one of which is located at Aubigné –sur-Layon, another at Thouarcé and the last one in the village of Cornu as well as two devoted to red vines, one Gamay, the other Grolleau and Cabernet, both situated in Thouarcé.

La Chantelée is a cheeky blend of 50% Gamay, 50% Grolleau from 25-year-old vines on mixed soils of sand, gravel and schist. After a maceration of eight days the wine undergoes an ambient fermentation of eleven months (whole bunch). Stéphane observes that “it’s the wine that decides on the temperature of the fermentation”. No filtration, no fining, no sulphur, eleven months in used oak barrels.

Utterly agreeable tasty red wine with the thirst dial firmly set to quench. Red and bramble fruits (with the prickles left in), a healthy score of acidity and a little carbon dioxide lurking underneath. Responds well to chilling.

Terres Blanches is from 80-year-old low-yielding Chenin vines. Grapes are first pressed then fermented in (used) oak barrels for twelve months. Stéphane allows a partial malolactic intentionally to conserve the wine’s acidity. The wine is then aged for twelve months in used oak barrels, is neither filtered, nor fined and given a small amount of sulphur.

So where does this sit in our Chenin pantheon? Roasted almonds leading into beeswax, some sweet apples and quinces opening out to reveal some beautiful aromas and flavours of fresh cut pineapple and honey. Sumptuous and rich with a suggestion of waxed apples, herbs and cheese, a touch of wood tannin grip. A profound wine, this would age for fifteen to twenty years.

Les Nourrissons is a 100-year-old one-hectare plot of Chenin Blanc and Verdelho, biodynamically farmed, producing on average 1,000 bottles a year. Stéphane ploughs with a horse, picks ripe, makes a natural ferment and ages for fourteen months on the lees in barrels used for three wines. This is a wine of power, tension, acidity, and fantastic length.

Les Onglés is the newest white wine in Stéphane’s cellar. It comes from a 2-hectare parcel of 30-year-old Chenin Blanc planted on schist. Vinification is done in used barrels with the wine staying on its lees for 12 months before being bottled without fining or filtration. Stéphane’s tasting note for this wine is succinct, describing it as « un vin avec une belle fraîcheur et une grande minéralité, bouche dans un premier temps avec une belle attaque acide puis un côté salin sur la finale un vin encore jeune 99eper faut savoir attendre. »

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| 2020 | “LES ONGLES SUR SCHIST” | W |
| 2020 | « LES NOURRISSONS » | W |
| 2020 | « LES TERRES BLANCHES » | W |

These tiny production wines are rarer than rare, alas, and are on single bottle allocation.

DOMAINE MOSSE, SYLVESTRE & JOSEPH MOSSE, Anjou – Organic – certified Bureau Veritas

...toutefois l'absorption de 184646 bouteilles de vin d'Anjou ne rendit pas sa langue moins habile...
~ Rabelais

Agnès and René Mosse live and work in the village of Saint-Lambert-du-Lattay, in the Coteaux-du-Layon area of Anjou. The Layon is a small tributary to the Loire that lazily digs its way through well exposed and drained hills of schist and sandstone. Its micro-climate allows for a long hang-time, and when the mornings are foggy in the fall, with no rain, botrytis develops easily on the Chenin grapes.

Previously, the Mosses had owned a wine-bar/wine retail in Tours, and they credit the great vignerons they met there, among them Jo Python and François Chidaine, as the impetus to become winemakers. They studied viticulture and oenology at the agricultural lycée in Amboise where two of their teachers were Thierry Puzelat (Clos du Tue Boeuf) and Christian Chaussard (Domaine le Briseau).

They spent two years working in Côte-de-Beaune, then bought the estate in St-Lambert in 1999 and work 13ha of vines, most of them planted to Chenin Blanc (nine ha), and Cabernets Franc and Sauvignon (three ha), the rest is planted with Gamay, Chardonnay, Grolleau Gris and Noir.

They adopted organic viticulture techniques from the start, ploughing between and under the rows, and use biodynamic preparations to treat the vines and soil. In their area of Anjou Noir (Black Anjou, so called because of the dark colour of the soils of slate and volcanic rocks), the soils are shallow, with subsoils of schist and sandstone, and varying amounts of clay on the surface.

With all the efforts put into vineyard work, it is equally important to them to vinify in a natural fashion, and they are particularly attentive to minimizing manipulations and the use of sulphur. All the wines are barrel-fermented and aged, and usually the whites go through their malolactic fermentation. The barrels are renewed as needed: they are containers, not oak flavour providers.

The Anjou Blanc sec – now Vin de France - is from young selection massale Chenin vines planted in 2001 & 2002 grown on clay and gravel soils alternating with schist. Yields in this vintage were less than 15hl/ha and harvest was done by hand with selection (tri) of grapes. Vinification is slow, malo takes place in barrels and the wine spends a further year in them before bottling. Wild honey, fleshy apricots, quince paste and wood spice. Once the wine warmed up in the glass it developed secondary nutty aromatics and layer after layer of rich flavour.

Arena is a Savennières sourced from 0.45 hectares of vines planted in 2002 on soils of wind-blown sands and schist near the Moulin de Beaupréau. The vines only came into the ownership of Agnès and René in 2007, after they purchased the land from Eric Morgat. As is the case with Anjou, the fruit here is hand-picked and the fermentation en fût with 12 months elevage topping up once a week. Rich and acacia-honeyed with a dried-fruit (apricot and quince) character yet seemingly defined and lively too, Arena is quite youthful now with a somewhat muted palate – albeit one with plenty of substance and would benefit from spending half an hour in a carafe. The warmth of the wine manifests itself in the 9.3 g/l residual sugar. Try with ris de veau, grilled sea bass and certain cheeses.

Summer's ready and the mousse is on the loose, specifically the Moussamoussettes, a delightful sparkling rosé made from a blend of Grolleau Gris and Gamay. Yields are low (25 hl/ha) with strict triage and initial fermentation is in a mixture of vats and barrels. The wine is gently sparkling with framboise, cherry and rhubarb; it is fresh, soft, and lively in the mouth, joyously simple.

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| 2023 | VIN DE FRANCE BLANC (ANJOU) | W |
| 2022 | SAVENNIERES "ARENA" | W |
| 2023 | BANGARANG ROUGE ~ Pineau d'Aunis | R |
| 2023 | MOUSSAMOUSSETTES PET NAT | Sp/Ro |

LE CLOS DES TREILLES. NICOLAS REAU Anjou – Organic

Former jazz and blue pianist Nicolas Reau one day decided to tickle the vines rather than the ivories. He studied winemaking and viticulture at Montreuil and supplemented these studies with time spent in Bordeaux. Nobody's perfect. He makes a Chenin from vines on clay-limestone soils that displays characteristics of minerality, and ample fruit combined. The grapes are fermented in old barrels and aged for a further year without racking. The grapes for the Anjou Rouge Pompois are de-stemmed before fermentation which place in cement tanks, followed by maturation in oak barrels. No filtering, no fining, no sulphuring, and twelve months in used oak barrels (used for two to five wines). A lovely rumpus-pumpus red with prominent black fruits on the nose and palate and, typical of the vintage, easy on the gums.

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| 2022 | ANJOU BLANC "CLOS LES TREILLES" | W |
| 2022 | ANJOU ROUGE "POMPOIS" | R |
| 2021 | ENLEVEMENT DEMANDE ~ Cabernet Franc | R |

LES VINS DE LA GABARE, Loire – Organic

Les Vins de la Gabare is a collaboration between Les Caves de Pyrene and local growers in the Loire. The idea behind this project is to create excellent value wines, from organically farmed grapes and as naturally as possible, wines that faithfully reflect the place they come from. All harvests are manual in small crates, the grapes were crushed immediately after harvest, wild yeast fermentation without temperature control, then six to twelve months' ageing in oak barrel with full malolactic, no filtration, nor fining. A refreshing, vibrant, clean Chenin with a lick of salt on the finish Grapes for Les Amandiers were destemmed, macerated and native yeast fermented for three weeks (50% in concrete vat and 50% in tapering-shaped wooden vat) without any temperature control (the wine cellar was cold anyway). This was followed by 9-12 months of ageing on lees (50% in the same concrete vat and 50% in the same tapering-shaped wooden vat). After ageing, the two batches were blended together and bottled without filtration, fining or added sulphites. Purple red Cabernet Franc brimming with aromatic youthful sappy red fruits with velvety texture in the mouth, notes of red cherries and finishing on a touch of red pepper and cleansing acidity,

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| 2022 | MUSCADET LA PENTIERE | W |
| 2022 | MUSCADET INDIGENE ~ 20 litre key keg | W |
| 2023 | ATTENTION CHENIN MECHANT | W |
| 2023 | GRANDES HERMINES CHENIN | W |
| 2022 | BONHOMME CHENIN BLANC ~ 20 litre key keg | W |
| 2022 | ANJOU ROUGE LES AMANDIERS | R |

SYLVIE AUGEREAU, Anjou – Organic & biodynamic methods used (not certified)

Sylvie's vineyard site is a pretty, colourful hill on which the Loire comes knocking. The soil is rather sandy, and it turns red with a little iron on the Chenin hill. The ground is strewn with large white shells. And, above all, the centuries-old vines are beautiful. Sylvie works with Georgian qvevri for her white. The clay receives the grapes gently, and like magic, fermentation begins soon after and is never violent. She observes: "I think the life (of the wine) is made more harmonious by this bulbous and pointed form. It seems to me that there is more harmony in the wine. Since the skins are macerated for nine months, the wine should be harder. But instead, there is more creaminess; a velvety quality; greater unity." The Rejoissances red, a blend, is more glou in style. Finally, there Les Manquants, from centenarian Cabernet Franc vines. Almost opaque, this red combines density and real verve, with chewy yet digestible tannins. Sylvie makes natural wines. Mais, naturellement.

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| 2020 | PULPES CHENIN | W |
| 2021 | REJOISSANCES ~ 50% Pineau d'Aunis, 50% Grolleau | R |
| 2020 | LES MANQUANTS ROUGE – Cabernet Franc | R |

JEANNE GERMAIN, Saumur-Champigny– Biodynamic (Biodyvin)

In 2013 Jeanne began a wine training course which led her to live different experiences with inspiring winemakers. She spent years learning and observing her father's work at Domaine des Roches-Neuves, which enhanced her awareness of working biodynamically. After training in animal traction ploughing, she was entrusted with working the soil within the family estate in 2018. She produced her first cuvée in 2019. Since then, with the help of her companion Florent, they have been keen to develop their 1.7 hectares of vines, in Saumur-Champigny with the help of their horses, Ben and Comtesse. Her vivid Cab Franc is characterised by a melange of blackberry, raspberry, blackcurrant, chalky and slightly smoky aromas, smooth, supple tannins, and fresh finish thanks to the mineral notes.

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| 2021 | SAUMUR-CHAMPIGNY « LA FOULEE » | R |
| 2023 | SAUMUR-CHAMPIGNY « BAVARDAGES » | R |

Saumur loving had me a blast
Saumur loving happened so fast
Found a Chenin crazy for it
Met a grower he was so very fit
Saumur days drifting away to oh oh the Saumur nights

DOMAINE DES ROCHES NEUVES, THIERRY GERMAIN, Saumur-Champigny – Biodynamic certified Biodyvin

Serious wines are produced at this estate run by the charismatic Thierry Germain. His approach is closer to a Burgundy winemaker than a typical Loire producer. This 50-acre domaine, situated in a superb viticultural location in the appellation of Saumur Champigny, has been a winery since 1850. Germain, from a long line of Bordeaux winemakers, arrived here in 1991, attracted by the region's perfect balance of grape varietal, climate, and terroir, which he considers one of the finest in France. The vineyard is worked in a natural way with the goal of keeping the vine and the soil at its healthiest and Thierry has become a fully-fledged advocate of biodynamics. The harvest is manual, selecting grapes at their very ripest level. Vinification is handled in small batches with bottling unfinned and unfiltered. Germain has garnered praise in the European press for his exciting wines, which are always filled with ripe, generous fruit and supple textures. Painstaking attention to detail: the grapes are selected at optimum maturity to create suave, velvety, plump wines. The basic Cuvée Domaine is garnet with purple tints, exhibits lively aromas of irises, violets and red fruits, a balanced and ripe palate, harmonious and full and a smoky finish with subtle tannins. Disregard a label so loud it could be heard in Timbuktu. The Cuvée Marginale is a selection of the best grapes put into used barriques, a felicitous amalgam of Bordeaux and Loire styles. The vines for the Marginale are situated on the superb clayey-limestone soil of Fosse de Chaintrés. This cuvée is only made in the best years when the grapes achieve a minimum of 13 degrees alcohol. Yields for the Marginale are a miniscule 25hl/ha; the grapes are macerated for 30-35 days, then the wine is placed in oak to undergo malolactic fermentation. It will mature for 18-24 months depending on the vintage. The Terres Chaudes, from organically cultivated grapes grown on the unique tufa-rich soil (sandy clay and clayey limestone soils that suit wines with deep root systems), is as seductive as the swish of a silken kimono. Yields are a mere 35hl/ha.

The grapes macerate for 25 days before undergoing malolactic fermentation. Half the wine is matured in barrels that have been used before, the other half is kept in stainless steel. It is bottled twelve months later when the complexity of aroma is revealed, and the tannins have balanced out.

Saumur-Champigny Terres Chaudes More powerful than the Cuvée Domaine, this wine could easily age several years. The colour is dark ruby, with purple highlights. The bouquet is marked by cassis and blackberries. The palate is dense, with fat fruit, a beautiful structure and fine, ripe tannins. A happy future for this wine which is beautifully balanced in nose and palate."

Saumur-Champigny Cuvée Marginale "This wine is always held back for a year and only made in exceptional vintages. It is produced from the ripest grapes at harvest and aged in new barrels (400 litre). Very concentrated, it merits an ageing of 5 years." The yield for this intense wine is only 25 hectolitres/hectare coming from southern-exposed hillside vineyards. This grand wine is powerful yet elegant, structured like a top Bordeaux.

L'Insolite is from a plot of vines some 85 years old, grown on clayey limestone with sandstone and flint subsoil. The grapes are harvested in several picking sessions according to ripeness (three selections (tri) in the vineyard, with the last pass being only nobly rotten grapes) and yields no more than 18hl/ha. Organic work is done on the soil with special tisanes. Fermented in 12 hl oval foudre for four months to accentuate high-toned minerality. Aged on the fine lees for 12 months. The nose is very attractive, full of pears, pineapple and honey. There is incredible vitality on the palate with perfect balancing acidity. The wine is paean to Chenin Blanc, a snapdragon on an anvil, and drinking it will give your goosebumps goosebumps. After a couple of hours in the carafe drink it with lobster in sauce, sea bass steamed with ginger and/or gourmet Chinese food. Every year we see an evolution in Thierry's wines. They possess finer bone structure and less obvious oak influence; they challenge the palate with their energy. This is the move to natural winemaking.

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| 2023 | SAUMUR BLANC "L'INSOLITE" | W |
| 2021/22 | SAUMUR BLANC "CLOS ROMANS" | W |
| 2021/22 | SAUMUR BLANC "TERRES" BLANC ~ amphora (orange) | W |
| 2022 | SAUMUR BLANC « ECHELIER » | W |
| 2023 | SAUMUR-CHAMPIGNY DOMAINE | R |
| 2021/22 | SAUMUR-CHAMPIGNY "TERRES CHAUDES" | R |
| 2022 | SAUMUR-CHAMPIGNY "LA MARGINALE" | R |
| 2021/22 | SAUMUR-CHAMPIGNY "FRANC DE PIED" | R |
| 2021 | CLOS DE L'ECHELIER ROUGE | R |
| 2021/22 | SAUMUR ROUGE "LES MEMOIRES" | R |
| 2018/19/21 | OUTRE TERRE ROUGE ~ qvevri | R |

2022 SAUMUR-CHAMPIGNY “GUINGUETTE”

R

TOURAINE

Do not fret, it's not a crisis/But this wine has brettanomyces (Ogden Smashed)

- The Alternative Wine Glossary

DOMAINE DE LA CHEVALERIE, EMMANUEL & LAURIE CASLOT, Bourgueil – *Biodynamic – certified Demeter*

The Caslot family have been farming their domaine of thirty-three hectares since 1640 from their farmhouse which sits on the hill overlooking the vines in the heart of the superb terroir of Restigné. As you enter the courtyard a dark tunnel leads you down to the huge family cellar where you'll get to see row upon row of unlabelled pleasure. These are the massive tuffeau cellars carved into the slopes, their unvarying temperatures providing a perfect haven for the conservation and ennoblement of fine wines. Made from Cabernet Franc grapes, the Caslot Bourgueil is a delightful fresh, yet intense, wine with a floral bouquet and flavours of raspberry and blackberry. He makes several cuvées of varying degrees of intensity and complexity from different soils. Some wines are to be quaffed with a smile and some smoked meats, the more profound versions should be decanted to allow the fruit and mineral perfumes to mingle. As well as harvesting Cab Franc, Caslot has also been harvesting a tidy crop of coup-de-coeurs.

Franco de Porc from twenty-five-year-old vines planted on sandy soil, is a lively aromatic number with small ripe fruits and notes of framboise and griottine cherries. It's savoury and easy on the gums. Put it in your rabbit stew and drink with proper gusto.

Les Galichets, from average thirty-year old vines on silica-clay soils, is a firmer, more sculpted style of Cabernet Franc. The nose displays aromas of raspberry and redcurrant, with notes of freshly dyed leather and pencil shavings.

The palate is full of fresh, juicy red fruit flavours with a sweet and sour black cherry quality and a chocolatey, savoury richness – pronounced, but elegant tannins are married to refreshing, mouth-watering acidity. It won't say no to a Côte-de-Boeuf.

Moving on up the Chevalerie is from forty-five-year-old vines. A deep purple (almost opaque) core leads to a narrow rim – this is a big, concentrated wine. The nose offers a huge whiff of raspberry, blackcurrant, and dark cherry aromas, with a touch of cedar/pencil shavings as well as spice and blond tobacco and sous-bois. The palate is dense and rich, with bags of sweet, ripe fruit flavours. There are some healthy tannins here, so saddle that haunch of wild boar and make like a parody of Henry VIII (tearing the meat off the bone, gulping your vinous grog and lobbing the carcass over your shoulder – it's the new courtly behaviour).

Busardières is from the oldest vines planted on limestone-clay soils. Velvety and rich, with savoury and dark chocolate flavours complementing black cherry and blackcurrant fruit. Yet more flavours reveal themselves with time in the glass, including notes of cinnamon, cloves, and Sichuan peppercorns. Monumental depth of flavour, great length, yet wonderful finesse. It will continue to age magnificently.

All very wonderful. Damn it, my dear, we do give a Franc.

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|------|----------------------------------|---|
| 2020 | BOURGUEIL “FRANCO DE PORC” | R |
| 2018 | BOURGUEIL CUVÉE DE LA CHEVALERIE | R |
| 2018 | BOURGUEIL “BUSARDIERES” | R |
| 2017 | BOURGUEIL LES GALICHETS | R |
| 2015 | BOURGUEIL “BRETECHE” | R |

*Gaudeamus igitur,
Juvenes dum sumus,
Post jucundum juventutem
Post molestum senectutem,
Nos habebit humus*



DOMAINE DES BERNARDS, BERNARD GAULT & BERNARD PELE, Chinon – Organic (certified AB France)
 “The tangy, expressive, stalky Cabernet Franc, capable of seeming both playful and fruity in some moods, darker and even a touch forbidding in others, though without really ever preparing to challenge the peaks or plumb the abysses (of sensation, of expectation) which grander and more ambitious wines inhabit as their landscape.”

John Lanchester – The Debt to Pleasure

The Chinon appellation lies in the triangle between the Vienne and Loire departments. Famous for its red wines, the vines are planted on tuffeau, the celebrated chalky bedrock of variable hardness. The town of Chinon was the favourite residence of the Plantagenet king, Henry II, and it was in the Great Hall of the château during the Hundred Years' War that Joan of Arc acknowledged the future king Charles VII. And, of course, the great Rabelais himself lived within spitting distance of Chinon, the man who once wrote: “When I drink, I think; and when I think I drink.”

Lover of Loire wine, Bernard Gault bought the estate in July 2022 in the appellation of Chinon, in the heart of the pretty village of Cravant lès Coteaux. To develop his vision there, Bernard Gault sought the advice of Nicolas Reau, winemaker of Clos des Treilles. Bernard admired the deep and precise and deep wines of this vigneron. “Nicolas is a great winemaking expert. By instilling his philosophy in the Bernard estate, he is the ideal person to give substance to my dream, to make exceptional wines in the heart of this historic place”. Bernard was joined by another Bernard (Pelé) who would focus on the operation and winemaking at the domaine. Organic farming was a prerequisite for making quality wine. Their first vintage, 2022 is certified. Their aim is to preserve the biodiversity that surrounds the vines, the diversity and structure of the soils, and to respect the essence of the terroir. On top of this, Bernard Pelé, helped by Nicolas Reau, ensures that the wine undergo a natural vinification without any additions. sharp. All the plots of the estate are located on hillsides, on natural terraces which offer the ideal exposure. On the surface of the bedrock, the soils evolve from bottom to top, from a sandy-silty soil, to flint silt, Senonian sand and tufa. After being harvested by hand in small boxes, the grapes are sorted in the cellar, destemmed and placed in concrete vats for fermentation. To let the grapes express themselves as naturally as possible, there are no inputs, and the alcoholic and malolactic fermentations take place naturally and at their own pace. After devatting, the marc is gently pressed by a pneumatic press before returning to the cellar. Les Trois Piliers is then further aged in concrete vat and bottled without filtering, fining or added sulphites.

This is what one might expect of a pure Chinon. It is elegant, fragrant, yet also quite robust.

These vital, tonic wines will undoubtedly improve your chi, non?

DOMAINE CATHERINE & PIERRE BRETON, Bourgueil – Biodynamic

The Bretons (the perfect name for Cabernet Franc specialists) are based just north of Restigné. They live in an old but well restored farmhouse with adjacent cellars, surrounded by the vines of the Galichets vineyard. Les Galichets is but one part of their domaine, however, as the pair have about 10.5 hectares of vineyards to their name, including Les Perrières and Clos Sénéchal in Bourgueil, as well as vines in Chinon. The Breton philosophy stems, in their own words, from a love of the land.

The vineyards see ultra-intense organic care, no mean feat in this northerly clime; they avoid chemical fertilisers and weedkillers, restrict yields to something like 40-45 hl/ha (although some cuvées are below 35 hl/ha) and harvest by hand. Once the grapes have arrived at the cellars they are fermented according to terroir, with those from gravelly soils going into stainless steel, whereas those from clay-limestone vineyards are fermented in old oak vats. The Bretons use indigenous yeasts and their desire for “natural” winemaking comes through strong in their resistance to the use of sulphur, with typically just

10 mg/l added at bottling to many cuvées, although some are bottled without any sulphur at all. And they are bottled unfiltered. The range kicks off with an early-bottled Bourgueil made by carbonic maceration called La Dilettante. It showcases the fruity side of the Cabernet Franc grape. With an aroma of roses, it possesses a little more structure than the Trinch, and a ripe core of juicy berry fruit. From twenty years old vines Trinch (the sound made by two glasses clinking together) planted in gravelly soil is raised in large foudres, then bottled early while it still shows of all its fruity, youthful vigour. No clunk, just clink every trip to the bottle. The Chinon Beaumont has a beautiful ruby colour, plenty of violets on the nose and is lush, tender and silky on the palate with black cherry, currant, and pomegranate with earthy notes, nice herbaceousness and minerality bringing up the rear. Catherine’s brilliant natural Vouvrays are in two words – de-licious. High toned white fruit notes meld with honeycomb and goats milk wrapped in a loving shroud of sweet blossom. The Pet Nat stems from a natural fermentation in bottle, no dosage or filtration. Somewhere between cider and perry with delicate honey notes, gently effervescent. Halfway down the bottle the wine becomes cloudy and vinous and finally full of skin extract. So much fun and it tastes healthy.

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|---------|----------------------------|-----|
| NV | VOUVRAY LA DILETTANTE BRUT | Sp |
| 2023 | VOUVRAY LA DILETTANTE SEC | W |
| 2023 | GROLLEAU | R |
| 2023 | BOURGUEIL AVIS DE VIN FORT | R |
| 2023 | BOURGUEIL TRINCH! | R |
| 2023 | BOURGUEIL TRINCH! – magnum | R |
| 2021/23 | BOURGUEIL DILETTANTE | R |
| 2022 | CHINON “LES BEAUX MONTS” | R |
| 2020 | BOURGUEIL “PERRIERES” | R |
| 2002 | CHINON “LES PICASSES” | R |
| 1989 | VOUVRAY DEMI-SEC | D/S |

I have forgotten to tell you, Reader, that Jacques never went anywhere without a gourd filled with the best wine, which used to hang from the pommel of his saddle. Every time his master interrupted him with a question that was a little long he would unfasten his gourd, throw back his head, raise the gourd above it and pour a stream of its contents into his mouth, only putting it back when his master had stopped speaking. I have also forgotten to tell you that in moments which required reflection his first impulse was to ask his gourd. Were it a matter of resolving a moral question., discussing an event, choosing one road rather than another, beginning, continuing or abandoning a transaction, weighing up the advantages or disadvantages of a political matter, a commercial or financial speculation, the wisdom or folly of a law... his first word was, “Let us consult the gourd”, and his last word, “That is the opinion of the gourd and my own”.

Jacques The Fatalist – Diderot (presumably the origin of the expression “Gourd help me”?)

DOMAINE SEBASTIEN DAVID, Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil – Organic certified Ecocert, Biodynamic conversion

Hare-brained person, a coiffure, and a little storm (when the hurly-burly’s done) in a wine glass. Sébastien David makes deliciously crunchy Cabernet Franc from his vineyards situated on the limestone-clay and gravels of the Loire. Eschewing chemicals and working without sulphur in the winery he makes a gratifying aromatic red. The wine looks as if it has just been born, being vermilion-hued, exuberantly fresh, brimming with cherry and cranberry goodness and a lively wriggle of liquorice. It is sapid, savoury, and moreish and delicious served lightly chilled.

Totally unfiltered – as if Ribena had grown up and joined the French foreign legion. In 2016 Sébastien didn’t have enough grapes and so the Hurly became Cab Franc supplemented by Grenache, Cinsault and Fer Servadou from the south and southwest – all fermented and aged in eggs.

| | | |
|------|--------------|---|
| 2023 | “HURLUBERLU” | R |
|------|--------------|---|

DOMAINE CHAMPALOU, CATHERINE & DIDIER CHAMPALOU, Vouvray

Didier and Catherine Champalou have been established in the heart of the appellation since 1983 and have acquired over 20 hectares of Chenin. Their philosophy is simple: to create wines that respect the grape variety, the terroir, and the nature of the vintage.

The Champalous are registered with the Terra Vitis programme, a charter that promotes sustainable farming and respect for the environment by maintaining a good balance in the soil, the terroir and the plant and limiting chemical applications.

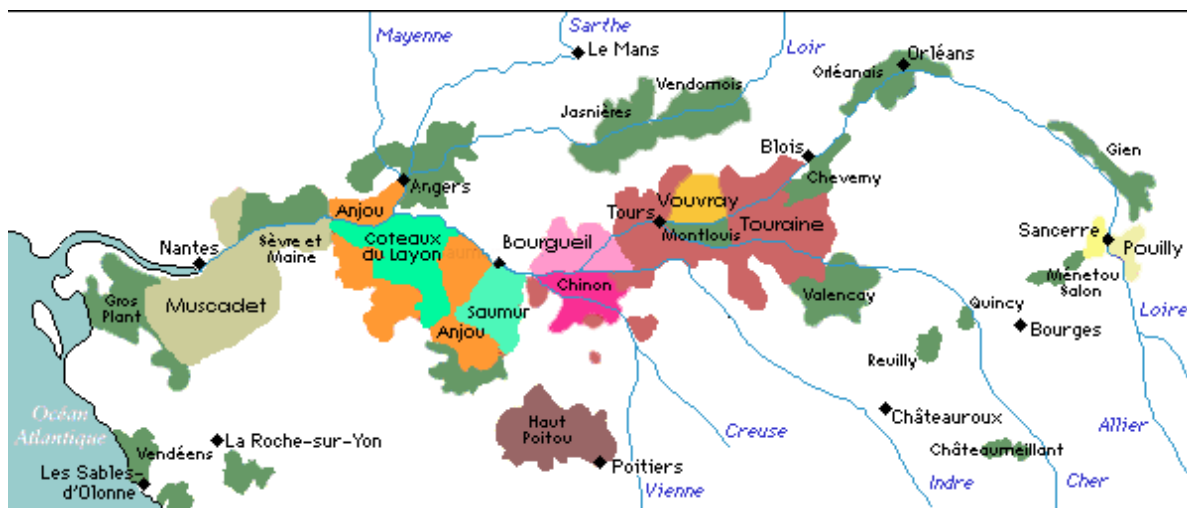
Didier Champalou makes beautiful, ethereal Vouvray. His wines have a rounded, tender, almost buttery texture with suggestions of apples and ripe quinces sheathed in delicate threads of honey. The grapes for the Vouvray Sec are cultivated on argilo-calcaire soils and are the earliest harvested to preserve their vivacity. The wine ferments at an even cool temperature and is aged in troglodyte “cellar-caves” gouged from the limestone. The balance that the Champalous seek to achieve in this wine is “sec tendre”, in other words dry but soft and supple in the mouth. Delicious with rillettes, trout, rabbit, and pork. The Cuvée des Fondraux, a demi-sec, is from densely planted 50-year-old vines propitiously located on slopes of argilo-silicieux terroir. An enticing golden colour draws you to nose an exotic bouquet of lavender honey, sweet grape, and marzipan; the palate reinforces this delightful impression. Chenin Blanc like this works well with many types of food; it will accompany wild salmon, white meats, and various cheeses, whilst the gorgeous floral Vouvray Brut should be sampled in a field (Elysian or otherwise) with a gobload of wild strawberries. This cuvée was traditionally known as pétillant. The base wine for the Brut is the sec tendre which undergoes a secondary fermentation in the bottle with the residual sugar of the wine. The estate calls this “pétillant naturel”. The cultivation of the mousse takes place in the troglodytic cellars where the cool ambient temperature contributes to the finesse of the bubbles and the aroma of the Chenin is allowed to re-establish itself after the second fermentation. Delightful nose of honey, sweet hay and quince, lively acidity supports the rich apple fruit.

Back in 1998, Champalou first released a thrilling special cuvée Le Portail from an enclosed south-facing microterroir, an extraordinarily intense oak-matured dry wine of crystalline purity and with, as the Americans would say, the whole nine yards of length. Fascinating aromas of dry pollen, amazing finesse. They make only three hundred cases of this virtuous rarity, so grab some while you can (although we would prefer if you left it for us).

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|------|------------------------------|----|
| NV | VOUVRAY BRUT | Sp |
| 2022 | VOUVRAY SEC | W |
| 2022 | VOUVRAY “CUVEE DES FONDRAUX” | W |
| 2021 | VOUVRAY SEC “LE PORTAIL” | W |

Judge Red – “I am the Loire!!”

(Comic Book Heroes for Our Age)



You're looking at Montlouis now (south of the yellow blob that is Vouvray)

DOMAINE FRANTZ SAUMON, Montlouis – *Organic (Ecocert)*

Frantz Saumon used to be a forester in both Canada and France for several years. In 2001 he decided to take over a small three-hectare property in Montlouis near Tours. Frantz is another non-interventionist and works without chemicals in the vineyards. The winery is an underground cellar carved into the tuffeau, the ubiquitous fossil-rich clay of the region, and all the wines are vinified in barrels (some 228l, some 400l) only with the indigenous yeasts. *Le Clos du Chêne* is a dry wine made from Chenin grapes from a 95-year-old vineyard on silex and clay. The wine is unfiltered, and no sulphur is added. With its spiky personality and honeyed texture this Montlouis is designed for the most regal salmon that you can lay your mitts on. He has also developed a negoci wine business and plays playful pet nats, amongst others. After an absence, we have the welcome return of the Mineral +- this time sans appellation as with all of Frantz's other wines from now on.

| | | |
|------|---|-------|
| 2023 | SAUVIGNON | W |
| 2022 | VD FRANTZ CHENIN | W |
| 2022 | MINERAL + | W |
| 2019 | MONTLOUIS "CLOS DU CHENE" | W |
| 2022 | PETITE GAULE DU MATIN ~ Chenin, Chardonnay, Sauvignon | Sp/W |
| 2022 | PET NAT ROSE REBIFFE ~ Grolleau, Gamay | Sp/Ro |

DOMAINE LE CLOCHER, LES VINS DE SAINTE-ANNE, BRENDAN TRACEY, Vendômois – Organic methods

Brendan Tracey didn't land in this corner of the Loire overnight; he is a New-Jersey native who spent most of his youth in San Francisco where his parents moved to in the 60s' to follow the hippy trail. When in San Francisco, Brendan lived through the cultural revolution embodied by this city, he soon developed a passion for music, going to concerts at the Fillmore Auditorium, listening to psychedelic bands and then much later to punk musicians. His mother being French, he travelled from time to time to France and eventually moved to Blois in 1971 at the age of 15, initially to better his French, staying with his aunt. He went to high school there and passed his baccalauréat in 1974, beginning all the while to love this country.

Brendan came back to California in 1977 and there, he joined several music groups of the hard-core punk movement in California, as one of these groups was looking for a singer and he happened to be a good singer. It worked well and he went on stage in the first part of events featuring The Dead Kennedys, Black Flag and the Avengers to name a few. Having kept contact with a friend whom he met during his high school years in France, he came back to France in 1980, married her and stayed in France for good.

Hey, ho, let's go!!"

The Ramones' battle cry has been a constant source of inspiration since I got started out in wine making, back in 2010. The punk rock movement taught me a few positive things about getting the nerve to do my own thing in viticulture. What's foremost to me is the inspiration of the moment and the spontaneous energy it takes to make it all happen, without regards to conventional practices or being worried about what people might say. For example, I don't filter my wines. I discovered organic and natural wines thanks to Thierry Puzelat, one of the pioneers in the Loire Valley. This man simply went back to basics, renewing with ancestral methods that were in vogue before the post-war industrial onslaught. Low cost, extensive production, to feed the starving masses, with little, or no regards to long term effects on human health, or the environment. That was the "noble" argument of the time. In my opinion, a winemaker is a humble assistant to nature. He, or she, use their technical abilities, and their creative inspiration, to make the best of an ever-changing cosmological context. Every year, each variety, terroir, and climatic situation imposes decisions on the way grapes are grown, harvested, and fermented. In that glass of wine you behold, you can see, breathe, and taste, a concentrate of an eighteen-to-twenty-four-month cycle that is the result of passion, energy, and an alternative to standardisation.

He spent his training partly as Thierry Puzelat's négoce, taking advantage of Thierry's rigorous winemaking and vineyard management expertise. He started his own business in 2010 making wines from purchased grapes (the equivalent of 2 hectares then) and from the start he vinified the natural way, using only wild yeast and working like Thierry on reds, with semi-carbonic macerations. For the whites, Brendan got his inspiration from Philippe Tessier. Now the overall vineyard surface Brendan works from is 5 hectares.

Brendan makes various wines from Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Gamay, Côt, Romorantin, Cabernet Franc and Pineau d'Aunis. Gorge Sèche is a blend of 50 % Pineau d'Aunis, 25 % Côt and 25 % Gamay.

Pour Une Poignée de Bouteilles is a humorous reference to an iconic Western by Sergio Leone, with the would-be-Clint-Eastwood character in the foreground holding his hand ready to grasp a bottle. It's actually the only label which Brendan didn't design himself, even the Coinstot Vino label is his work, if inspired by the bar's logo. It was designed by a friend-caviste in Blois who is also a designer.

The grapes (50 % Pinot Noir, 50 % Côt) are also farmed organic by Franck Rio, a grower-friend in Saint Julien de Chédon along the Cher River (further east from Clos Roche Blanche and Noella Morantin). The Pinot Noir dominates the nose of this light red wine, whilst there is an agreeable perly impression in the mouth, as Brendan doesn't add sulphur during the élevage or bottling, except for homeopathic doses on the incoming grapes.

Earthy natural style which has become a trademark of the Loire, with the savoury elements firmly in control. Medium ruby in colour, lots of savoury gravel, herbaceous, and soil notes mark the bouquet, with fresh cranberry and darker fruits in a subsidiary position. There are hints of liquorice and pepper.

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|------|--|---|
| 2021 | POIGNEE DES BOUTEILLES | R |
| 2022 | CAPITALISME ROUGE ~ Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc | R |
| 2020 | WAH WAH LIGHT GAMAY | R |

TOURAINE**DOMAINE DU SALVARD, M. DELAILLE, Cheverny**

Classified as a VDQS in 1973, Cheverny moved to full AOC in 1993. The appellation extends along the left bank of the Loire from Sologne to the outskirts of Orleans. Its symbol is the castle of Cheverny, built in the style of Louis XIII. Domaine Salvard has been a family wine estate since the 1890s. From father to son, the Delailles continue to transmit the family's winemaking passion. Craftsmen of terroir and quality since the beginning, the latest generation expertly manage their 30 ha of vines with a program of conscientious vineyard management. After the grapes for the Cheverny Blanc are picked they receive a short maceration followed by a pneumatic pressing. Settling of the juice for 48 hours is succeeded by an alcoholic fermentation in thermoregulated stainless steel tanks at a temperature of 18-20°C for 10 days. The wine rests on its fine lees at 12°C for 3-12 months of maturation (according to the cuvée) before bottling. So much for the fiche technique. Made from 90% Sauvignon and 10% Chardonnay the Cheverny Blanc is junior Sancerre with intense gooseberry crispness. The nose is full and fruity with elderflower and blackcurrant bud aromas and the creaminess of the Chardonnay fills out the palate providing weight and structure. Try it with goat's cheese (Pouilly St Pierre); it would also go well with smoked eel, snails à la bourguignonne, crayfish and asparagus. The Cheverny Rouge is another one of those "the cranberry-juice-is-on-the-loose" numbers, a fruitsome soother blended from Pinot Noir and Gamay. Mildly serious frivolity if you know what I mean. Grapes are macerated and fermentation with the skins last 8-10 days at 28°C so most of the colour and aroma is drawn out. Gentle pneumatic pressing avoids extracting harsh tannins. After malolactic the wine is stored in underground vats before bottling. A mid-cherry red, an engaging nose of red cherries, cloves, and earth, lively, fresh and fruity with strawberry and liquorice dominant on the palate with acidity and tannin provided by the Pinot, the red Cheverny is a good accompaniment to guinea fowl, chicken, charcuterie and hard cheeses.

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| 2023 | CHEVERNY BLANC | W |
| 2023 | CHEVERNY ROUGE PETIT SALVARD | R |

CEDRIC ALLION, Touraine

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|------|--|---|
| 2022 | SAUVIGNON DE TOURAINE "LES GRANDES VIGNES" | W |
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DOMAINE GUY ALLION, Touraine

This domaine with its beautiful Touraine-style house made from tufa produces first class Sauvignon from vines grown on perruche (sandy-clay) soil. The estate is managed according to the Terra Vitis programme, a codified system which posits not only respect for the environment but knowledge of the land, parcel by parcel. This sensitivity to the environment means that natural rather than chemical solutions can be pursued in the vineyard. The grapes are picked at maximum ripeness and immediately transported to the winery to prevent oxidation. This Sauvignon de Touraine, which in previous years has garnered high praise from the Guide Hachette, has lifted aromas of elderflower cordial, Victoria plums and hints of grass. The palate is filled with gooseberry fool infused with elderflower and hints of summer fruit.

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|------|---|---|
| 2023 | SAUVIGNON DE TOURAINE | W |
| 2023 | SAUVIGNON DE TOURAINE – ½ bottle – stelvain | W |
| 2023 | SAUVIGNON – 5-litre BIB | W |
| 2023 | SAUVIGNON – 20-litre KEYKEG | W |
| 2022 | SAUVIGNON DE TOURAINE "ORIGINALE" BIO | W |

I'm going to nail my tastebuds to the standard here – these are my wines. While they are certainly mad enough to appeal to my warped sensibility, they also have a sheer honesty that seems bring a smile of bemused lack of recognition to all who taste them. I enjoy their unorthodoxy on all levels; I'm content to delve into their undoubted pelagic depths at my leisure. Situated in the heart of Sologne, 35 km from Blois, Claude Courtois and his sons elaborate their wines according to ancestral methods and are zealous advocates of natural wine. "Nature admits no lie", as Carlyle said, and Courtois (Claude) often says that his wine is made from "true grapes", pointing out that the French vineyards are generally doped with chemicals to guarantee bigger yields. There is a price to pay for whereas a vigneron using chemicals can tend ten hectares by himself, in bio it takes three people. The first time Eric met Claude Courtois the latter was digging a hole in the ground on his estate. "What's the hole for?" Eric asked. "To bury my enemies", replied Claude darkly. You spray at your peril in his proximity. Claude won't sell you wine unless you taste it with him and he assesses the cut of your jib, and even then, he may not have any wine to sell.

He is one of the wild men of the region, fierce, generous, and capricious, guiding beautiful naturally expressive wines to the bottle. Claude Courtois has created a small farm which exemplifies what biodynamics is all about in terms of biodiversity and self-sufficiency, although he does not consider himself to be a biodynamic grower. As we will hear Claude is not fond of being pigeon-holed or have his methods categorized. Recently, he has handed the reins to one of his sons, Etienne, and just kept a couple of hectares for himself. Together they farm a balanced & completely chemical-free 13 hectares of vines in the heart of the Sologne. Courtois also grows organic wheat, which he feeds to his cows who provide the manure for the vines. "Nothing comes into my vineyard," he says, meaning no chemicals ever. He has created a well-balanced, biodiversity with trees, fruit trees, vines, woods & fields. No pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, chemical fertilizers, or synthetic chemicals of any kind are allowed on the vines or in the soil of the vineyards. He has his own methods for promoting the diverse life of the soil. The grapes – Gamay, Cabernet Franc, Côt (Malbec), Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc & Pineau d'Aunis and maybe up to a further forty varieties (ye dare not ask)—are harvested by hand and only indigenous yeasts are used during fermentation.

Claude regards the soil on his farm as a living organism. He lives in harmony with nature & the wines he crafts are a pure and vibrantly alive testament to outstanding biodynamic winemaking. I mean winemaking. The wines here aren't submitted to a rigid temperature control and there are fluctuations along the seasons, which doesn't seem to harm the wines, it could even make them more apt to stand their SO₂-free life without accident. With Courtois you should not speak about the variety. It is always about the terroir of the cuvée. There are probably around twenty cuvées, made by design or caprice or the restless desire to experiment and push boundaries. As if that wasn't enough Claude says that wines like Nacarat are made to a secret, new recipe. Darkly mysterious as ever we must accept it for what it is rather than probe its origins.

Quartz is vinified in barrel & aged for 12-24 months in oak. It drinks well in its youth, though decanting is highly recommended, & the wine can age for a decade. Golden straw in the glass with shimmering pale highlights. The nose offers sliced apple & poached pear backed by apple chutney spiced with brown sugar, nutmeg, cinnamon & allspice. The palate is very nutty, with a firm acidity. The wine finishes long & vibrant, with great mineral & core fruit presence & a lingering inner mouth perfume of pear eau de vie. This is a truly outstanding, complex wine and we know, from experience, that it ages for many a moon. Roots by name and by nature Racines is from hand-harvested, destemmed, and gently pressed grapes (around 30 varieties including Cabernet Franc, Côt & Cabernet Sauvignon from 20 hl/ha). Only natural yeasts are used, and the juice undergoes an extended maceration. Vinified in barrel and then aged for 36 months in oak. Deep purple in the glass the nose is redolent with pounded stones, plum, cherries, warm iron, and damp chalk. The palate has great depth of dried currant, fig and plum hewn to a deep mineral bed. The wine has lovely acidity, a terrific structure and finishes with red berry fruit and mineral zest. Such vitality as if the roots referred to had sucked the life blood from the very soil. Many roads at Les Caves lead to

Romorantin, a grape variety introduced to the Sologne by François Ist who planted it on his mother's property situated in Romorantin which was, at that time the capital of Sologne, and from which town it derives its name. This wine undergoes an élevage of eighteen months. The nose is beautifully flowery with notes of Mediterranean flowers, laurel leaves, acacia, and fresh almond, whilst the palate has tremendous tension and minerality. Etourneaux, meanwhile, is pure Gamay (de Chaudenay and a Jus Blanc) with nice pepper notes, beautiful stony minerality. Marked by black confit fruits (cassis, cherry) with a distinctive minerality and a lightly tannic structure this is fresh and balanced style of wine. Great persistence with secondary aromas of smokiness. Recommended with well-preserved tommes de vaches. With aeration this cuvée booms.

L'Icaunais means inhabitant of the Yonne. There were 9,000 hectares of this Gascon variety in the Yonne (Northern Burgundy) before phylloxera. According to the official records of the varieties surfaces as of 1988, there were only 3 hectares of Gascon left in the whole world. Yields are naturally low, and the wine spends between 18 and 24 months in old futs. The mouth is savoury and mineral, and the length is terrific. An hour in the carafe reveals the true nature of the wine. Utterly rooted in their terrain, they are deep, rootsy-earthly, slow wines, brewed with patience, intuition, and love. Don't call them organic or biodynamic or natural. Don't call them at all; they'll call you.

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| 2022 | QUARTZ BLANC | W |
| 2020 | ROMORANTIN | W |
| 2020 | RACINES BLANC | W |
| 2018 | LE PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2018 | CABERNET FRANC | R |
| 2019 | COT | R |
| 2019 | RACINES ROUGE | R |
| 2017 | ETOURNEAUX ~ Gamay two types | R |
| 2019 | L'ICAUNAIS ~ Gascon | R |

DOMAINE LE BRISEAU, NATHALIE GAUBICHER & EMILE HEREDIA, Jasnières – Organic methods

Christian Chaussard studied and then taught viticulture and oenology whilst running a small estate in Vouvray. For financial reasons he had to give the latter up, but soon decided that he wanted to practise vine-growing and winemaking. Before accomplishing that goal, he met Nathalie Gaubicher, a Swiss actress with an oenologist and sommelier diploma, and they set out to find vines somewhere in France. In 2002, they settled in the Jasnières/Coteaux-du-Loir area in northern Touraine. The entirety of Jasnières covers eighty hectares of vines, and Coteaux-du-Loir about two hundred hectares. The soils are largely all clay and silica over a subsoil of limestone, and Domaine le Briseau was started with four hectares of vines planted mainly with Chenin Blanc and Pineau d'Aunis. In 2007, the estate had grown to eleven hectares. All vineyard work is done according to the principles of organic viticulture (with the certification of *Qualité France*): no pesticides, insecticides or chemical fertilizers are used; nettle and horsetail decoctions are sprayed on the foliage; copper is used in modest quantity (less than 5kg/ha); the vines are ploughed, and grass allowed to grow between the rows. In 2006, the estate started its conversion to biodynamic principles.

Apart from biodynamic viticulture, the following harvesting and cellar practices are followed: The harvest is done by hand in 10kg boxes. The white grapes are pressed lightly and slowly. *Débourbage* (first racking to separate solid matter from juice) takes place after twenty-four hours, then the must goes into barrels for the alcoholic fermentation (none of the barrels are new, but rather four- to eight-year-old.) Malolactic fermentation usually follows and is not stopped by any means. Nothing is added: there is no chaptalisation, no selected yeasts, no sulphur, no enzymes, no de-acidification, no fining. There is one racking to get rid of the wine's gross lees, and then aging for several months, according to each *cuvée*. There is a light filtration and addition of 2g/hl of sulphur at the time of bottling. The red grapes are trodden by foot before going into maceration vats. Maceration occurs under the protection of carbon dioxide in a semi-liquid stage (semi-carbonic maceration) and lasts one to three weeks. The musts are then pressed and go into barrels for their alcoholic and malolactic fermentations. Again, nothing is added to the wines and the same principles are used at bottling.

It is said that, maybe three or four times a century, the appellation of Jasnières makes the greatest Chenin on earth. I like this notion of a *terroir*, notoriously temperamental, that unabashedly fixes you with its glittering eye and declares: "I am what I am – take me, or preferably, leave me!" Most certainly the vagaries of vintage determine the style of the wine: the difference, for example, between 2004 & 2005 is profound. Even the more sumptuous examples have an astringency that keeps your palate guessing. There's warmth, waxiness and those almond notes typical of Chenin, some sly sherry aromatics and pulped-pear-mingled with-flint-fruit. And here's the rub, the longer you leave it the more profound it becomes, so please *carafe* to allow the dry honey to become runny. Coteaux du Loir means Pineau d'Aunis, a grape as delicious as it is unknown. Their wines have a wonderful way of being carefree, yet beautifully made. A cornucopia of red fruit notes – wild strawberry, raspberry, and thimbleberry with a hint of rose geranium, are graced with the characteristic spice of Pineau d'Aunis, revealed as a dusting of black pepper. Lovely just for sipping. Send in the malevolent clown with Patapon. Brilliantly purple, utterly bonny, a distillation of red berry aromas and flavours. The nose is reminiscent of fermented grape juice; it is warm, approachable, deliciously savoury showing as it does a combination of crunchy strawberry, sweet beet and black pepper fruit, backed up by delicate smokiness. The palate is dry and taut with a sweet wild strawberry character, and a little chalky perfume. There is an appealing freshness to it, and a lovely peppery finish.

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| 2020 | "PATAPON" ROUGE ~ Pineau d'Aunis | R |
| 2019 | « LE VERRE DES POETES » ~ Pineau d'Aunis | R |

Let me not to the marriage of true wines
 Admit impediments. Must is not must
 Which alters when the winemaker fines
 Or strip filters the juice to overtly adjust.
 O no! it is an ever-fixed marker
 That looks on critics and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wandering Parker,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Wine needs no obvious tool, no obfuscating techniques
 To nurture the naked juice from barrel's womb
 Such wine alters not within brief hours and weeks,
 But bears out even to its final tomb.
 If this be error and upon me proved,
 Then I am a fool, from my wits removed.
 Cod Shakespeare

DOMAINE DE LA GARRELIÈRE, FRANÇOIS PLOUZEAU, Touraine –Biodynamic

Inspect our Plouzeaus.

François and Pascaline Plouzeau tend their 50 acres of biodynamic vineyards, near the village of Richelieu just to the south of Tours. The vineyards at Domaine de la Garrelière have been certified organic by Ecocert and biodynamic by Biodyvin. They started working the land here (the estate once belonged to the Duc de Richelieu) in the 1970's, slowly bringing it back to life after many years of conventional farming and have quickly become one of the rising stars of the region. Yields are low – around 40hl/ha in a region where 60 hl/ha is closer to the norm and the vineyards are on south-east facing slopes with limestone and clay soils. The wines are made very naturally...harvested by hand, natural yeasts, and carbonic maceration...minimal sulphur is used in the wine-making process.

Gamay Sans Tra la la has bright aromas of wild cherry, plum and woodland fruits with hints of exotic spice, pepper, violets, sous bois, herbs and pan juices. There are plenty of earthy facets along with some raspberry and red-fruited high-tones – quite a pretty smelling wine. Lively, light of body and full of flavour in the mouth, with plum, blackberry and wild cherry fruits, all supple and juicy slipping nicely through to a mid-palate that shows hints of spice, dried flowers, rosemary, earth, and roasted meats.

Le Blanc does a bit more than it says on the tin. Sauvignon, natch, and it is natch, extra maturity on the vine and low yields conferring some fleshy mouthfeel, the kind of wine that glues a meal together from soup to nuts.

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| 2023 | LE BLANC DE MARIE SAUVIGNON | W |
| 2023 | GAMAY SANS TRA LA LA | R |

Getting Real...

There is no doubt that the Loire is the real and spiritual home of the natural wine movement. This is undoubtedly due to the marginal climate and the commitment growers need to put into their vineyards. Biodynamics is hugely risky, eschewing chemical solutions to problems such as mildew means that every vintage is a lottery. However, having worked amongst their vines with such extraordinary devotion, many vigneronns wanted to express the terroir and the typicity by relying on minimal interventions in the winery. Thus, we have natural wines with wild yeast fermentations, no filtration, no fining and little or no added sulphur dioxide. It allows us to understand what wine tastes like when it is naked. Some critics complain that it is not wine; they are not familiar the style, the uncertainty and volatility. Others see it as a kind of irrefutable truth, an expression of identity and individuality in a world of homogeneity.

CLOS DU TUE-BOEUF, Touraine – Organic (Bureau Veritas)

Since the Middle Ages, there have been records about the lieu-dit “le Tue-Boeuf” and its excellent wines which were enjoyed by the local nobility and the kings of France. The family name Puzelat is mentioned in 15th century documents.

History, though, is not the story here. It’s about two brothers, Jean-Marie and Thierry Puzelat, who tend their 10-hectare family estate in Les Montils (in the Cheverny AOC) and rent 6 hectares in a village nearby, in the Touraine AOC. The region, near the hunting grounds of Sologne, has always used a wide variety of grapes. Since the 60’s, the Puzelats’ father had been making his own selections of vines to replant, and left them with vines of Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Menu Pineau (or Arbois), Pinot Noir, Gamay, Cabernet Franc and Côt (or Malbec).

Jean-Marie (the older brother by 10 years) was joined on the estate by Thierry in the early 90’s and they began converting their vines to organic viticulture. When the Cheverny AOC was created with the 1993 vintage, some varietals became outlawed from the blends, and the brothers started a yearly struggle to get their wines accepted under their appellation. Now, when a wine is rejected, they sell it under a Vin de Pays or Vin de Table label; their customers know and trust their work and methods.

La Guerrerie is a blend of 75% Cot and 25% Gamay and earns its wacky wine moniker. Very earthy with extremely bright fruit such as plum, spice, fresh herbs with ash and wood notes. Dusty, earthy, minerally, complex and savoury. Structured as much by acid as by tannins. Despite its brightness it is on the dark berry fruit side of things. As with other “low sulphur” wines you can’t escape the ping of wild yeast which manifests itself here as warm, doughy smells. This is very full-bodied due to the high content of Côt, but the Gamay softens it and makes it accessible. Chill it for half an hour in the fridge, then carafe it.

Bear in mind this wine and its idiosyncratic nom-du-guerre when you next exclaim “I could murder a steak”. La Guerrerie smells and tastes as if it has slaughtered quite a lot of beef in its time and knows where the bodies are buried. Puzelat has, not unnaturally, been described as the “Pope of unsulphured wine”. Well, we’re glad he believes in the living Cot. Benedictus benedicat!

So many cuvées, so little time. Brin de Chevre is another example of this rare grape – citrus, honey, crystallized ginger. Petit Buisson is a tangy Sauvignon, whilst Buisson Pouilleux is its old vines brer is unlike any other Sauvignon Blanc that you can imagine. Bright light lemon with intense minerality and brilliant notes of honeysuckle, verbena and even persimmon. So exotic. Great palate coating depth. There’s a Cheverny Blanc called Frileuse which mixes Sauvignon Rosé (yes, indeed), Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, and a pair of limpid red Cheverny, both Gamay/Pinot blends.

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| 2023 | TUE-BOEUF SRL VIN BLANC | W |
| 2022 | CLOS DU TUE-BŒUF BRIN DE CHEVRE | W |
| 2022 | CLOS DU TUE-BOEUF CHEVERNY BLANC “FRILEUSE” | W |
| 2022 | CLOS DU TUE-BŒUF CHEVERNY BLANC LA GRAVOTTE | W |
| 2022 | CLOS DU TUE-BOEUF PETIT BUISSON | W |
| 2022 | CLOS DU TUE-BOEUF BUISSON POUILLEUX | W |
| 2022 | CLOS DU TUE-BŒUF ROMORANTIN | W |
| 2022 | CLOS DU TUE-BŒUF VIN ROUGE | R |
| 2022 | CLOS DU TUE-BŒUF PINEAU D’AUNIS | R |
| 2022 | CLOS DU TUE-BOEUF CHEVERNY ROUGE “ROUILLON” | R |
| 2022 | CLOS DU TUE-BOEUF CHEVERNY ROUGE “CAILLIERE » | R |
| 2020 | CLOS DU TUE-BOEUF ROUGE “LA GUERRERIE” | R |
| NV | EAUX DE VIE PEAU SAUVIGNON | Edv |

“Studying wine taught me that there was a very big difference between soil and dirt: dirt is to soil what zombies are to humans. Soil is full of life, while dirt is devoid of it.”

— Olivier Magny, *Into Wine: An Invitation to Pleasure*

DOMAINE HERVE VILLEMADÉ, Cour-Cheverny – Organic

Acacias by Hervé Villemadé. Because you're worth it.

Domaine Hervé Villemadé is an estate of 25 hectares (17 of which are planted) located in Cour-Cheverny. It has passed from father to son from the installation of Hervé's grandfather in 1939. Hervé took over the estate in 1995, after studying viticulture and winemaking. In the late 90's Hervé met Thierry Puzelat (who was then in his second year of organic viticulture) and tasted his wines as well as Marcel Lapierre's Morgons and was struck by their purity. He decided to turn a couple of hectares organic just to check: no synthetic products, but ploughing and hand harvest instead, and also no-or very-little sulphur. The results proved to him that he should travel the non-interventionist path.

The Cheverny Rouge (50% Pinot Noir, 50% Gamay) has appealing aromas of wild cherry and plums and a definite rusticity.... Plenty of spice and earth with hints of minerals, sous bois, meat jus, jasmine and a waft of smoke and liquorice. A lovely sense of freshness on the palate with some wicked, musky, floral notes and a nice pure wild cherry and plum fruits with a touch of redcurrant lift. There are hints of violets, jasmine, and sous bois, plenty of underlying spice and earth studded with meaty/gamey nuance. Built for food with a bright, energetic mouthfeel, quite light in body but not lacking punch and drive and a nicely shaped curtain of fine, ripe chalky tannins. Les Ardiles is 80% Pinot & 20% Gamay in tronconic vats then demi-muids. No sulphur in this wine, just unvarnished fruit – and spice such as caraway and saffron. A beautiful wine.

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| 2023 | CHEVERNY BLANC | W |
| 2020 | COUR-CHEVERNY "LES ACACIAS" ~ Romorantin | W |
| 2022 | CHEVERNY ROUGE | R |
| 2022 | PIVOINE | R |
| 2023 | VDF ROSE ~ Pinot Noir, Gamay | Ro |

CENTRAL VINEYARDS

DOMAINE HENRY PELLE, Menetou-Salon – Organic methods

Situated right in the heart of France, in the extreme east of the Loire Valley, a stone's throw from Bourges lies the charming little Berry village of Morogues with its fields, meadows and slopes clustered around its very beautiful church.

The Domaine Henry Pellé cellars are nestled at the foot of one of these slopes. The vines grow in Kimmeridgian clay-limestone marl made up of myriads of minute fossilized oyster shells called locally terre blanche or white soil. Out of respect for the terroir the estate practices organic viticulture (promoting healthy soil, and a living environment, fauna).

Working the soil and green harvesting helps to control yields, ultimately focusing the fruit flavours. Grapes are gravity fed into pneumatic presses and fermented using natural yeasts while thermos-regulated stainless-steel tanks allow control over fermentation.

These wines with tongue-samba-ing acidity will introduce the notion of oystercide in your mind's palate. Take a shot glass, chill it in t' freezer for twenty minutes, bang some Menetou-S in and deck it with some friendly natives (I'm still speaking bivalves here). Showing lively nostril-arching gorse and broom aromas there is a bristling palatal interplay between grapefruit, blackcurrant and shell-like minerality. Les Blanchais, from 40-year-old vines, is a touch more vinous and more complex. Astonishingly pure mineral nose (slate), grape-pith and crystallised lemon on the palate, beautiful persistence and a rapier thrust of acidity. It's got guilefully gaisous alto-tude in abundance.

The red Menetou, from Pinot Noir, has a clear garnet colour, not much darker than a dark rosé. It shows rather vegetal green-tomato aromas over vinous red fruit at first and hits the palate with a lean and herbal first impression; but a little time in the glass sees the nose add pleasant spicy notes of cinnamon and cloves, and the flavour develops full, almost plush red fruit with plenty of lemony acidity to give it structure.

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| 2022 | MENETOU-SALON BLANC MOROGUES | W |
| 2022 | MENETOU-SALON BLANC MOROGUES "LES BLANCHAIS" | W |
| 2022 | MENETOU-SALON ROUGE MOROGUES | R |

DOMAINE LAPORTE, Pouilly-Fumé

Poised, elegant Pouilly-Fumé from vines grown on a mixture of chalk and flint combining high quality ripe Sauvignon fruit with a fine array of pure mineral flavours. The length is incredible; there are even secondary notes of honey.

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| 2023 | POUILLY-FUME "ROCHE BLANCHE" | W |
|------|------------------------------|---|

DOMAINE DES BERTHIERS, JEAN-CLAUDE DAGUENEAU, Pouilly-Fumé

Jean-Claude is the scion of the famous Dagueneau clan. His vineyards are situated in the terroir called Les Berthiers in the village of Saint-Andelain. This area is composed almost exclusively of hillside vineyards overlooking the Loire River and facing south-southwest. Consequently, these are some of the best-drained soils, with excellent exposure in the appellation. The wine itself sees a short period of skin contact before being slowly cold fermented for 3-4 weeks. It is then aged on the fine lees to give the wine added richness and some of that distinctive smokiness. His basic wine is rich and fruity with a touch of grapefruit and red apple whilst the Cuvée d'Eve, from forty-year-old vines, deserves some relaxation in the decanter to shed its primary austerity. The brevity of the note indicates how little we need to advertise its qualities.

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| 2023 | POUILLY-FUME "LES BERTHIERS" | W |
| 2023 | POUILLY-FUME – ½ bottle | W |
| 2022 | POUILLY-FUME "CUVEE D'EVE" | W |

Terroir – poetically revisited

The vine and the wine it produces are two great mysteries. Alone in the vegetable kingdom, the vine makes the true savour of the earth intelligible to man. With what fidelity it makes the translation! It senses, then expresses, in its clusters of fruits the secrets of the soil. The flint, through the vine, tells us that it is living, fusible, a giver of nourishment. Only in wine does the ungrateful chalk pour out its tears...

Colette – *Earliest Wine Memories*

DOMAINE GERARD FIOU, Sancerre – Organic

This small domaine was one of the first to modernise in the region of Sancerre. The vines are planted on the rocky silex soils, and the resultant wine takes a little time to show its true colours. But when it does, it is impressively pure and expressive of the flint from which it was born. Very pungent elderflower and gooseberry fruit, but there's an edge of ripe pear and pear-drop, with a little suggestion of a more tropical fruit character. Very crisp, clean, and racy on the palate with a core of orchard fruits that is very pure and focused through the mid-palate, with melon and a tangy apple acidity on the finish.

2023

SANCERRE BLANC

W

DOMAINE ALEXANDRE BAIN, Pouilly-Fumé – Biodynamic – certified Demeter

Alexandre's passion for working the land was inspired by his grandfather who was a farmer. At 18 he decided to go to winemaking school in Beaune. He worked for several different vignerons until he was finally able to buy a few hectares of vines in 2007. Alexandre tends his land biodynamically, works with horses and make wines with minimal intervention. Alexandre believes natural wine is the most authentic product of terroir and for this reason his terroir must not be altered by chemicals or by sulphites, which will obscure the hard work he does in the vineyard.

The vineyards (4.9ha) are situated in Tracy-sur-Loire in the north of the Pouilly-Fumé appellation on southwest oriented slopes mixed between Portlandian limestone and Kimmeridgean clay. A lot of work amongst the vines: pruning, debudding, leaf thinning, whilst neither pesticides nor artificial fertilisers are used. Travail du sol is effected with the aid of his horse called Phenomene. This method of working the soil, the vines, the grapes, and the wine is based on ecological responsibility and the desire to create a wine that offers the maximum of pleasure. Golden colour with golden plum fruit and notes of wild honey and spring flowers. Complex nose with a suggestion of marzipan and amontillado behind the rich textured fruit.

The cuvees change from vintage to vintage – some are more on the tropical fruit and lactic richness, others convey greater minerality.

Alexandre calls this wine "Pierre Précieuse" (Precious Stone), because it is made from grapes planted in a parcel called 'Les Courtes Echines' (the short backs or the short spines) that is that is so crammed full of little limestone pebbles that Alexandre comments "you can hardly see the soil itself". These pebbles capture the sun's heat and release it in turn to the vines when the outside temperature is cool, in so doing they enable Alexandre to harvest fully-ripe and sometimes over-ripe grapes, giving his wines richness and depth and length he says, "even though this Pouilly Fumé region is a cold region, all thanks to these precious stones my wines are "ensoleillés" (sunny) and "souriants" (smiling) and gourmands.

The presence of these little stones in the soil means that the ground drains well, too, during periods of heavy rain, which is another plus point. It is easy to see why Alexandre pays such homage to them.

The grapes are pressed whole cluster, the juice runs off by gravity, there is a long slow ambient fermentation, and the wine is aged in tanks on the lees for two years without stirring, allowing for a natural decantation. Full malo is completed and the wine is bottled without filtration or fining and minimal added sulphur and according to the biodynamic calendar.

2020

« TERRE D'OBUS »

W



DOMAINE HENRI BOURGEOIS, Sancerre

Spring has come again. The earth is like a child who knows poems.

Rainer Maria Rilke – *Sonnets to Orpheus*

An acclaimed producer whose wines exhibit the complexity of the terroir of Chavignol, being chalky with a touch of gunflint, initially steely, then ripening in the mouth with a broad array of flavours and wonderful length. The Monts Damnés (M.D.) is from grapes harvested on the Monts Damnés, slopes so steep that they are called “cursed”. A grace and flavour wine that will age and age. Since the eleventh century noblemen would try to outbid each other just to possess a small parcel of this prized land. We would also draw your attention to the manifold other cuvées. The wittily titled Petit Bourgeois misses appellation status by a gnat’s whisker. This belt-tightening faux-Sancerre has undeniable typicity. La Vigne Blanche comes from vines grown on slopes separating the village of Chavignol from Sancerre, the terroir being an amalgam of clay and limestone chalk. Oak aged in barrel for five months on the fine lees, La Vigne Blanche is vinous with herbaceous notes of elderflower and ivy as well as a hint of kiwi fruit. Cuvée d’Antan (70-year-old vines) is a different ball of silex made in “the old style” from vines on south-facing slopes. Viticulture is biodynamic, grapes are harvested by hand and after pressing and maceration the wine is left in old wooden barrels for eighteen months batonnage. Racking is done after the full moon. The style is sui generis: the wine fills the mouth with layer after layer of creamy fruit, a touch of breadiness from the lees and the terroir notes of truffle and warm stone. The Jadis is grown on Kimmeridgean Marl (60-year-old vines) and is made according to grandfather’s recipe. This is a wine of great charisma; very aromatic and concentrated. Complex and well-balanced, Sancerre Jadis reveals aromas of exotic fruits and honey. The oaked Etienne Henri cuvée comes from the older vines on flint clay slopes. Such a method of 17th century requires top-quality grapes for a successful marriage of wood and wine. Alcoholic fermentation is exclusively in oak barrels followed by 12 months of maturation on fine lees. Result: a fine wine of great complexity. Les Demoiselles is a Pouilly-Fumé made from select Sauvignon grapes from the Saint-Laurent Kimmeridgean marls, the site of the first vines planted in Pouilly-Fumé. Around 85% of this wine has been fermented in stainless steel and the other 15% in oak from the Tronçais forest. It is aged on the fine lees for seven to eight months. Finally, don’t neglect the rosé, a real wine by any other name, with its lovely nuances of wild strawberry fruit. All the wines are sublime with cheese.

Once upon a time, o best beloved, a great oak was planted in what would become the National Forest of Saint-Palais near Bourges. As the centuries passed it grew bigger and stronger and one day became the eldest and most majestic of a line of great oaks that were used to build the frame of the Saint Etienne cathedral in Bourges. Located at the crossroads of telluric forces (yes, this was a feng shui oak tree), legend has it that Sully, King Charles V and Agnès Sorel came to rest at the foot of this great oak and many others since used it as a place of assignation. But in 1993 a violent storm struck down the 433 year-old tree. In the subsequent auction the Bourgeois family outbid interested buyers from around the world to preserve this piece of local culture and to renew it by crafting it into barrels in which they placed the fruit of their most cherished Sauvignon and Pinot vines. As you wipe away a misty tear know that the wines are magnificent, liquid testaments to the vessel in which they have been aged. “Old noted oak! I saw thee in a mood /Of vague indifference; and yet with me /Thy memory, like thy fate, hath lingering stood /For years, thou hermit, in the lonely sea /Of grass that waves around thee!”

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| 2023 | PETIT BOURGEOIS | W |
| 2023 | QUINCY | W |
| 2023 | SANCERRE BLANC “LA VIGNE BLANCHE” | W |
| 2023 | SANCERRE BLANC “LA VIGNE BLANCHE” – ½ bottle | W |
| 2021 | SANCERRE BLANC “MARNES KIMMERIDGIENNES” | W |
| 2022 | SANCERRE BLANC “CUVEE JADIS” | W |
| 2023 | SANCERRE BLANC “PURE” | W |
| 2022 | SANCERRE BLANC “CUVEE D’ANTAN” SILEX | W |
| 2019 | SANCERRE BLANC « COTES AUX VALETS » | W |
| 2023 | POUILLY-FUME | W |
| 2020 | POUILLY-FUME “LA DEMOISELLE” | W |
| 2020 | SANCERRE ROUGE “LES BARONNES” | R |
| 2023 | SANCERRE ROSE “LES BARONNES” | Ro |

FOOD AND WINE OF THE LOIRE

Gustave Flaubert once wrote of the Loire valley: “The wind is mild without voluptuousness, the sun soft without ardour; the whole landscape pretty, varied in its monotony, light, gracious, but of a beauty which caresses without captivating, which charms without seducing, and which, in a word, has more common sense than grandeur and more spirit than poetry. It is France.”

Joanna Simon writes in *Wine With Food*: “Gourmet and gourmand, the two extremes (though not opposites of good food) can find contentment in the... Loire region” Stretching as it does from Nantes almost to the Ardèche it would be foolish to generalise about the food from the Loire, but the region, if we may call it so, has an exhilarating gastronomic heritage. Flavours tend to be fresh and subtle rather than heavy and rich. Dishes are cooked simply to highlight the quality of the ingredient. The white wines are pungent from the brine-scented Muscadet to the intensely flavoured (but never heavy) Chenin and Sauvignon to sapid light reds from Cabernet Franc, Gamay or Pinot Noir. Then, of course, there are the fabulous sweet wines...

Beurre Blanc

This is a “*nantaise*” specialty. People from Nantes attribute its creation to Mère Clémence (a restaurant on the levee called the “Divatte”). Its reputation grew quickly, and it began to be served at all the fine tables in Anjou, Tours and all the way to Orléans. Beurre Blanc accompanies pike, salmon, turbot, and even scallops marvellously. The sauce is an emulsion of melted salted butter thickened with a reduction of shallots and vinegar (Muscadet wine vinegar for purists).

Fish & Shellfish

The wild salmon fished in the Loire has now become a part of legend. It is now as rare as truffles would be on the daily lunch table and has been replaced with imported salmon or salmon from fish farms. The salmon is cut into steaks which are then grilled or served in fillet with sauce. Wild salmon should be drunk with Savennières, the muscularity of the noble fish pierced by the harpoon of the wine’s natural acidity, the natural oils of the fish softening and enriching the angularity of the Chenin, a true regenerative mutuality. Pike is a very savoury fish that is gorgeous with *beurre blanc* but may also be served roasted – as it is in Sologne. Loire River pikeperch fillet in Vouvray wine with asparagus and morel mushrooms is a classic rendering (with Vouvray, naturally). On a similar theme, grilled shad with wild mushrooms and sorrel, or braised with white wine with *beurre blanc* are particularly good hosed down by a nippy Anjou or Saumur Blanc. *Friture de Loire* is composed of bleak fish and gudgeon and is prepared with garlic butter. Muscadet is a good bet here. Muscadet and oysters are another happy marriage and for the skyscraper fruits de mer platter good quantity as well as good quality is a prerequisite! You can even try Gros Plant (or maybe not). *Anguille* (eel) is prepared in matelote sauce with red wine, cut into chunks, stewed in red wine with mushrooms, small white onions and lardons and sometimes served with fresh pasta and local truffles. Local chefs will cook their eel in Chinon or Bourgueil; these reds have an earthiness that respects this hearty rustic dish. More elaborate dishes might include: sautéed scallops served with vegetable parmentière, whipped cardamom sauce and beetroot butter or John Dory fillets served with ginger butter and garden vegetables, or roasted langoustines set around a creamy risotto made with local andouillette (sausage made of chitterlings) seasoned with shellfish vinaigrette. One of Henri Bourgeois’ oak-aged white Sancerres would fit the bill beautifully here; even a red Sancerre would do.

Charcuterie, Snails, Poultry and Prunes

The rillettes from Tours and Vouvray are just as renowned as those from Mans. Rillons are delicious served warm, not hot. According to Balzac they look like “*pork residue sautéed in fat which looks like cooked truffles.*” Uncork that bottle of Gamay de Touraine from Henry Marionnet which has been cooling in the fridge and gulp with extreme prejudice. That opposition of sweet fat with the hint of bitter cherry and damson makes a happy marriage. The rustic flavours of a casserole of snails from the St. Nicolas de Bourgueil area, Touraine high quality free-range chicken, Bresse pigeon or calf’s sweetbreads braised perhaps with candied lemon and cumin and served with turnip-rooted chervil attract a chunky Anjou-Villages (they don’t come chunkier than those from Ogereau) or an earthy Saumur-Champigny. “Potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism are very good for the lips: especially prunes and prism,” quoth Mrs General in Little Dorrit. Cooked with pork, rabbit, chicken and fish, prunes feature heavily in Loire gastronomy – prisms are noticeably absent. A good Bourgueil, such as the one from Domaine de la Chevalerie, is a tremendously adaptable red; its soothing gravelly flavours, ripe tannins, and refreshing acidity, neither dominate nor are dominated, but flow, swirl and eddy like a river around the constituent parts of the dish.

Goat’s cheese

The area along the Loire is known for the diversity of goats’ cheese. The “Chèvres”, as goats’ cheeses are called in France, are available in pyramids, rolls or conical shapes. Some of the varieties are coated with plant coals or depending on the degree of maturity, covered with a fine mould rind. The Crottin de Chavignol is most noteworthy; others such Sainte-Maure de Touraine, Selles sur Cher, and Pouligny Saint-Pierre are worth seeking out. Gourmets respect these goat’s cheeses which have been produced according to an old tradition in the places they are named after. Take a mature piece of goat’s cheese and put a little on the tip of your tongue and drink some fine Sancerre and take in the interplay of chalkiness, creaminess and tangy gooseberry as the cheese crumbles on your taste buds.

THE AUVERGNE

Too much and too little wine. Give him none, he cannot find truth; give him too much, the same.

- Blaise Pascal (born in Clermont-Ferrand)

DOMAINE JEAN MAUPERTUIS, Côtes d’Auvergne – *Biodynamic*

Stop sneering at the back. We’ll provide the vin if you provide the table.

Whether grown in volcanic hills called puy, in Limagne, or on the hills (domes) on the eastern edge of the Massif Central, Auvergne wines are made with the Gamay variety, which has been cultivated in the region for centuries. Domaine Maupertuis is in the commune of Pérignat-lès-Sarlièves fairly close to Clermont-Ferrand (twinned with Salford and Aberdeen amongst other places). The vines, some of them 100 years old, are planted on a mixture of terroirs, but the Pierres Noires (from vineyards adjacent to La Roche Noire) are on volcanic basalt. Slightly cloudy with an aroma of barnyard when it is first opened. This dissipates quickly but leaves behind a topsoil smell that remains to accompany the raspberry notes.

Sour cherry and pomegranate seed flavours are accompanied with earthiness too. This is a Gamay as nature intended, organic, unfiltered and unsulphured, as prickly as a hedgehog with ants in his pants, a dark pickled damson strut across the tongue, and you should drink it with alacrity from a pot Lyonnais with some tripoux or “Truffade” a baked mixture of sliced potatoes and Tome de Cantal. By the way there is some Mirefleurien in this wine, a grape variety named after an Auvergnate village. What it gives other than a soupçon of local street cred I have no idea.

It is important to appreciate the simple things in this complex world of ours, as someone once wrote. The Guillaume is an aerial number and asks you to remove the bottle to the nearest picnic zone. Neyrou is 100% Pinot Noir from 25-year-old vines that grow on an outcrop of marl with limestone overlooking the plain of Limagne. Neyrou is the ancient Auvergnate name for Pinot Noir. Fermented with natural yeasts in concrete vats this is beautifully pure, elegant Pinot with dark red fruits and peppery notes. Take the Bulles by the short and pointies. It is a cute Pet Bul made au naturel (natch) with wild yeasts and (second) fermentation finishing in the bottle with manual disgorgement with no malolactic, no filtering, no fining and no sulphur. Dare we say that this wine has vulcanicity? We daren’t.

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| NV | VDF GAMAY “LA PLAGE” (2023) | R |
| NV | VDF GAMAY D’AUVERGNE “CUVEE PIERRES NOIRES” (2023) | R |
| NV | VDF PINOT NOIR « NEYROU » | R |
| NV | VDF PINK BULLES | Sp/Ro |



LE CLOS SAINT-JEAN, RICHARD & JOEL LAPALUE, Côtes Roannaise– *Organic*

Located by the village of Saint-Jean de Maurice, a famous medieval town, in a commune that is literally at the beginning of the Loire. Organic since 1996 (certified Ecocert) this small domaine is situated on steep granite slopes Harvest is by hand and ferment is whole harvest in stainless tanks.

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| 2022 | COTES ROANNAISE ROUGE TRADITION | R |
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DOMAINE DES PALAIS, YANN PALAIS, Côtes Roannaise– *Organic certified AB*

This is an old vineyard abbey now a family estate in the village of Ambierle. The vineyards are on pink granite at 400 metres above sea level. La Tassée des Anges is a blend of 40% Syrah and 50% Gamay whole bunch fermented with its own yeasts in stainless tanks. A natural little number with very low sulphur addition. This is what the Roannaise does so well – big scoops of fruit but steering wide of the bubblegum idiom.

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| 2022 | GAMAY SYRAH LA TASSEE DES ANGES IGP D’URFE | R |
| 2022 | LE CARRE DU PRIEUR GAMAY | R |
| 2023 | LE CARRE DU PRIEUR GAMAY ~ 10 -litre BIB | R |

*Here once, through an alley Titanic,
Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul-
Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.
There were days when my heart was volcanic*

Edgar Allan Poe

LES CHEMINS DE L'ARKOSE, YVAN BERNARD & AUDREY BALDASSIN, Côtes d'Auvergne – *Biodynamic (Demeter)*

The Les Chemins de l'Arkose domaine is in the heart of Montpeyroux in the Auvergne region. Yvan Bernard and Audrey Baldassin cultivate 8-hectares of vines on the various beautiful terroirs of Puy-de-Dôme. The soils are clay-limestone, mixed with volcanic ash with basaltic intrusions. In a vineyard area that is very fragmented and therefore difficult to mechanise, they work by hand and with respect for the environment and according to the precepts of organic culture, in other words without insecticides, fungicides or synthetic chemical treatments. A former student of the Beaune wine school in Burgundy, Yvan Bernard settled in the region in 2001 at the age of 22. Not being from a winegrowing family, he had to rent plots of vines from different owners to start him on his path. For twenty years, he converted his domaine to organic farming and offered wines under his name. In 2020, Yvan joined forces with Audrey Baldassin who had already been working at the estate for a few years. The estate became Les Chemins de l'Arkose and so the adventure continued. Each plot produces a different cuvée. The eight hectares of the estate are spread over the communes of Montpeyroux, La Sauvetat, Authezat, Corent and Boudes. Yvan switched the entire farm to organic farming (certified by Ecocert) in 2010. They use only plant-based treatments, work according to the lunar calendar, whereas tillage is the main work in the vineyards. Respect for indigenous yeasts, maceration and ageing on lees adapted to each cuvée, are the leitmotifs in the cellar.

Les Terrasses is a pure and racy (yet profound) expression of Syrah which is reminiscent of its Rhone counterpart. This wine is from a massale selection of Syrah from Côte-Rôtie and 'Petite Syrah' (Serine) from the Authezat conservatory vineyard. The vines are planted on terraces at an altitude of 400 metres, on the Arkose terroir of the beautiful village of Montpeyroux. The wine is fermented and aged in amphora and has an earthy/red brick quality. Juicy red berries, violets and peppery notes to the fore. Les Terrasses has both amplitude and balance. Would happily accompany veal, spiced pigeon, duck breast and all manner of game. The 100% Gamay Cuvée Arkose, from 60-year-old vines, and aged for 12 months in barrels, is distinguished by its purity and energy. The wine exhibits a beautiful purple colour, the nose is exuberant, evoking juicy red cherries, roses and white pepper. In the mouth one finds gorgeous fleshy red and blue fruits with delicate hints of vanilla.

Pairs with sausage with aligot, charcuterie, stuffed cabbage, terrines, and Cantal cheese. Finally, Le Clos Rouge Cuvée Parcellaire hails from a plot of old Gamay with some Pinot Noir planted on calcareous soil with basaltic debris. This red has a touch more body than the others but is still marked by mountain freshness, and its purity is down to excellent work in the vines and sympathetic low-intervention winemaking.

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| 2022 | LE CLOS PARCELLAIRE ROUGE | R |
| 2021 | ARKOSE ROUGE VIEILLES VIGNES | R |
| 2022 | LES TERRASSES ROUGE | R |

DOMAINE VERDIER-LOGEL, JACKY LOGEL & ODILE VERDIER, Côtes du Forez– *Organic (certified AB France)*

The Côtes du Forez appellation is located between the Loire and Allier rivers in the centre of France. Domaine Verdier-Logel is the leading estate of this small and obscure appellation where vineyards are few and far between. (There are only nine growers and one co-op) The Côtes du Forez hillsides are foothills of the volcanic mountains of the Massif Central and have soils of granite and volcanic composition. Due to the difficult climate only parcels with the best exposition and soils are planted to grape vines. The appellation's laws mandate Gamay as the sole grape to be used and Verdier-Logel produces separate wines from volcanic soils "Volcanique" and granite soils "Cuvée des Gourmets". These soils impart a rich earthy fragrance to the wines which combines well with the elegant fruitiness of the Gamay grape.

Their vines used to be from clonal (the practice of selecting a single plant in the vineyard and taking cuttings for propagation) in the beginning; but have now switched to selection massale (in which cuttings are selected from many of the best vines) because the domaine had problems with the clones in 1990 when the vineyards fell sick with a vine disease called Esca. The grapes from the Cuvée des Gourmets, which is grown on granite soils, undergo an eight to ten-day maceration period before pressing. Fermentation takes place in the tank at a temperature of about 30 degrees. It is a wine that can be enjoyed with lamb shank, blood sausages, ham, or chicken dishes. Le Poycelan is a selection of the oldest vines grown on the iron-and-magnesium-rich basaltic soils made in particular vintages. The extra intensity of this deep purple wine is remarkable. The Volcanique itself has wonderful aromas of black raspberries, asphalt, and chocolate with that familiar pepperiness on the finish that characterise the Gamays from the Auvergne & Forez. Forez trumps!

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| 2023 | GAMAY "CUVÉE DES GOURMETS" | R |
| 2023 | VOLCANIQUE ROUGE | R |
| 2022 | LE POYCELAN ROUGE | R |

VIN & PIC, LAURENT DEMEURE, Côtes du Forez– Organic practising

When Laurent Demeure moved to the southern part of the Côtes du Forez, he'd already left his initial career behind as an industrial worker in the Rhône Valley. He became a winegrower in this small, oft-forgotten wine region, dotted with volcanic peaks and bordered by the Monts du Lyonnais, the Loire, and the Monts du Forez. The first vines were those belonging to the historic village of St-Romain-le-Puy, on a steep hillside, impossible to mechanise, and where only human physical endeavour could enable the vine to be cultivated. With Christine, his wife, who joined him in the venture, they became not only committed to breathing new life into these historic plots, but also passionate about bringing to bottle those hybrid varieties that had an important role to play in the history of French vineyards. Alongside the main grape of the region – Gamay St-Romain – and “classic” grape varieties such as Viognier and Syrah, Laurent and Christine also craft cuvées from old vines of Baco, Plantet, Ravat...

The winery is more precisely located in Boisset St Priest in the administrative area of the Loire, some 30 km from Saint Etienne, 10 km from Montbrison, in the magnificent foothills of the Monts du Forez, in the Côtes du Forez. The vines for the cuvee called Diana are on the upper part of the volcano of St-Romain-Le-Puy, (the soils being of basaltic origin) and are planted facing south, at 450m above sea level.

The grapes for the Diana Viognier are manually harvested, destemmed and direct-pressed, before being fermented in stainless vats with indigenous yeasts at cool temperatures to focus the fruit flavours. The wine undergoes malo and is aged further in tank for 4-6 months. Pale gold, Diana has an expressive nose with floral notes of violet, citrus fruits and apricots. The palate fills out with flavours of pear, ripe citrus fruit and white spice and there is a certain nuttiness also.

Boutonnière is from a century old plot, located 700m above sea level on a south-facing slope. The soils here are granitic and sandy. A blend of 50% Gamay St-Romain, 50% Seibel, the grapes are 100% destemmed and given a semi-carbonic maceration for 10 days in a fibreglass tank. The wine then spends 10 months in used barrels and three grams of sulphur is added at bottling. Dark garnet colour, leading to an expressive nose which reveals an array of candied black fruits and spices.

The mouth is round, an explosion of fruit and freshness. A delight! Seibel, incidentally, is a hybrid developed to increase disease resistance. Descended from Aramon and Alicante Bouchet; one wild American grape, Jaeger 70 and one rootstock, AxR1, which was created by crossing Aramon with a wild American V. rupestris, it was once more commonly seen, especially in the 1950s, but has vanished since French appellation laws do not allow for hybrids.

Sanguine means ‘bloody’ which perfectly describes the colour of the wine that the Gamay Teinturier produces. Teinture means ‘dye/stain/tint’. Grapes for this wine are 80% destemmed, pneumatically pressed and undergo a 10 day semi-carbonic in stainless tank, before ageing 10 months in used oak. Deep red with forest fruits and blueberry on the nose and a palate brimming with dark red cherries.

The Cuvée Baco vines, planted in 1935, face north and south at 380m above sea level, and are harvested when slightly overripe. The soils are granitic and sandy in this vineyard. Whole bunch ferment, semi carbonic for 15 days in fibreglass tanks and then ageing in used barrels with a dose of 2g sulphur before bottling.

Baco Noir’s origins go back to 1894, when French grape breeder François Baco crossed Folle Blanche with an unknown member of the Vitis riparia family. The intention was to create phylloxera-resistant vines that retained their French character. At one time, Baco Noir was grown in Burgundy and parts of the Loire, but it was gradually ushered out of the Old World and has since become one of North America’s more successful hybrids.

With its light to medium body, decent acidity and preference for cooler climates, Baco Noir is seen a grower-friendly alternative to Pinot Noir. Nor does it express the distinctive foxy aromas and flavours of other Vitis riparia varieties, but instead shows rich fruit tones, typified by blueberry and plum.

The nose on the Vin et Pic Baco is very open and displays forest fruits and pepper. It is fresh in the mouth with notes of blueberry and liquorice and more lashings of pepper. French Baco? Consider our curiosity piqued!

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| 2021 | BOUTONNIERE GAMAY SEIBEL | R |
| 2021 | SANGUINE GAMAY TEINTURIER | R |
| 2021 | BACCO ROUGE | R |

IN PRAISE OF FUNK

Thou hast shewed thy people hard
Things: thou hast made us to drink
The wine of astonishment

Psalm 60,3 Authorized Version

Some wines are so naughty they deserve to be put in honorary detention. Take the Gamay from the Auvergne (take it, I say), superlatively cloudy, reductive, oozing zum zuyder aromas of fermenting apples. Wild thing/You make my heart sing. The murky wine, vitally raw, prickles and dances, nettles the furthest outposts of your tongue with lancing acidity. 95% of the drinking populace would pucker up on acquaintance with this rude fluid, for it prompts the question: is the wine meant to taste like that? Why not go further: is wine ever meant to taste like that? We've heard of nature red in tooth and claw, but most would prefer the tooth and claw filtered out. Call me perverse, but we live such mappined lives, that it is salutary, refreshing, and darn therapeutic to glimpse life on the wilder shores, in this case, a wine that does not conform to our notion of tutti-frutti correctness. As Ralph Waldo Emerson says: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

I wonder who laid down the primer for correct and incorrect wine. It is the coldly reductive logic of the Consumer Acceptance Panel which ignores the fact that individuality and unpredictability are what makes wine a living drink. Our list would be a pale shadow if it were missing wines from Cousin-Leduc, Gramenon, Bera, Princic, La Stoppa, Bea and Valentini. To some these may be the taste equivalent of Joan Crawford's fingernails scratching the underside of an iron coffin, but to others a welcome diversion from the smart, prinked, clean-chopped-identikit- oenologically-smoothed clones that bestride the supermarket shelves.

We love these wines for their faults; in fact, their faults make them what they are. Made with wild yeasts, handled gently without filtration or addition of sulphur, the wines are alive, constantly in flux, rarely the same one day to the next.

And the jessamine faint, and the sweet tuberose/ The sweetest flower for scent that blows. – Percy Bysshe Shelley

VIGNOBLES ANDRE SCHERER, CHRISTOPHE SCHERER Husseren-Lès-Châteaux

Gewürz-stamina – an Alsace wine that goes on and on
– The Alternative Wine Glossary

A grower highly regarded for the quality of his Gewürztraminers. Try the straight Gewürz. If your palate seeks the enchantment of the spice bazaar. There is a touch of residual sugar here, more than offset by mouth-charming acidity – check out the Turkish delight and rosewater aromas on this one! The Holzweg, from a vineyard in the picturesque village of Husseren-lès-Châteaux, and grown on a limestone-clay plot, is more restrained and seemingly drier with thick, buttery fruit – definitely a food wine. Recently it has soared to new heights: “Fine intense floral notes both on the nose, extraordinarily long and aromatic finish” enthused the Hachette jury who awarded it Coup de Coeur. Equally adept battling chilli fire or choucroute garni. Also consider Scherer’s late harvested wines; redolent of pineapples, mint, dates and honey these provide toothsome accompaniments to foie gras, roast goose and fresh fruit.

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|------|------------------------|---|
| 2022 | PINOT BLANC RESERVE | W |
| 2022 | RIESLING RESERVE | W |
| 2022 | PINOT GRIS RESERVE | W |
| 2022 | GEWURZTRAMINER RESERVE | W |

DOMAINE PIERRE FRICK, JEAN-PIERRE FRICK, Pfaffenheim – Biodynamic (certified Demeter)

Second Yorkshireman: Nothing like a good glass of Château de Chasselas, eh, Josiah?

Third Yorkshireman: You’re right there, Obadiah.

Monty Python: Four Yorkshiremen

At the forefront of the biodynamic movement Jean-Pierre Frick makes wines that are scrupulously natural. From promoting biodiversity in the vineyard to hand harvesting all the grapes to using little and even no sulphur during the winemaking to ageing in large old oak casks (foudres), Jean-Pierre aspires to capture the essence of the grape and the flavour of the terroir.

His Chasselas (the grape originates in Switzerland), vinified without the addition of sulphur, is left on the lees. It is quite vinous reminiscent of greengage, plums, and dried banana. The Riesling is dry with hints of blackcurrant bud, tobacco, and mineral – impressively lively in the mouth. The Pinot Gris is typically round and rich: think plum jam, caramel, and apple compote: try with cheese. The Riesling Grand Crus are wines of considerable complexity and develop intriguingly in the glass. Notes here of praline, vanilla, and mineral; it opens to reveal yellow fruits and menthol and has a long, fresh, almost salty finish with flickering minerality. The unsulphured Pinot Noir Strangenberg (also made without sulphur) has beautiful discreet aromas of cassis, griotte cherries, grenadine, and spice. The Sylvaner is extraordinary, revealing lush waxy apricot fruit and notes of botrytis. We love the Pinot Gris Maceration, a pur vin in every respect. The rosy hue is enchanting, the nose is delicate, suggestive of wild strawberries and fresh watermelon and there are notes of sage and pepper. The freshness is beautiful – and surprising.

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| 2016 | SYLVANER BERGWEINGARTEN | W |
| 2021 | PINOT BLANC | W |
| 2018 | GEWURZTRAMINER STEINERT MACERATION | Or |
| 2021 | PINOT GRIS MACERATION FISCHBACH | Or |
| 2020 | RIESLING GRAND CRU VORBOURG MACERATION | Or |
| 2020 | RIESLING GRAND CRU STEINERT | W |
| 2021 | PINOT NOIR FISCHBACH SANS SOUFRE | R |
| 2019 | PINOT GRIS GRAINS CENDRES ~ 1/2 bottle | Sw |
| 2019 | PINOT NOBILIS MOELLEUX | Sw |

DOMAINE ALBERT MANN, MAURICE AND JACKY BARTHELME, Wettolsheim – Biodynamic (certified Biodyvin)

The ability to tell your *Alsace* from your *Elbling* is the raisin (sic) d'être of a wine connoisseur
- The Alternative Wine Glossary

This well-regarded Alsace domaine is run by two brothers, Maurice and Jacky Barthelmé in the village of Wettolsheim, near Colmar. Maurice, who took over here in 1984, is married to the daughter of the late Albert Mann who gave his name to the domaine. It's not a huge operation: they have 22 hectares in all, but five of these are in five different Grand Cru vineyards and a further two are in lieux-dits. All the wines from the Pinot Auxerrois to the stunning SGNs are fabulous, but we were particularly taken with the wonderful Schlossberg Riesling, which is a brilliantly tightly focused, mineral interpretation of this great grape. With a pale gold colour, the Schlossberg combines power and finesse. Apple, spice, mineral and wax integrate with the sinewy structure and rich texture. The length of this wine is extraordinary. The Riesling tradition is more of a vin de fruit. It has an attractive musky nose and a tranquil palate with ripe pear and apple offset by cleansing notes of mandarin.

"In the same way that a basketball team exhibits good teamwork, winemaking duties are shared between the two Barthelmé brothers, each of whom stands a good 6'6" (Jacky is at least 6'7" and plays semi-pro basketball, a fact well-known in the French press, and thus the basketball analogy). While one brother is in the vineyard, the other is in the caves. Using the best organic methods, their domaine is guided by rules of art, with carefully controlled yields, to obtain grapes of elevated maturity with rich and complex substance. These superb grapes are then transformed in a chai of gleaming stainless steel, conceived in the style of an American winery, which allows the production of wines that are clean and pure and where often the initial rich constitution of the grapes comes to light. In this modern oenology their clay-limestone soils seem to be especially favoured because of their structure..." Revue du Vin de France.

The Pinot Gris tradition is pale straw in colour, with a full, up-front bouquet of honeyed tropical fruits, yellow stone fruits, pears and spices. Off dryish, the palate was soft and rounded with accessible fruit and a touch of alcohol warmth showing. An excellent expression of the variety. Cuvée Albert has Soil-driven aromas of smoke, butter and pastry dough. Broad and sweet but with almost mineral-like acid grip and a saline element giving it a sappy quality. Finishes with a slight peppery quality.

Light golden hued straw yellow, the Gewurz has a classic bouquet of ginger, lychee and spices, intense and fresh. Off dry on palate, this wine possesses a floral and spice amalgam of flavours with a little alcohol warmth. Attractive and accessible. The Furstentum weighs in at 13.5% alc and 31 g/l rs, made from fruit from vines more than 50 years old from two parcels. Even straw yellow in colour this has a tightly bound bouquet of florals and minerals, a characteristic of these lighter grand cru soils. Off-dry on the palate, this is a taut wine; stylish and elegant, yet with intensity and richness. Very fine texture for Gewurztraminer, with no coarse blowsiness at all.

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| 2022 | PINOT BLANC/AUXERROIS TRADITION | W |
| 2022 | RIESLING TRADITION | W |
| 2022 | PINOT GRIS TRADITION | W |
| 2019 | PINOT GRIS CUVEE ALBERT | W |
| 2022 | GEWURZTRAMINER TRADITION | W |
| 2018 | GEWURZTRAMINER GRAND CRU "FURSTENTUM" | W |
| 2020 | RIESLING GRAND CRU "SCHLOSSBERG" | W |

DOMAINE KUMPF & MEYER, JULIEN ALBERTUS, Rosheim, Alsace – Organic – Certified Ecocert

With about 16 hectares spread over more than 70 parcels of vines, this domaine extends 15 kilometres from north to south passing through 5 communes. There are various "terroirs" in the different areas of. Keeping the vines healthy is achieved whilst keeping the use of chemicals to a strict minimum. The domaine adheres to the charter "Tyflo" which is administered by Ecocert. Following these principles, the various summer tasks are performed successively during July and August: - debudding, tying and training, removing excess bunches where necessary to promote the quality of the remaining grapes (vendange en vert), and thinning the leaves.

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|------|-------------------------------|---|
| 2018 | RIESLING ORGANIC | W |
| 2022 | BADINERIE RESTONS | W |
| 2022 | CLAIR OBSCUR RESTONS | W |
| NV | JE SUIS DE MARNE | W |
| 2015 | TRAVERSEE RIESLING | W |
| NV | RIESLING WESTERBERG PERPETUEL | W |

DOMAINE CHRISTIAN BINNER, Ammerschwihr– Biodynamic certified Demeter

The Binner family has owned vines in Alsace since 1770 and today they practice organic and biodynamic agriculture, neither fine nor filter the wine, use only natural yeasts, use minimal sulphur, etc... That is Caves de Pyrène mood music. All the wines are aged in 100-year-old big foudres and undergo malolactic fermentation.

The average vine age is 35-years-old, with 40% over 60 years old, and plenty that have entered their second century of productivity. Christian Binner has an excellent slice of land in and around the Kaefferkopf Grand Cru, close to his home village of Ammerschwihr on a terroir of colluvial granitic topsoil over a marly bedrock. The Binner's own nine hectares in total, with only six planted to vine and estate, as mentioned, has been chemical-free for over two decades. They harvest in October, later than any of their neighbours, with patience that allows for fully ripe fruit and resulting complexity of flavour in the bottled wines. They also strive to vinify as naturally as possible with a minimum of sulphur addition, preferably not even at bottling. To manage, one should make a wine that is as biochemically stable as possible. This is accomplished by fermenting as much as sugar as possible, allowing malolactic transformation and storing and bottling the wine under reductive conditions keeping some carbon dioxide in the wine at all stages.

The result is aromatic and dry wines with a lot of personality and somewhat unpredictable character. As it should be ...

Les Saveurs, a blend of Riesling, Sylvaner, Gewurz and Auxerrois is aromatic and textured, a fruit basket of apples, poached pears and grapes. The baby Riesling Ammerschwihr is properly hazy with some leesy notes and primary flavours of butter lemon, linden and soft orchard fruits. A lovely wine for any occasion. Ratchet up the intensity a notch or two for the Riesling K Non Filtré which exhibits that charged Kaefferkopf terroir. A deep golden wine with gorgeous minerality underpinning the spiced apple fruit.

Let's examine the terroir of Kaefferkopf that gives the signature flavours to Binner's wines. South-east-facing or south-facing slopes on a terroir that is blessed with a very complex geology, comprising some quite heavy soil types, even in areas that contain both granite and sandstone, a heaviness that is due to a subterranean layer of loess limestone. This presence of limestone in areas with acidic soils (granite and sandstone) is perhaps the explanation of the style of the wines: (powerful thanks to the limestone), and very elegant (thanks to the presence of acidic rocks).

Binner's Pinot Noir comes from are a geologic melange of limestone, sand, clay, even some loess, gypsum, schist. You name it. So minerality abounds in the reds of central Alsace, and thanks to being warmer, sunnier and drier than land to the west of the Vosges, pleasantly ripe and still delicate red wine can be grown here. This wine reminds one of cranberries, strawberries and fresh, savoury herbs, mostly thyme. Béatrice is equally lovely with a tad extra oomph.

Christan is moving more and more on the natural path. All the vineyards are grassed, and a great variety of cover crops are sown. He has phased out ploughing other than on the Schlossberg. He is now experimenting with permaculture and natural farming (no wires, no rows and no pruning). He will receive Demeter certification for biodynamics in 2020 but has long since espoused BD practices. He stopped using sulphur in the wines five years ago and is a member of the recently formed Vin Nature group.

Christian's philosophy is that healthy soils with plenty of humus and micro-organisms will assist in the making of strong natural wines. He is constantly searching for ways of promoting vitality, both in the vineyards and the wines. The best wines for him are those that come from grapes that are fully ripe, mature yet balanced. He knows that these wines will be gastronomic, but they will be wholesome. The wines must also be fault free, which is why he tops up all his barrels, for it is at the top of the barrels that faults may form.

| | | |
|------|---|----|
| 2021 | RIESLING CHAMPS ALOUETTES | W |
| NV | ELSASSISCH BOMBISCH RIESLING | W |
| NV | LES SAVEURS | W |
| 2019 | RIESLING GRAND CRU SCHLOSSBERG | W |
| NV | SI ROSE ~ Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris – solera of 4 vintages | Or |
| 2022 | PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2003 | MUSCAT HINTERBERG SGN – ½ bottle | Sw |

DOMAINE GERARD SCHUELLER, BRUNO SCHUELLER, Husseren-Lès-Châteaux –Biodynamic (not certified)

The contemplation of things as they are, without substitution or imposture, without error or confusion, is in itself a nobler thing than a whole harvest of intervention.

Francis Bacon

Domaine Gérard Schueller is in Husseren-les-Châteaux, a small hamlet hanging on to the hillslope below a series of old castle ruins. Situated south-west of Colmar, they mark the northern boundary of the geological fault stretching south towards Thann.

The domaine is managed by Bruno Schueller who is anything but mainstream. Although the vinification methods, anchored in biodynamic viticultural ideas, create high class wines with loads of personality, the relations with INAO are not uncomplicated.

Bruno owns land on Grands Crus that are split between Eguisheim and Husseren-les-Châteaux, namely Pfersigberg and Eichberg.

However, the most interesting terroir may be Bildstœcklé. This lieu-dit is within the commune of Obermorschwihr, the southern neighbour of Eguisheim. During the years when the Grands Crus were delimited, most communes received their “own”. Grand Cru. But not Obermorschwihr. Here, there were simply no reputed growers willing to mobilize and pursue the issue. Today, grapes from

Bildstœcklé, a calcareous soil, are sought after by some of the most reputed domaines of Alsace. Schueller makes wines with a minimum of intervention. Zero, or the bare minimum of sulphur, is added during the vinification, the primary fermentation is allowed to reduce the residual sugar to a minimum, and Bruno allows all his wines to undergo the secondary malolactic fermentation. The

result is wines of tremendous personality golden, aromatic wines with a wide range of aromas and flavours, and wines with dry, almost hard finish with profound minerality.

The barrels are massive old foudres. The Pinot Blanc has a developed nose (after aeration!) with notes of dried fruit, boiled vegetables and citrus. On the palate, it is medium bodied with good structure, ripe fruit, and amazing acidity and minerality. Very peculiar and aromatic 126rocya-style aroma. Dry, powerful taste with 126rocya, hazelnuts and red grapefruit. Spicy and elegant with roese, arrack and honey. The taste is vigorous, melting, and elegant.

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|------|--------------------------------|---|
| 2021 | RIESLING MITTEL | W |
| 2020 | GEWURZTRAMINER BILD | W |
| 2020 | PINOT GRIS | W |
| 2020 | PINOT GRIS RESERVE | W |
| 2017 | RIESLING GRAND CRU PFERSIGBERG | W |

Introducing the lesser-spotted Bruno Schueller

The contemplation of things as they are, without substitution or imposture, without error or confusion, is in itself a nobler thing than a whole harvest of intervention.

Roll sound, roll camera ...Hushed David Attenborough tones:

I am crouched here in an overgrown vineyard in Alsace hoping to catch a glimpse of one of the rarest bird-vignerons in this part of France, the lesser-spotted **Bruno Schueller**.

The Schueller belongs to a unique sub-species, inhabiting a small 10-hectare zone around Husseren-les-Châteaux, a hamlet hanging on to the hillslope below a series of old castle ruins, situated south-west of Colmar. I am actually here in Bildstœcklé, a *lieu-dit* within the commune of Obermorschwihr, the southern neighbour of Eguisheim. During the years when the Grands Crus were delimited, most communes received their “own”. Grand Cru. But not Obermorschwihr, and this is where the Schueller will happily ply his craft in the summer, flitting from vine to vine removing excess vegetation. Although the Schueller might well be classified as part of the biodynamic family, he is a free spirit and prefers not to be labelled by any overarching organisation. In the autumn the Schueller will migrate to the cool shelter of the winery and establish himself amongst the gigantic old wooden foudres that abound there. There he stores his wine over the winter and keeps them to a simple but nourishing diet of zero-sulphur and no other additives.

Once bottled a typical Schueller will begin to show its full aromatic plumage after three to five years. This is when the best Schuellers take flight and present majestic soaring flavours. The Schueller may give birth to a variety of little Schuellers, some straw yellow, others deep gold, although the most celebrated examples of the Schueller clan are the Pinot Noir family. Wine twitters might easily confuse the Chant Oiseaux and Bildstœcklé with Nuits Saint-Georges, which suggests that it is forgivable not to know your Alsace from your elbow.

PEPIN, DIETRICH FAMILY, SCHERWILLER Alsace – Organic

Coordinated by Pierre Dietrich (of Domaine de L'Achillée) Pépin is a project that works closely with several small Alsatian winegrowers with the collaboration running from grape growing right through to vinification, the aim is to make great natural wines. The growers are all friends, and each have been working organically for many years. This is why the batches follow each other and do not know the state of rupture. In the batches of whites, we mainly find Riesling, Sylvaner and Chardonnay in particular, which gives a beautiful fruity frame to thirsty wines. From batch to batch, the content and the winemaker may change but the ethos and the label remains the same, so customers can have a white wine that meets the same expectations all year round.

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| NV | PEPIN ORANGE | Or |
| NV | PEPIN BLANC | W |
| 2020 | PEPIN BLANC ~ 20-litre key keg | W |

DOMAINE DE L'ACHILLEE, JEAN & PIERRE DIETRICH, Scherwiller- Biodynamic (certified Demeter)

The Dietrich family has farmed land in Alsace since 1600 (mostly in this village of Scherwiller but also in an adjacent village). In the past, the family farm used to be run on the basis of polyculture, however the family now concentrate on growing grape vines and other fruit. In 1999 Yves converted the estate to organic farming (at the time he would sell his grapes to the local Cave cooperative). Pierre and Jean took over the responsibility of the winery in 2016 and were the first members of the family to bottle the estate's wines. The estate has been farmed with biodynamics ever since 2003. It contains 18.5 hectares of vines and 6 hectares of fruit trees from which the family also produces Pet. Nats from black and red cherries, Damson and Victoria plums.

'Achillee' (pronounced 'Ackillay') is the name of the plant Achillea Millefolium (Common Yarrow in English), that is used as an infusion in biodynamic farming, it grows very naturally in vineyards, and it is sometimes planted intentionally in by vigneron for its ability to enhance the antifungal powers of plants growing near to it, therefore reducing the necessity of regular sulphur spraying on vines. It is also planted for its capacity to contribute coolness and energy to the vine plants in the summer heat. Pierre comments that, ever since his family converted its vineyard to biodynamic farming, this flowering plant has grown up quite naturally amongst all their vines and, even though the Dietrich family's estate contains five different soil profiles and several different micro-climates.

The Alsace Blanc is composed of Sylvaner (50%), Gewurztraminer, Riesling, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, and Pinot Noir, with Auxerrois, Muscat and Chasselas. The Sylvaner vines used in this cuvée are planted facing West, on flat riverside plains, containing cold, fertile clays (this area used to be the old wharves and embarkation quays for the River Aubach that runs through the village of Scherwiller). The other grape varieties are planted in diverse expositions, in the various other soil types and areas that make up the family's estate- such as in sandstone or granite soils, two hundred metres high up on the slopes of the local mountain, or on the stony, poor soil that surrounds the village of Scherwiller. The nose is pure with floral notes, accompanied by aromas of apricots and mirabelles. The palate is very elegant with good structure and great persistence. A variety of citrus fruit notes enrich the aromatic palette.

The straight Riesling comes from 30-year-old vines. These are in several different locations with several different soil profiles, altitudes, and expositions, ranging from the poor, stony ground of the village of Scherwiller, decomposing granite of the slopes in the top quality local Grand Cru zone ('Frankstein' Grand Cru) and the schistose soil of the nearby villages of Schiefferberg and Bernardvillé. Harvest is manual. The different parcels are vinified. Only the best batches are used in the final blend. Fermentation for eight months in stainless steel vat with indigenous yeast and matured in stainless steel vats on lees for over a year. After a full malolactic conversion, the wine is bottled without fining. Subtle hints of lemon and lime, enhanced by notes of white flowers. The palate is firmly structured with a well-integrated acidity endowing the wine with good length. Finally, a multi-layered finish with discreet touches of citrus fruits including grapefruit.

Scherwiller is Riesling from Scherwiller gravel with a thin layer of clay. Intense yellow colour with pink and golden notes. The nose is intense with notes of peach, apricot, nectarine, citrus peel, and almond. A result of very mature grapes. Full bodied in the mouth with a delicate acidity and a good length on the palate with citrus and spicy notes.

The Pinot Noir vines are from two parcels, one aged 55-years-old and one aged 60-years-old planted facing south-east in granite soils (hence the name of this cuvée 'Granite') at an altitude of 300-350 metres on the slopes of the local hill 'Rittersberg'. The grapes undergo whole bunch maceration for twenty-one days – one-third are crushed by foot, the rest pressed in a pneumatic press with a membrane. The wine naturally ferments and then is aged on the lees for fifteen months in a 40-hectolitre stainless steel vat for 90% of the wine, the remaining part in new 228L Burgundy oak barrel (fine grain and of light toast). There is no filtration or fining and only a tiny amount of sulphur before bottling.

Intense red with purple hints. Juicy red fruits, woodland fruit, strawberries, and spicy notes (cinnamon, pepper). The palate is complete with harmonious tannins and the fluent acidity that gives the wine pleasing persistence.

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| 2020 | CREMANT ZERO DOSAGE | Sp |
| 2021 | ACHILLEE ALSACE BLANC | W |
| 2022 | ACHILLEE HESPERIDE PINOT GRIS GEWURZTRAMINER | Or |
| 2021 | ACHILLEE PINOT NOIR GRANITE | R |

On a clear day, from the terrace you can't see Luxembourg at all... this is because a tree is in the way.

Alan Coren – The Sanity Inspector

Pass de Duchy on the left-hand side – well that's what it sounded like to me. Left side of the Moselle that is.

Take away this country – it has no theme. It is tempting to think of Luxembourg as a “beuro-country” producing wine only by qualified majority voting, perhaps highlighting a convergence between the prevailing styles of Alsace and Germany. In my antediluvian edition of Hugh Johnson's Wine Atlas it remains as uncharted as the dark side of the moon, whilst Andrew Jefford dismisses it as “not worth the detour”. Vines, however, have been grown on the slopes of Remich since before the Roman conquest, and survived serious damage by oidium in 1847, phylloxera in 1864 and mildew in 1878. Today, a thousand grape growers produce around 140,000hl of mainly white and rosé wine a year. So there. True, many of the wines are distinctly average; the main problems appear to be massive over-production and linking the correct grape variety to the appropriate terroir. Aye, but where there's muck there are schmucks, (which is where we come in) and Eric has sourced some brassy numbers. Prepare to be pleasantly surprised, very pleasantly surprised.

DOMAINE MATHIS BASTIAN, REMICH

Luxembourg has a long tradition of making wine (since late Roman times). Virtually all production is for white and sparkling, the major grape varieties being: Rivaner, Pinot Blanc, Auxerrois, Riesling, Pinot Gris and Gewürztraminer. The climate is one of the coolest in Europe for winemaking (rivalling England supposedly) and Luxembourg also has a clear-as-mad-mud cru classé system, worthy of the Circumlocution Office. Most wines are labelled as varietals. There is one covering appellation called Moselle Luxembourgeoise and tasting panels may rank superior wines as Vin Classes, Premier Crus and even Grands Premier Crus! This system has attracted criticism and a rival organisation called Domaine et Tradition which encourages local variation and expression and restricts yields. Domaine Mathis Bastian, a regular visitor to the Guide Hachette comprises 11.7 hectares of vines on chalky soil located on the exposed slopes of Remich Primerberg overlooking the Moselle.

Check out your primary fruit options with this quintet of friendly Luxembourgers. The Rivaner (Sylaner/Riesling cross to you), is a yummy fresh pineapple popsicle, off dry with compensating singing acidity – the perfect aperitif wine. The basic Grand Cru Riesling impresses with its clean lemon-glazed fruit. Its posher big brother is trying to escape the house and align itself with the Germanic Moselles on t'other side of the river. Well, they say the Riesling is greener on the other side of the river. These wines will upset your long-held preconceptions about Luxembourg wines (as if). Now imagine an Alsace Pinot Gris with its ripe honeyed orchard fruit and slide in a little Moselle slatiness. Bastian's “Domaine et Tradition” Pinot Gris has finesse illustrated by the manner in which the wine evolves so eloquently in the glass from the initial nose of meadow flowers broadening into something earthier: medlars and truffles, finally re-enforced by the burgeoning of the secondary mineral aromas. Think of it as a soothing roasted butternut squash smoothie. It exudes memories of golden autumn afternoons plumped up on a tussock after a lotos-munching picnic in Yeats's bee-loud glade. The blushing twinkling oeillet Pinot, freighted with amber grapes as Arnold might say, is a rosé by any other name, similar to the splendid ramato Pinot Grigio that Specogna makes in Northern Italy. Maybe a tad darker. With its lip-smacking cherry-menthol fruit they'll be sipping this on the sun-bleached promenades of Etzelbruck I'll be bound.

The Grand Premier Cru appellation, by the way, signifies nothing other than some grand premier cru persiflage.

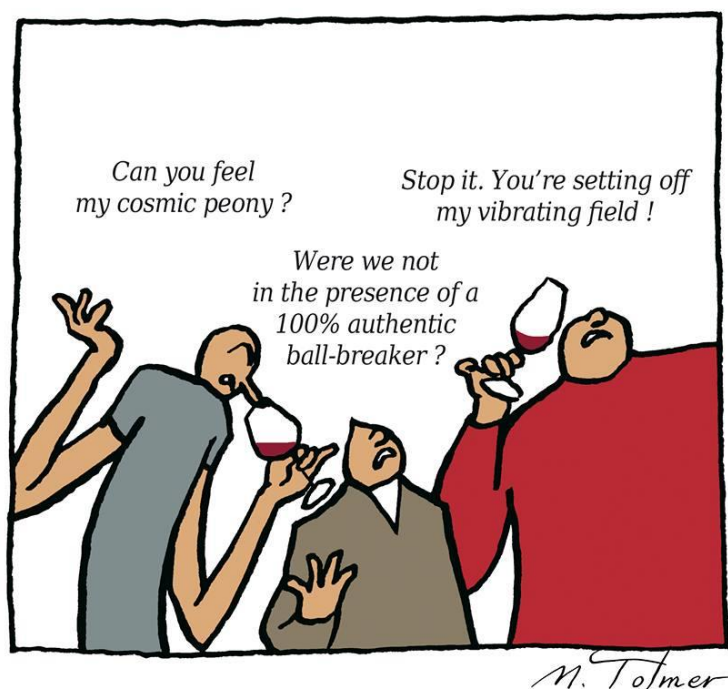
The Jura vineyards occupy the slopes that descend from the first plateau of the Jura Mountains to the plain below. The soils are, in the main, sedimentary Triassic deposits, or deposits of Jurassic marl, particularly in the north of the region. The local grape varieties are perfectly adapted to the clay soils and produce wine of a very specific regional character. The *Trousseau* is one such, being rich in colour and tannin. Another local grape variety is *Savagnin* cultivated on the poorest marly soils. Savagnin is best known as the variety used in the *vin jaune* (yellow wine) of Château-Chalon aged for 6 years on ullage in barrel. Vin Jaune undergoes a process similar to sherry, whereby a film of yeast (*une voile*) covers the surface, thereby preventing oxidation but allowing evaporation and the subsequent concentration of the wine. The result is a sherrylike wine with a delicate, nutty richness. Burgundian interlopers also thrive in the Jura (the Haute-Bourgogne is, after all, just on the opposite side of the Saone valley) with some very fine examples of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir to be found.

Savoie stretches from the French shore of Lake Geneva to the Isère, comprising the departments of Savoie and Haute-Savoie. Much of the terrain is too mountainous to cultivate vines and the Savoie vineyards tend to be widely dispersed. *Mondeuse*, an indigenous quality variety produces full-bodied reds with a peppery flavour and a slight bitterness, particularly in Arbin. Of the whites *Altesse* (also called *Roussette de Savoie*) is most notable and is similar to Furmint from Hungary. It is exotically perfumed with good crisp acidity and has a certain ageing potential. Frangy is the one of the best communes for Roussette de Savoie. The *Gringet* grape is grown in the village of Ayze. Said to be related to the Savagnin. Or the Traminer. Or... I can see you're looking at me quizzically. But, it seems to be unique to the region.

The wines of Jura have acquired cult status over the past ten years. Increased demand throughout the world has coincided with the ravages of climate change with certain vintages being virtually wiped out. As a result, there is less wine to go round and most of the growers' product tend to end on (tiny) allocation. Several of the producers are combining their grapes with those of grower-friends who farm elsewhere in France and have the same philosophy (JG Ganevat and Patrice Beguet, for example), whilst others blend creatively or buy grapes from neighbours to supplement their meagre output.

“To say that his grapes are spun into gold would not be far from the truth; they are entirely otherworldly.” Kermit Lynch

Superb multiple Chardonnay and savvy Savagnins and limpid reds from a grower who worked with Jean-Marc Morey in Burgundy. Jean-François Ganevat vinifies all of his scattered parcels separately respecting the primacy of terroir. The Grands Teppes, for example, is from old vines, unfiltered and unsulphured, a wine that will happily age for another ten years. Pale gold, it has a scent of honey, quinces and white flowers. The complexity of the nose continues on the palate. The pale Trousseau has plenty of acidity with leather and musk overtones and a peppery finish whilst the Pinot Noir shows excellent potential for development. The latter achieves its Côtes de Nuits-style concentration by virtue of minuscule yields of 21hl/ha and strict green harvest. Thereafter the wine undergoes cool maceration (7C) for 9 days before a natural fermentation begins with indigenous yeasts. Pigeage and remontage twice daily give further extract and colour. Finally, the wine is vinified in 228l barrels lasting 12 months. Dark burgundy colour, nose of blueberry, black cherry and beetroot, black fruits, chocolate and leather on the palate, frisky acidity – it's a wine for the decanter. Whereas the Trousseau would happily accompany guinea fowl or smoked meats, the Pinot would appeal with venison or smoked duck breast. Grown in Jura since the 13th century Poulsard's names are legion: Ploussard, Peloussard, Pulsard, Polozard, Mescle dans l'Ain. What an enchanting oddity! Such colour – pale colour with flickering orange, a mad bouquet with plenty of sous-bois and fruits (cherries and strawberries) in eaux de vie. A silk 'n' spice trail in the mouth: redcurrants, bilberries and rhubarb tied up with liquorice shoelaces. Worth the detour Since the above was first written, Jean-François a.k.a Fanfan has garnered an international reputation. Due to a succession of terrible vintages in the Jura, he has founded a negociant business alongside his sister, vinifying grapes from around France (but especially Beaujolais) to supplement his production from his 8-ha in Rotalier.



Le Dernier Repas

A mon dernier repas
 Je veux voir mes frères
 Et mes chiens et mes chats
 Et le bord de la mer
 A mon dernier repas
 Je veux voir mes voisins
 Et puis quelques Chinois
 En guise de cousins
 Et je veux qu'on y boive
 En plus du vin de messe
 De ce vin si joli
 Qu'on buvait en Arbois...

Jacques Brel

MAISON OVERNOY-HOULLON, PUPILLIN, Arbois – Organic

Anoraksia Nervosa – The uncontrollable trembling induced by being in the presence of a rare/unicorn wine.

These wines are on allocation.

In the quiet village of Pupillin just north of Arbois is a sign beside the road that proudly announces: World Capital of Ploussard". It was vigneron Pierre Overnoy who established the unyielding purist precept that wines should be made without the addition of sulphur. Pierre's father originally made zero-sulphur wine, but Pierre, who did his internship in Burgundy, experimented with it, until tasting the difference between his father's wines and his own convinced him that the zero-sulphur wine had a finer aroma.

The vines and the cellar are now in the hands of Pierre Overnoy's protégé, Emmanuel Houillon, who fully espouses the philosophy of his mentor. Without sulphur the quality of the grapes must be exceptional; everything in the vineyard is done totally organically, yields are never more than 35hl/ha and Houillon turns the top six inches of soil, cutting the surface roots and thus depriving the plants of the topsoil's potassium which otherwise combines with tartaric acid and lowers their acidity. In the cellars the selected grapes undergo a semi-carbonic maceration in a covered vessel, with carbon dioxide added at the start before the fermentation supplies its own. To keep the bacteria from multiplying, the temperature is held to about 8C for about ten days of maceration. Then the temperature is allowed to rise, and fermentation begins. The white grapes are immediately pressed, and their juice is also protected with carbon dioxide. After the initial active phase, some of the white wines continue to ferment a year or more, virtually all in old oak barrels of various sizes. The Ouillé is Savagnin aged on the yeast lees in very old barrels and topped up. Bright golden colour, green plums and figs mingled with the salty leesiness, pickled ginger and toasted walnuts. Phenomenal length.

Houillon is opposed to adding anything to the wine. No new oak barrels influence the taste – some of the barrels in use are a century old. Before bottling, the wines are neither filtered nor fined and they retain a lot of carbon dioxide, which has an antioxidant effect and helps to convey aroma. The maceration and fermentation give little colour to the Ploussard, with its fine skin. Houillon's pale, exceptionally light, and piercingly fresh red is filled with flavours of 131eolian cherry, redcurrants, wild strawberry and quince, a study in deliciousness, the avatar of purity. Wines such as these have an evanescent quality: they are unpredictable, variable, even fragile. They can react adversely to certain temperatures, location, and atmospheric pressure. Houillon's convivial red contradicts the notion that wine should be stable. File defiantly under quirk, strangeness, and charm.

DOMAINE MARIE-PIERRE CHEVASSU-FASSNENET, CHATEAU-CHALON – Organic methods

Château Chalon – because you're worth it.

Cut yourself some nutty nutty slack and, if you're suffering sotoion deficiency, pour yourself some liquid fenugreek...

Marie-Pierre is a vigneronne whose wines span the stylistic spectrum encompassing traditional and modern.

If you like your Poulsard orange and rustic and your Chardonnay to have that "jaune" ne sais quoi, from a sojourn under a yeasty veil, you'll love the uncompromising earthiness of these Jurassic wines. At just 50 hectares Château Chalon is home to the extraordinary Vin Jaune ("Yellow wine"), made from the Savagnin varietal. The grapes are harvested late and then aged in small oak barrels for a minimum of 6 years and 3 months (although some producers age their Vin Jaune for up to 10 years in barrel). The slightly porous oak barrels are, by design, not completely airtight, and a considerable portion – nearly 40% - of the wine therefore evaporates over the years (the so-called "angels share"). No topping up is done. A thick layer of flor yeast, known as the voile or veil, looking like a white foam, develops on the surface of the wine and helps prevent excessive oxidation. This ageing method, similar to that used for fino sherry in Spain, but in France specific to the Jura, allows the wine to acquire its distinct flavours, characteristic of walnut, almond, spice and apple, before release. This remarkable dry wine, at its best immensely complex and very aromatic, is best appreciated after at

least 10-15 years in bottle and has the ability, in good vintages, to age for a century or more.

This unique wine is bottled in a unique bottle, squat with a deep punt, called a "clavelin". Each clavelin has a capacity of 62cl (0.62 litres) – based on the fact that for every litre of newly made wine put into barrel, just 62 centilitres is left after nearly six and a half years of ageing. Vin Jaune is the only wine allowed to be sold in France in a bottle of this capacity. The wines of Château Chalon are distinguished by an additional escutcheon at the base of the neck. How to describe Marie-Pierre's Château Chalon? Green walnut, caraway, fenugreek seed, pickled ginger jostle for attention with a hint of medlar segueing into peanut brittle and salted caramel. The finish is taut, verging on stony-metallic with gripping lemon-grazed acidity and an amazing nuttiness that reverberates around the palate for such a long time. Don't neglect the simply delicious and deliciously simple (and natural) Pinot and Poulsard respectively as well as the brilliant-value Chardonnay sous voile and Savagnins both styles.

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| 2020 | SAVAGNIN OUILLE | W |
| 2019 | SAVAGNIN TYPE | W |
| 2021 | CHARDONNAY SOUS VOILE | W |
| 2022 | PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2022 | POULSARD | R |
| 2015 | CHATEAU CHALON – 62cl | Y |

DOMAINE-BEGUET, PATRICE BEGUET, MESNAY, Arbois – Biodynamic

Patrice Beguet has a vineyard in Mesnay, a little village a stone's throw from Arbois in the Les Planches-près-Arbois gorge. Patrice cultivates roughly four hectares of vines in the Arbois and Arbois Pupillin appellation areas, with a majority of Savagnin for the whites and Ploussard for the reds. All the wines are fermented only with wild yeasts, never chaptalized to increase the degree of alcohol and are produced from vines sprayed with the lowest possible doses of copper, thanks to the use of herbal concoctions which strengthen and regulate the vines' natural defences. The straight Ploussard is pretty pretty. A short maceration for this quaffable Arbois wine yielding a most delicate shade of red just this side of a rosé, whilst in the mouth the tannins are unobtrusive allowing the transparent fruit to express itself, where raspberry is predominant.

The nose exudes hints of smoke, characteristic of Ploussard vines planted on shadier hillsides, as well the black pepper notes which Pupillin's oldest vines often confer to their wines. The more structured Côte de Feule displays initial pungent aromas of red and black fruits mingled with spices leading into intense notes of soft red fruits (strawberry jam), pepper and, unexpectedly, cocoa. On the palate, the wine delivers a lively attack with supple, silky tannins that roll across the tongue. The mid-palate is structured whilst the finish is spicy and balanced.

So True is ruby red Trousseau with a complex nose of cassis, violets, leather and smoke. Lovely fresh attack in the mouth with fine tannins and great equilibrium.

The Savagnin is utterly bracing wine in the ouillé style that will keep you coming back for you, whilst Orange Was The Colour of Her Dress is a wink and nod to Patrice's love of jazz (and in this case Charles Mingus). From 40-year-old vines, a long natural ferment in barrels gives this wine its extra spicy bite.

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|----------|---|----|
| 2020./21 | THREE VIEWS OF A SECRET BLANC | Or |
| 2019/20 | BIG BUNCH THEORY GO TOGETHER BLANC | Or |
| 2021 | BIG BUNCH THEORY FRESH IMPRESSION BLANC | Or |
| 2021/22 | ORANGE WAS THE COLOUR SAVAGNIN | Or |
| 2021 | BIG BUNCH THEORY FRESH IMPRESSION ROUGE | R |
| 2019/20 | BIG BUNCH THEORY GO TOGETHER ROUGE | R |
| 2022 | SILK BLUE ROUGE | R |

Jura-prudence – The innate wisdom of populating your cellar with wonderful bottles of Château Chalon

DOMAINE LES MIROIRS, KENJIRO KAGAMI, GRUSSE, Jura – Organic

We receive occasional tiny quantities of these wines and they are invariably on allocation.

Kenjiro Kagami has made the unlikely transition from electronics engineer at Hitachi to running a natural domaine in Revermont, Jura, that makes some of the most sought-after wines in the appellation. Having worked for six years with Bruno Schueller in Alsace (qv) Kenji wanted to start his own project in a region with limestone soils (the better for acidity). Jean Francois Ganevat helped him to find his 3-ha plot of vineyards just above Grusse, which have now qualified for organic status. He uses native yeasts, tanks and barrels and is resolutely natural (so zero SO2). His Chardonnays are heavenly, the Poulsard, almost pink in colour, is an absolute tonic.

DOMAINE DANIEL DUGOIS, PHILIPPE & MELANIE DUGOIS, LES ARSURES, Arbois – Organic

Garnet coloured with an expressive bouquet, this Trousseau is both delicate and elegant, musky on the nose with attractive tannins. Morello cherry, spices, blackberry jostle for attention on the palate and there is an edge of pinesap which makes this very appealing. Try with wild boar or venison. The Savagnin tastes of bruised apples, fresh walnut, vanilla, and caramel. Watch out also for amazing aromas of fresh curry powder with fenugreek to the fore. It is a baby vin jaune with a highly developed style. For those of you who like to push the pedal to the floor. The vin jaune is probably a bit of an infant itself, having only just emerged from its yeasty veil. These yellow wines will go well with foie gras, chicken with morels, trout with almonds and various cheeses.

| | | |
|------|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 2019 | ARBOIS SAVAGNIN | W |
| 2016 | ARBOIS VIN JAUNE – 62cl | Yellow |
| 2021 | ARBOIS TROUSSEAU “CUVEE GREVILLIERE” | R |

DOMAINE DE SAINT-PIERRE, FABRICE DODANE, MATHENAY, Arbois – Organic

Fabrice Dodane joined this estate in Mathenay in 1989 and began conversion to organic farming in 2002. He also works biodynamically. Situated on a beautiful limestone hill, at the foot of which a chapel houses a statue of the saint of the same name. All the wines are fermented naturally in oak barrels. Both styles of Savagnin are made; a topped-up version and a lovely sous-voile example. The wines are elegant and understated.

KEVIN BOUILLET, PUPILLIN, Arbois – Organic

Kevin Bouillet, a native of Jura, launched his winery in 2018. The young winemaker had cut his teeth at Domaine de la Tournelle before branching out on his own. He recovered some family plots that he supplemented with the vines of retiring farmers, all of which resulted in a total of 4 hectares in Pupillin, near Arbois. Kevin converted his vineyards to organic viticulture. On the Jurassic limestone and the blue and grey marls characteristic of the region, he cultivates the five emblematic grape varieties of the Jura (Poulsard, Trousseau, Chardonnay, Savagnin and Pinot Noir) with a little Melon Queue Rouge.

| | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 2020 | SAVAGNIN OUILLE | W |
| 2020 | SAVAGNIN OUILLE ~ 24 months | W |
| 2020 | SAVAGNIN FEULE ~ magnum | W |
| 2021 | GAMAY PEPIN D’AILLEURS | R |
| 2021 | LA MARCETTE PLOUSSARD VIEILLES VIGNES | R |
| 2021 | ARBOIS PEPIN ROUGE | R |

JURAVINUM, PUPILLIN, Arbois – Organic methods

| | | |
|------|----------------------|--------|
| 2020 | CHARDONNAY TYPE | W |
| 2020 | LE GLANON CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | LE GLANON TROUSSEAU | W |
| 2016 | VIN JAUNE ~ 62 cl | Yellow |

DOMAINE DES CAVARODES, CRAMANS, ETIENNE THIEBAUD, Arbois – Organic

Run by young Etienne Thiébaud who is in his mid-twenties and has been making wine since 2007, Domaine des Cavarodes comprises five hectares on mainly Kimmeridgian chalk and clay with some limestone and marl in the northern part of the Jura region. Etienne is a true artisan currently working organically but is currently in conversion to full biodynamics. He uses herbal teas and vineyard activity is determined by lunar calendar. He is working with fantastic material; some of the vines are ungrafted and over 100 years old. His philosophy is to make wine with as little intervention as possible.

Etienne makes his version of J'en veux!!! (see Ganevat) which is a living archive of vestigial pre-phyloxera varieties. This Vin de Pays de Franche-Comte is a blend of 1/3 Pinot Noir, 1/3 Trousseau and the remainder a melange of Gamay, Poulsard, Pinot Meunier, Argant, Portugais bleu, Enfariné, Mézy...! Vinification is semi-carbonic and there is a ten-month élevage in old barrels. The fruit has a veritable crunch think slightly sour griotte cherries, rustic, yet seductive tannins. The Savagnin Pressé relies on beautiful grapes. Fermentation and élevage sur lie in vat for twelve months then a further two to three months in old fûts (topping up) so that the wine has a chance to settle. Sulphur is only added at bottling for stability. The result captures the essential nobility of the Savagnin grape with an ensemble of lovely pear, apricot and gentian aromas adding colour and tone to a palate of remarkable persistence. The Poulsard is a shimmering ruby, pepper and red fruits on the nose, supple in the mouth, whilst the Trousseau is more muscular and musky, yet still possesses plenty of finesse.

LES BOTTES ROUGES, ABERGEMENT-LE-PETIT, JB MENIGOZ, Arbois – Organic

Jean-Baptiste Menigoz, Les Bottes Rouges, is one of the new wave of natural producers in the Jura. He enrolled in a viticulture course and was eventually taken under the wing of Stephane Tissot in Jura. He started by renting his vines and is slowly buying parcels now, when and where they become available. The whites are rich and textural, the reds undergo semi-carbonic maceration.

DOMAINE BORNARD, TONY BORNARD, PUPILLIN, Arbois – Biodynamic

Philippe Bornard lives at the top of the village of Pupillin and farms about six hectares, which he inherited from his father.

After years of selling grapes to the local cooperative, and with the urging of his good friend and Jurassic legend Pierre Overnoy, in 2005 Philippe made the move towards vinifying and bottling his own wines. He makes wines in same very natural vein: unfiltered, unfinned and with no added sulphur. Point Barre is Ploussard and that's the end of the argument (a very rough translation of the French colloquialism). Or all wine and no bull. Your first hint that something interesting is going on is the nose of the wine: notes of spicy strawberries and spiced apples tease your nostrils. The body is medium-to-full with a delicious mid-palate of acidity that pricks your senses. The core of the wine has an earthy, barnyard character, but one that is wrapped in fruity, pink grapefruit and a candied cherry and pomegranate finish. It's delicious and startling and balances a tightrope between earth and fruit. The Trousseau is another in the lighter idiom. The nose offers floral notes along with red fruit. "Le Ginglet," loosely translated means "easy to drink," and the wine is precisely that; light on its feet, highly quaffable, and a perfect introduction (for those who haven't had one) to the brilliant red wines of the Jura. Maceration of these Trousseau grapes takes place for three weeks in fibreglass. Once fermentation is finished the wine is transferred to large oak barrels to age for 12 months. The Savagnins grows on designated vineyard sites – predominantly limestone soils interspersed with deposits of marl and clay. In the vineyard Philippe practises biodynamic viticulture, a strict form of organic farming whose timing is dependent upon the lunar cycle, as well as the utilization of a set of natural preparations to treat vines to optimize vineyard health. His wine is made traditionally, meaning that during the ageing process there exists head space between the surface of the wine and the opening of the barrel. Thus, the wine is constantly exposed to oxygen and most often develops slightly oxidized characteristics similar of roasted nuts, salt, and savoury flavours. Nevertheless, along with subtle nuances of such an oxidized wine, this Savagnin still maintains a vibrancy and briskness marked by fresh apples and a distinct mineral note.

DOMAINE DE LA BORDE, JULIEN MARESCHAL, PUPILLIN, Arbois – Biodynamic

Julien Mareschal is one of the only people to make wine in the Côte de Caillot, right outside of Pupillin.

He works organically and has been in conversion to biodynamics since 2012. Each of his wines has a vineyard name. Proportionately, he has a lot of Savagnin, almost 50% of his vineyard holdings, grown on grey marls. His Savagnin called Foudre a Canon is ouille, fermented in foudres and bottled a little more than a year later. The Ploussard La Feule is made without any sulphur added at all; the other wines receive a small dose just at bottling. The Chardonnay is from a plot of 25 hectares of 35-year-old vines planted in Bajocian limestone on the top of steep slopes at 450m in elevation. Julien crafts serious Chardonnay in the ouille style, showcasing the true terroir of the site. The wine ferments naturally with indigenous yeasts and is raised in old, 1200L barrels.

Rousseau – Voltaire – our Gibbon – De Staël --
 Leman ! These names are worthy of thy shore,
 Thy shore of names like these! Wert thou no more,
 Their memory thy remembrance would recall:
 To them thy banks were lovely as to all,
 But they have made them lovelier, for the lore
 Of mighty minds doth hallow in the core
 Of human hearts the ruin of a wall
 Where dwelt the wise and wondrous; but by thee
 How much more, Lake of Beauty! Do we feel,
 In sweetly gliding o'er thy crystal sea,
 The wild glow of that not ungentle zeal,
 Which of the heirs of immortality
 Is proud, and makes the breath of glory real!

LES VIGNES DE PARADIS, DOMINIQUE LUCAS, BALLAISON, Haute-Savoie – *Biodynamic*

Dominique Lucas is a 5th generation Burgundy winemaker who started his domaine in the Haut Savoie in 2008. Today he has 10 hectares of vines, 2.5 of which are in Burgundy in the Haute Côte de Beaune, and in Pommard across from the Chateau.

Harvest at Les Vignes de Paradis lasts an incredible 2.5 months. Chasselas needs a long time to get ripe! Dominique does five passes through each vineyard making sure that the grapes are ripe. Chasselas does not take the sun as easily as some other cépages, and most Chasselas is harvested grossly under ripe. We talked about how most Chasselas in the region is made: over-cropped and under-ripe, loaded up with sugar to attain a respectable degree of alcohol. I laughed when he commented: les camions du sucre sont infernaux! – spoken like a man who will never chaptalize. The overall terroir of the area is limestone with yellow marl, granite, and glacial morasses; Dominique farms 27 different parcels on various soil types, which he separates and raises in egg, barrel, or a combination of the two depending on the desired result. There are four appellations by Lac Léman, and they are all for Chasselas. And he plants Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Savagnin, and Petite Arvine, which are for the most part legal in IGP wines, but not in appellation wines. The Chasselas for the Marrin is planted in granitic soils with glacial moraines lending it some of the most biting mineral-flavours and textures you will find a white wine. Restrained aromas of yellow under-ripe citrus fruit and a hint of honeysuckle rise from the glass. On the palate it opens with brilliant honey-tinged, tropical fruit and bright citrus that gives way to a rush of minerals that lasts seemingly forever. Un matin face au lac is from high parcels in a vineyard facing Lac Leman. 40-year-old vines planted on silty-clay soils. The wine is naturally vinified in betons and amphora. It maintains a ravishing acidity and ample minerality like all of his wines but seems a bit more open aromatically with hints of crème brûlée, almond milk, and zesty lemon meringue. These luscious aromas coalesce once on the palate with more succulent citrus and sea minerals coming forward. Savagnin comes from young vines are very near the lake planted on silty soils. This tiny production is fermented in cement eggs and given a tiny dose of SO2 at bottling. The wine is more in the style of a Gringet, its weight given real verve by naturally bracing acidity.

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|------|-----------------------------|---|
| 2022 | IGP SAVAGNIN | W |
| 2022 | CHASSELAS MATIN FACE AU LAC | W |

DOMAINE BRUNO LUPIN, FRANGY, Savoie ~ *organic methods*

Hills peep over hills
 Alps on Alps arise

The Roussette de Savoie AC is for dry white wines made from the Altesse variety (locally called Roussette). There are sixteen villages in the Savoie, all of which have higher standards than those of the Vin de Savoie AC and Roussette de Savoie AC and may append their name to either of these appellations if their wines meet these higher criteria. One of the best of these crus is Frangy. The soils here are argillaceous limestone and glacial moraines and the exposure of the vines is south facing. As with many of the vineyards in this region the viticulture is lutte raisonnée. (Minimal use of chemicals, low yields, hand harvested) and the yields moderate (49hl/ha). In the winery some skin contact is allowed for richness of aroma with fermentation at 18-20c, followed by a natural settling of the must, lees contact, and eventual bottling in April the following year. The flavours are reminiscent of pear, gingerbread, spice, and honey with a touch of nougat and the mouthfeel is soft, mellow and off dry. This would be splendid with river fish such as pike or perch, or veal escalope, or even the local Beaufort cheese.

| | | |
|------|--------------------------------|---|
| 2023 | ROUSSETTE DE SAVOIE CRU FRANGY | W |
| 2023 | MONDEUSE | R |

I have long remembered
 the pavilion
 on the stream
 the falling sun
 so deep in wine
 we did not know
 the way home
 how pleasure spent
 late returning
 the skiff
 thoughtless
 entered
 a lotus deep place
 and struggling through
 struggling through
 we scared up
 from the sand
 gulls and herons.

DOMAINE DUPRAZ, MARC DUPRAZ, APREMONT, Haute-Savoie – *Biodynamic*

Established in 1880 by François Dupraz, the estate is now run by 6th generation, Jérémy and Maxime Dupraz. They work 18ha of vineyards in the foothills of the Chartreuse massif in Apremont, within the lieu-dit of Le Reposoir. Jérémy and Maxime produce natural wines to obtain the purest expression of Jacquère and other grapes, such as Mondeuse and Altesse. Being in the shadows of Mt Granier, the estate benefits from regular light winds. Clay soils, situated at an altitude between 350 and 450 metres on steep slopes, oriented to the east, facing the rising sun (best for gentle ripening). Le Reposoir was spared from the landslide of Mt Granier that occurred in 1248 and the soils of the estate therefore differ completely from the other climates of the Apremont cru. The winningly-named En Route Pour l'Apero Blanc is 100% Jacquère, a relatively prolific grape in this region. This delightful version is whole cluster pressed and fermented in a combination of cement tank and eggs, additionally using old futs and demi-muids. Indigenous yeasts and zero temperature control are the order of the day. Maturation takes place in used barrels and malolactic fermentation occurs naturally. Minimal sulphites are added. The resultant wine is clean and crunchy with an alpine acidity, sporting notes of juicy pears and green apple. This cuvée is homage to the grape Jacquère, the wine being the king of the aperitif.

| | | |
|------|-----------------------------|---|
| 2023 | EN ROUTE POUR L'APERO BLANC | W |
| 2022 | MONTRACUL SAVOIE BLANC | W |

LES VINS DE BELEMA, YANN PERNUIT, AYZE, Haute-Savoie – *Biodynamic*

Yann has been a purveyor of biodynamic practices during the last 15 years in Savoie, previously employed at Chateau de Merande helping them convert the domaine to biodynamic farming. He returned home to AYZE in the Haute Savoie to work with Dominique Belluard, a friend and mentor. He started Domaine Belema as a negociant before planting some vines in the village. Belema is a tiny 1.5 hectares of alpine grapes consisting of Mondeuse, Etraire de la Dhuy, Altesse, and of course Gringet. Yann farms using organic and biodynamic practises, in the cellar, minimum intervention with fermentation and ageing in sandstone amphora and terracotta eggs, no filtration and a little sulphur added at bottling. The wine, called Imago, is beautiful, generous and spicy, light in alcohol and very long on flavour.

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|------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 2023 | VIN DE SAVOIE-AYZE GRINGET « IMAGO » | W |
| 2023 | VIN DE SAVOIE SANS PAREIL ROUGE | R |

LA CUVERIE, AURELIAN BEYEKLIAN, Bugey – Organic

At “La Cuverie”, Aurelien Beyeklian stands for a natural, humble, and friendly approach to wine with determination & passion. After a first professional career around the world with the Red Cross, he decided, at 40, to start all over again! A few essential encounters (apprenticeship with the Bret brothers in Vinzelles), the need of a different life and the conviction that Bugey is home of wonderful wines: this is what pushed him to become winemaker. Revermont belongs to the most southern part of the French Jura, to the east of the Bresse plain which it dominates from 150 to 400 m. Composed from east to west of several anticlinal and synclinal structures, oriented north-south, its territory offers soil (formed at the secondary level) very suitable for Jura grape varieties (like Poulsard). The hillsides, backed by a limestone plateau have quite complex soils where marl, Triassic clay and limestone scree mix. All work in the vineyard is carried out manually with horses used for ploughing and sheep grazing between the vines. Certified organic (since 2023), but converting currently to biodynamics, all in a permaculture environment. The Patchwork Chardonnay has citrus notes (grapefruit) in the attack then more pastry notes arrive (buttery side of wood aging) which brings a thicker texture which balances well with the acidity of this juice. Both the wines are naturally made, without the addition of any sulphites.

| | | |
|------|--------------------------|-------|
| 2022 | PATCHWORK CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | GLOUSSARD PLOUPLOU ROUGE | R |
| 2023 | CERDON PET NAT ROSE | Sp/Ro |

FOOD & WINE IN JURA & SAVOIE

The wines of Jura and Savoie are not for the faint hearted, but their peculiar angularity vitally accords with the food of the region. It may not be all cheese and pork – actually that’s what it virtually all is!

As is customary in rural France in the **Jura** region there is plenty of pig to poke about. *Jambon de Luxeuil*, a cured ham from the town of Luxeuil, is smoked according to an ancestral recipe. It is initially marinated in a bath of salt and juniper berries then slightly smoked with fir tree sawdust. *Saucisse de Morteau*, a sausage made exclusively with pork meat, originates from Morteau, located in the heart of the traditional “tué” region. The sausage is hung in a “tué”, enveloped by the smoke from coniferous trees for a minimum of 48 hours to achieve its unique taste and full flavour. It needs to be carefully poached in simmering water to prevent it from bursting and can be eaten hot or cold. *Saucisse de Montbéliard* comprises high quality pork, spiced with cumin, nutmeg, garlic and white wine and is smoked in accordance with the regional tradition. The sausage should be cooked for twenty minutes in simmering water or wrapped in foil paper and baked in the oven. It goes well with most vegetables and is traditionally served with warm *cancoillote* cheese. A rustic spiced berry Trousseau or Trousseau blend would serve admirably. *Coq au vin jaune* benefits from the unique flavour of the famous “vin jaune” (yellow wine). Other French regions prepare a similar dish with red or white wine. This recipe uses a rooster or a large hen. The wine of choice to accompany the dish is naturally vin jaune, although a straight Savagnin will suffice. *Poularde aux morilles* is a variation of the “Coq au Vin Jaune”, and a local speciality popular in many Jura restaurants. It is prepared with a hen (16 to 20 weeks old, ready to lay eggs but not laying yet), yellow wine and morels (*morilles*). Used fresh in season (spring) or freeze-dried, morel is a delicate mushroom imparting distinctive perfume to the sauce. *Truite au vin jaune*, another classic Franche-Comté recipe, the delicate flesh of this freshwater fish is perfectly complemented by the exotic flavour of the unctuous sauce made with the typical Jura wine. One might try a Chardonnay with this, especially one where the wine has been aged in previously used Savagnin barrels.

Other local favourites include *Escalope de veau Comtoise* – first glazed in a pan, then topped with cured ham and grated 137eper cheese, the veal cutlet is coated with a rich and creamy mushroom sauce and *Potée Comtoise*, which, unlike other country “potées”, includes smoked meats. Palette, sausages and lard enrich this complete meal of potatoes, cabbage, carrots, celeriac and green beans, slowly simmered. A Poulsard with its high acidity would cut through this hale heartiness. *Chèvre sale* (salted goat) is a traditional dish of the Haut-Jura, served in winter, from October 15th to March 15th. It used to be the staple country food and is now becoming fashionable again. The number of “salt goat nights” is increasing in the city of Saint-Claude; restaurants have it on their menu or it can be cooked at home. Its meat is an attractive pink and is prepared as a pot-au-feu served with boiled potatoes.

Fondue-making consists of melting Comté cheese into a pot of warm, garlic-infused white wine. The pot called “poêlon” is centred on the table where guests (this is truly communal eating) dip pieces of crusty bread on long-handled forks to coat them with the cheese mixture. *Raclette Jurassienne* is made with “Bleu de Gex”, instead of the traditional Raclette cheese. An electric grill is centred on the table and each diner is given a stack of sliced cheese and places each slice into his assigned individual square dish under the grill till it melts. It is then spread over boiled potatoes, served with pickles and “charcuteries”. Still on a cheesy theme, Morbier cheese gave its name to the *morbiflette* (a cousin of famous tartiflettes), wherein cooked potatoes and onions are covered with slices of morbier cheese, the whole dish being baked until the cheese melts. This hearty dish needs a spiky local Jura or Savoie white wine and a green salad to cleanse the palate. *Poulet à la Comtoise* is another gratin-style dish involving poaching chicken then covering in creamy cheese sauce and mushrooms and finally grilling it in the oven. Comté cheese goes a long way in the Jura!

The region of **Savoie**, divided today into the departments of Savoie and Haute-Savoie, lies at the heart of the French Alps—the remnants of a kingdom that ruled much of this part of Europe for eight centuries, until the mid-1800s—and it is here that French mountain cooking thrives most vigorously. The raw materials are rich and varied—cheese and other dairy products; apples, pears, plums, and cherries; mountain berries and wild mushrooms; wild game; fresh fish from local lakes—not just trout but perch, pike, and the sublime omble-chevalier. *Fondue Savoyarde* is the region’s most famous dish, but hearty soups and stews (among them the famous potée), civets of

game, potato dishes, and glorious fruit tarts all appear on the Savoyard table as well.

Historically, during the long winter months, the people of Chamonix subsisted on a diet of potatoes, cheese, onions, and ham or pork. Today, these same ingredients are still fundamental to the local cuisine. One of the most popular offerings is an ancient speciality called *reblochonnade* (also known as *tartiflette*), a sturdy cousin of the classic *gratin Savoyarde*. The dish is made of thinly sliced potatoes sautéed with bacon and onions, moistened with cream, and then baked in the oven. Finally, generous slices of creamy reblochon (a cow's-milk cheese made in the Haute-Savoie) are melted on top.

The restaurants in and around Courchevel (and there are many) serve authentic Savoyard dishes such as warm Beaufort tart, cured country ham, wonderful cheeses, and desserts. In the evening, the mountains still reflect light from the horizon, tingeing white peaks with pink. At this hour, when the day's play is done and the broken limbs and bruises totted up, skiers sip mulled wine before heading off to the table. Then they sit down to a sumptuous array of dishes, from Mediterranean seafood to such unmistakably local offerings as *raclette* (melted raclette cheese served with potatoes, ham, and cornichons) or a classic fondue. Dishes such as trout or char cooked in white wine from nearby streams, roast kid with morels, lambs' brains fritters, and local cheeses, followed by mountain berries beaten with cream or by honeyed *matefaim*—literally “hunger-killer”, a dessert of thick risen pancakes and apples cooked in butter—all washed down with a crisp, pétillant Savoyard white wine (Gringet or Abymes), have been a feature of Savoyard cooking for centuries. Things change slowly in the mountains of France.

The wines are unique. In Jura the whites are characterised by their rich nuttiness: Vin Jaune, Château-Chalon and even straight Savagnin are magnificently aromatic with texture and flavour in abundance. Notes of apple, straw and almond for the lighter wines moving towards flor, marzipan and hazelnut and grilled walnut and oloroso in the great vins des gards. Savoie whites are as crisp as mountain air. The reds from both regions are pale yet robust with plenty of acidity, bitter fruit and tannin.

Notes From The Undersoil

"I had that Bertrand Russell in the back of my cab once. So, I asked him, "Well, Mr Russell, what's it all about?" And do you know – he couldn't tell me!"

A cab driver funnily enough asked me what I thought about wine, and, lacking a pat ontological response, I went puffing in many directions simultaneously. Wine as a subject is out there; it is part of mass culture now, yet equally it is about formulating individual opinions and developing a personal sense of taste. Wine elicits in some a strong philosophical inclination; in others, conversely, it exposes an anti-philosophical, pontifical side; it seems that many must hold deep opinions even if they are about shallow subjects. Meanwhile, the omphalic wine press focuses increasingly on the folderol and gimmickry of a trade fascinated by the tarnished lustre of PR campaigns, endlessly regurgitated surveys, the fripperies of branding, trite packaging, the meagre frivolity of awards, and, most of all, the deadly buzz of what's considered new and groovy. The wine trade reinvents itself constantly to track trends, but, in reality, it's just changing one set of the emperor's new clothes for another. Novelty, as Pierre Brasseur observes in *Les Enfants du Paradis*, is as old as the world itself.

The quality of debate is not much better at a supposedly more exalted level. I recently read a forum on biodynamics and was surprised how many contributions were couched in the contrarian language of pseudo-academia. Man, proud man, drest in a little brief authority most ignorant of what he is most assur'd etc. There was an extraordinary amount of hobbyhorse-riding, posturing, quoting out of context, intellectual absolutism and second guessing. It reminded me of those conferences where carefully researched papers are given, many opinions are vehemently ventilated, and no-one ends up any the wiser. The love that many of us have for us for wine is gradually being eroded by a welter of spurious scientific evidence thrown into our faces. Do you believe that you taste terroir in a wine? A scientist will be on hand to assert contentiously that there is no evidence for terroir and that it is a fanciful invention of the French. (In fact, that argument is a fanciful invention of scientists on an ego trip. They can't disprove its existence, but they can create false arguments to knock down). Do you love a particular wine? Then it may shake your confidence to know that many so-called authoritative wine writers (supertasters) will mark it out of a hundred and perhaps completely disagree with you. Romance? Magic? Pleasure. Forget 'em. Wine tasting has become over-evaluative; it bears less and less relation to the wine itself and to the way we respond as human beings.

The poem was probably
a poem about itself
as a pearl speaks of pearls
and a butterfly of butterflies

that poem
which eludes me in daylight
has hidden itself in itself
only sometimes
I feel its bitterness
and internal warmth
but I don't pull it out of
the dark hollow depth
on to the flat bank
of reality

unborn
it fills the emptiness
of a disintegrating world
with unknown speech

Tadeusz Różewicz – Translated by Adam Czerniawski

For me the pleasure of wine is pleasure: occasionally we should resist analysing our experience in the same way as when we read a poem or listen to music, we do not have to clinically dissect its beauty and rearrange it (what is this but translating one language into another). Too often we strain for definitive answers, we want to consciously validate our experiences rather than to feel them on the pulses. Yet pleasure may consist of denying the final moment of critical appreciation. In his *Ode to Melancholy* Keats depicts the tightly bound unresolved relationship between pleasure and melancholy with a succession of extraordinary taut images and juddering juxtapositions, one of the most memorable of which is "...whose strenuous tongue/ Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine". Keats suggests that the instant you resolve the pleasure (be it through gratification of desire or exploding a grape or tasting a wine) you destroy the pleasure, but that that let-down is an inevitable part of pleasure. Give rein to the senses, savour the moment exquisitely, suspend judgement and allow yourself to receive impressions; like the poem that has hidden itself in itself a wine doesn't need to be yanked out of a dark hollow depth and exposed to flip judgement. In these moments the wine is more important than the taster. A portion of humility works wonders.

This is not to say that appreciating wine is a solitary activity. Sharing a bottle of wine in good company with good food is the definition of happy sensuousness. Communicating pleasure takes it to another level. Wine writing has become an abstraction because it is unable to celebrate this sense of pleasure; editorial constraints mean that even accomplished writers are shackled and their columns effectively reduced to a succession of sound-nibbles and supermarket recommendations. Which brings me back to my initial point: to question whether there is any room in wine writing for philosophical interrogation, for relaying aesthetic appreciation and sensual pleasure, or must every single word fit the purpose – in that the writing is designed specifically to sell "the business of wine" and is consequently destined forever merely to skim the surface of this fascinating subject.

*To happy convents deep in vines
Where slumber abbots purple as their wines*
Alexander Pope – The Dunciad

WHAT'S UP MEDOC? (The price is – every day)

Appreciation – the process whereby the value of wines of a certain reputation multiplies exponentially over a short period of time. As in “I appreciate that this bottle of Pomerol will be worth three times as much if I sell it five years hence”.

- The Alternative Wine Glossary

A relatively small selection of Petits Châteaux, but we are scouring the region for goodies. Are we that bovvered? Maybe not. I would commend to your attention Château La Claymore (a flavoursome Lussac Saint-Emilion likely to be enjoyed by Scotsmen looking for hand-to-hand combat) and the Château Penin, a consistently fine wine punching above the modest Bordeaux Supérieur classification. For those in the Bordeaux name game who can't afford the top dollar top dogs, democratic second wines such as Lacoste-Borie and Segla provide an echoic flavour of the real thing. And for a Bordeaux that has shaken off the clunky shackles of Bordeaux we would unreservedly recommend Jacques Broustet's Autrement de Lamery. It's not AOC, it's biodynamic, low yields, no sulphur – and tastes like a Burgundy. So not a Bordeaux.

That's the upside. Now let's talk quality and squeaky pips and the mutest of fruit. Are not many growers in Bordeaux as smug as bugs in rugs? They certainly have green fingers; a character transmitted into the wines which embody the true flavour of LEAF-THROAT-MULCH. Sure, they talk the talk, but do they destalk the stalk? We taste endless samples, lean, mean, joyless wines with either dried-out or soupy fruit, or over-extracted wines where frantic fiddling in the winery is trying to compensate for the poor fruit quality. Until we find something good, we will resist the lustre of Listrac, avoid parting with our hard-earned moolah for Moulis and will never rave for the Graves and *damn it, my dear, I don't give a franc.*

I give this peroration 84 Parker points

Upfront, fruity language, acidulous facetiousness, moderate offensiveness, lacking in structure, very sudden fin--

ENTRE-DEUX-MERS/BORDEAUX

Neither mean nor green the Entre-Deux-Mers is a well-balanced wine wherein the grapefruit tanginess of the Sauvignon is complemented by the more vinous qualities of the Sémillon grape. Ages more than gracefully. The red Deville is a jolly juicer sans tannin, one for the mumblecrust tendency. It is possible that it may not change vintage within our lifetime. What Eric refers to as lunch-time claret.

| | | |
|------|---|---|
| 2022 | CHATEAU DEVILLE, ENTRE-DEUX-MERS | W |
| 2019 | CHATEAU DEVILLE ROUGE, COTES DE BORDEAUX | R |
| 2015 | CHATEAU DEVILLE ROUGE, COTES DE BORDEAUX ~ magnum | R |

BORDEAUX SUPERIEUR

Merlot 65%, Cabernet Franc 35%. A selection of the oldest vines in the vineyard. Grapes are hand harvested. Lovely nose of black fruits and developed herbaceous notes, dark plum and cherry with gravelly freshness and hints of green pepper and dried herbs, fine and well-integrated tannins.

| | | |
|------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 2019 | CHATEAU MAINE MARTIN VIEILLES VIGNES | R |
|------|--------------------------------------|---|

“Crambe repetita” (cold cabbage warmed up) as Juvenal wrote. Bordeaux occupies the dark basement in our value-for-money index. For years we have been spun a myth. Hype is the name of the game with every vintage at the time promising to be the vintage of the century with specious rumours of shortages and the wines being perceived as commodities to be brokered rather than drunk. Such tactics might conceivably be excused if the wines were divine, but they are generally not, and it would be nice if the traditional English seigneurial palate ventured into the humble French regions in search of greater fulfilment.

“I (Vautrin) propose a little *bottlerama* of Bordeaux made doubly illustrious by the name Laffitte...”
He poured out a glass for Eugene and Père Goriot and then slowly poured out a few drops which he himself tasted...
“Devil take it! It's corked.”

Père Goriot – Honore de Balzac

OOOoooOOO

Thuggish baddy (not so cunningly disguised as waiter):
Would you like your Château Mouton-Rothschild decant -ed now, sir?”

James Bond: No, I would prefer a claret.

T. B.: Very well, I will fetch you a claret.

Bond: Aha. If you were a real waiter, you would know that Mouton-Rothschild *is* a claret.

Waiter explodes with a stick of dynamite between his legs

Diamonds Are Forever

“I hardly know wherein philosophy and wine are alike unless it be in this, that the philosophers exchange their ware for money, like the wine-merchants; some of them with a mixture of water or worse or giving short measure.”

Walter Pater – *Marius The Epicurean*

CHATEAU PENIN, BORDEAUX SUPERIEUR – certified HVE

Patrick Carteyron's Château Penin is extremely supple, exuding sweet blackcurrants, bilberries and nuances of cloves all plumped up with nice oak. Very highly regarded by the jury of the Guide Hachette. The Grande Selection is a blend of grapes sourced from 11 hectares of the best gravel and sandy soils on the estate. All the vines are over thirty years old. The blend is Merlot (90%) and Cabernet Sauvignon (10%). Yields are kept low, grapes are harvested at maximum ripeness and then destemmed and fermented in temperature controlled stainless steel vats. Eventually the wine is racked into barrels of fine-grained Allier oak (one third of which are renewed annually) and aged for twelve months with regular oxygenation. Très supérieur.

2018 CHATEAU PENIN “GRANDE SELECTION” R

CHATEAU LAMERY, JACQUES BROUSTET, BORDEAUX /VIN DE FRANCE – Biodynamic

Château Lamery is based in Saint Pierre d'Aurillac (about 10km from Sauternes). The estate is a mere 3 hectares with south-facing vines on well-drained sandy-clay soils. Since 2006, Jacques abandoned conventional viticulture and conventional winemaking to work naturally – working the soil, plant tisanes and preparations of natural vine products. The vines are aged from 25 to over 70 years planted at 5,200 vines per hectare. After a manual harvest and a strict triage vinification takes place in small cement vats. Then it is natural all the way to the bottle with wild yeast ferment, zero additives, no topping up, no racking, no fining, no filtration, and no added sulphur. It's a Cabernet Sauvignon with Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Malbec. The wine stays nine months in casks plus four months in a blending vat. Very beautiful nose, complex and subtle with dried fruit and mineral tones. Jacques calls it a “vin Autrefois”, a wine from the past, when Bordeaux was elegant.

2016 AUTREMENT DE LAMERY R

New Wine For Old! New Wine For Old! There's a lot of dust on that bottle. So bad for asthma. And look at the label – so faded. You can hardly read H**T BR**N – could be anything. Wouldn't you like a clean bottle with a glossy label and a funny, happy name? I have one with hopping kangaroos. Of course, you would. Let's see the date. 1961? Oh my God, it's over forty years past its sell-by date. Listen, I give you a bottle with a new sell-by date – see, NV, that means you drink it any time forever you know what I mean? On my mother's life! First growth? Schmirst growth. That's one out of five, madame. No, cork is cheap – look it floats like a witch, trust me – get yourself screwcap, I give you no-charge rust-free guarantee...

BORDEAUX

2022 PLASSONS LE FREMENT R

NV RASTIGNAC PINEAU DES CHARENTES

GRAVES DE VAYRE

2018 CHATEAU TOULOUZE METAIRIE R

LUSSAC SAINT-EMILION

Several communes bordering Saint-Emilion are permitted to put their name on their wine labels along with that of their famous neighbour. Lussac is one of these. The vineyard's roots and history go back to the 14th century where it belonged to the Cistercian monastery of Faise and it takes its name from the 100 years' war. At last, something to shout about – highly potable Bordeaux from Maison Dubard (but you should taste their Bergerac!). The Cadet is the junior version, dark, chunky with good grip, the Claymore has that attractive old-pine-in-warm-earth mellow glow to the fruit. Both senior and junior are 80% Merlot with an equal split of the two Cabernets. The terroir is sandy and rich in iron. Yields are kept reasonably low (less than 50hl/ha) with a green harvest and a selection of grapes at harvest time. Each grape variety is vinified separately at controlled temperatures. The Cadet would go well with terrines and smoked ham, the estate wine with red meat, game, and cheese and both should be decanted before serving.

2018 CADET DU CHATEAU CLAYMORE R

2019 CHATEAU LA CLAYMORE R

2020 CHATEAU LA CLAYMORE – ½ bottle R

A new Iron Sommelier Challenge has been inaugurated in the US

Said to test the skills of wine waiters under the most extreme conditions, the challenge is divided into six stages. To the victor the spoils, a luxuriant chest hair wig and a TV series involving lots of shouting at the camera, to the losers a jeroboam of Liebfraumilch.

The candidates will be expected to excel in the following disciplines:

- “The Quick Pour”. “Roaderer (sic) Rollerblading” amongst an obstacle course of 15 tables pulling champagne corks out with their teeth, singing the lyrics to the Carpenter’s Top of the World whilst dispensing fizz to all and sundry – preferably in glasses.
- Creating the ultimate gangsta champagne cocktail. Judging this section will be Dom Dom Ru, MC Mumm, L. Pee, Snoop Salon Salon and the Wu-Taittinger Clan. Passing the yak and Cristal in a single glass is one of the mandatory disciplines. Points will be deducted if straws and multi-coloured parasols are omitted. All cocktails must be made with ice (diamonds) rather than ice (frozen water).
- The chest-beating Château Latour challenge. Sommeliers will each be asked to sell a bottle of the Pauillac 1st growth to a table of unwilling customers. If they succeed, they must pound their pectoral muscles with their fists and ululate for precisely three minutes and 45 seconds.
- Serving the late Michael Winner a bottle of wine in a hot air balloon. The winner (no pun intended) is the sommelier who allows the balloon to reach the greatest height before hurling the auteur of Deathwish 4 out of the aforementioned dirigible. Calm down, my dear, it’s only a game!
- The pronunciation test. Finalists will be tested on their ability to make Merlot sound as close to a three-syllable word or Lloyd Grossman swallowing a giant octopus.
- Food and wine matching to a menu devised by Ferran Adria’s gothic imagination*

Emulsion of angels’ wings

Muttering oysters, seaweed fritters, ocean essence

Mock parrot, buried treasure, devils’ islands, edible sand

Existential chocolate ideas

*Extra marks will be awarded in a half-assed fashion.

DOMAINE LES 4 VENTS, ANTONE & JULIE DUBIASTRE, PUISSEGUIN SAINT-EMILION ~ Organic

Antoine and Julie met at a winemaking school. After they got their degrees they both worked in different parts of the France and the world before coming back to Bordeaux and decided to make their own wine. They took over the vineyard in early 2020, immediately starting the conversion to organic farming. This is a lease with “Terre de Liens”, an association which helps a new generation of farmers to access to a land already worked organically or with the desire to restore it to an organic agriculture.

| | | |
|------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 2022 | VDF HEGOA ROUGE | R |
| 2020 | PUISSEGUIN-ST-EMILION “ALIZES” ROUGE | R |

SAINT-EMILION

Located within the appellation of St-Emilion, this Chateau produces wine from vines with an average age of 35 years from a mixture of sand and clay soils with a substratum of iron. Crafted from 80% Merlot and 15% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Cab Franc the wine undergoes 8-12 months élevage in cement tanks before being bottled. In the glass the wine presents a garnet colour and slightly paler rim. On the palate there are dark fruits, plums and hints of liquorice, tar, and spice with a finish of lead pencil shavings. The impressive length and complexity of this wine combined with smooth tannins makes this an ideal partner to grilled meat dishes.

| | | |
|------|-------------------------|---|
| 2018 | CHATEAU GUERIN-BELLEVUE | R |
|------|-------------------------|---|

SAINT-EMILION GRAND CRU

Whilst this lacks some of the immediate charms of the Lalande-de-Pomerols (q.v.) this Saint-Emilion has a youthful bite, a palate-pummelling grippiness of a swiftly flipped rare fillet of steak. 80% Merlot and 20% Cabernet Franc from an 8-hectare vineyard located so adjacent to the borders of Pomerol that you could virtually lean across the fence and pick the grapes of Château L’Evangile (perhaps they do). The terrain is composed of light gravels and old sands. Green harvesting, leaf and grape thinning is followed by meticulous hand selection of grapes according to optimal maturity. Macerated cherries and dark chocolate on the nose lead to a satisfying weight of red fruit in the mouth; the finish is complex, elegant and mineral. Food-wise, try this with quails in their coffins as cooked in Babette’s Feast, or, more conventionally, entrecôte béarnaise. This 25-hectare estate is located on the slopes just outside the town of St-Emilion, and owned by Escure family, who teamed up with the head winemaker of Château Bellegrave in the 1990s to bring their vineyards and winery into the modern era. A rounded and classy Merlot-dominated blend (with some Cab Franc) fermented in cement vats and aged half in vat and half in barrel, offering a soft, plump-feeling palate of ripe bramble and plum, with mature prune notes and hints of earth and pine forest on the nose.

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| 2018 | CHATEAU LA CROIX CHANTECAILLE | R |
| 2022 | CHATEAU LA CROIX CHANTECAILLE – ½ bottle | R |

Columbo: I want you to teach me everything you know.

Wine Expert: It took me forty years to acquire my expertise.

Columbo: Well, what can you do in an hour and a half?

Wine Expert: Oh, just the very basics.

Columbo: Let's start with this—How can you tell a good wine from an average wine?

Wine Expert: By the price.

Any Port In A Storm

SAINT-EMILION GRAND CRU CLASSE

The vineyards of Larmande lie a little over one kilometre to the north of the town of St-Emilion itself, and are planted on a variety of terroirs, principally (accounting for 70% of the vines) on ancient sandy soils as is typical of much of the right bank, but with some more desirable but admittedly smaller zones of clay with flint (15% of the total) and clay with limestone. The blend is typically 60% Merlot, 35% Cab Franc and 5% Cab Sauvignon. Vineyard practices are sound with ploughing to reduce weeds rather than herbicides, bunch-thinning and finical manual harvesting. Delicious nutty oak here, with smoky nuances, and plenty of deep, fruit-cakey, plummy fruit. Nice flesh on the palate, supple and well composed, with a gentle texture and a slightly nutty finish.

2016

CHATEAU LARMANDE

R

CHATEAU DES ANNEREAUX, LALANDE-DE-POMEROL – Organic (Ecocert certified)

Château des Annereaux is presently owned by the Milhades, a Bordelais family known for their uncompromising devotion to the production of fine wine and unwavering commitment to the viticultural restoration of historical Bordeaux estates. Critics consider Château des Annereaux to be this family's crowning achievement. No time in its more than five centuries of continuous production has Château des Annereaux produced better wine than it does today, prompting Decanter to call this property, "an essential discovery for any claret lover".

Situated on the plateau near Lalande in the heart of the appellation, Château des Annereaux produces one of the region's longest-lived wines. Here, the gravel and clay soils favour Merlot, and the 55-acre vineyard is planted primarily to that variety, with the balance consisting of lush, fragrant Cabernet Franc. Vinification is totally traditional, beginning with hand-harvesting and a long maceration (time the fermenting must spends on the skins). Elevage takes place in small barrels, about 35-50% of which are new each year. The resulting wine is invariably rich and full, and long lasting, developing a creamy richness with bottle age. As you might expect of a Pomerol satellite this red is plush, opulent, and delicious. Supple, fruity, and easy to drink, it would be easy to dismiss this wine as a lovely, round claret for early consumption. However, because of centuries of cultivation at the same site, the presence of natural wild yeasts on the grapes adds elegance as well as complexity to des Annereaux. Nuances of spice, leather, and chocolate combine with lush fruit and silky tannins to provide depth and layers of flavour in the wine. Ample airing and further bottle age enhance the wine's long, lingering finish.

Roast chicken, quail or squab would be perfect pairings with this delicious Bordeaux, as would more traditional fare like a crown roast of pork, beef tenderloin or loin lamb chops.

2021

LE BENJAMIN BORDEAUX ROUGE

R

2007

CHATEAU DES ANNEREAUX

R

2021

CHATEAU DES ANNEREAUX – magnum

R

POMEROL

"It's like looking in the eye of a duck and sucking all the fluid from its beak".

Dylan Moran – *Black Books* (on drinking a £7000 bottle of claret)

Impressive, accessibly priced Pomerol. The terroir is excellent for producing well-balanced wines: a mixture of free-draining limestone gravels on a subsoil of iron. The vineyard is worked by hand with green harvesting, leaf and bunch thinning and manual harvest of each parcel at optimal maturity. The vinification takes place in thermoregulated tanks at the winery of Clos du Clocher with a long maceration of four to five weeks and ageing in barriques. This smooth supple wine (from 90% Merlot and 10% Cabernet Franc) would partner duck with figs or red fruits, roast pheasant, and soft cheese such as St Nectaire and Brie.

2018/19

CHATEAU MONREGARD LA CROIX

R

It may be said that nothing in the world is charming unless it be achieved at some trouble. If it rained '64 Léoville – which I regard as the most divine of nectars – I feel sure I should never raise it to my lips.

Ayala's Angel – Anthony Trollope

MEDOC, CRU BOURGEOIS

According to authorities in Bordeaux, 2002, despite the adverse weather conditions, will undoubtedly be the vintage of the year. (Wine News Headlines)

A 31-hectare estate divided into different parcels with vineyards mainly on a mixture of gravels and flint soils. With the vines being youthful high-density planting is necessary (7200 vines/hectare). The blend is Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Merlot 28%, Cabernet Franc 10%, and Petit Verdot 2%. Respect for nature includes the use of manures made from animal and vegetable material. The harvest is manual with a table de tri to sort the grapes. Once in the winery the grapes undergo a long fermentation of 18-21 days in stainless steel and cement vats. The wine is then aged in barriques (15% new; 55% one-year-old and 35% two-year-old) for twelve to fifteen months and fined with egg white before bottling. Deep ruby wine showing some development at the rim. Classy nose of soft autumn fruits, damsons and blackcurrants with a hint of sweet spice. Dry and full-bodied with firm tannic structure and good weight of ripe fruit with hints of cassis. A lingering finish gives the wine character and definition. Highly recommended and a bargain cru bourgeois.

2013 CHATEAU SAINT-AHON

R

HAUT-MEDOC, CRU BOURGEOIS

Large Médoc estate of some 113 hectares near Cussac-Fort Médoc, close to the Gironde estuary, with a delightful Renaissance Mansard-style château of the 1850s at its heart. The property has been through many hands in its 300-year history of winemaking, and since 1986 has been owned by the Grandes Millésimes de France, an umbrella company that also owns the noted Saint-Julien cru classé châteaux Beychevelle and Lagrange. The size of the estate offers great economies of scale and the wines are always competitively priced and excellent value for money for the quality in the bottle. Despite its size, for nearly 20 years the estate has been farmed sustainably and is recognised as such by the certifying Terre Vitis organisation. The carefully tended vineyards are planted to 53 % Cabernet Sauvignon, 42% Merlot, and the remainder Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc, on gravel-rich soils which drain beautifully. Winemaking, under the watchful eye of Anthony Yaigre and much sought-after consultant Éric Boissenot, is traditional with the wine maturing in oak barrels, a third new every year, for 12 to 14 months.

2017 CHATEAU BEAUMONT

R

HAUT-MEDOC, CRU BOURGEOIS

2017 CHATEAU LANESSAN

R

HAUT-MEDOC

2015 CHATEAU CANTEMERLE

R

SAINT-ESTEPHE, CRU BOURGEOIS

Bernard and Francois Estager's property is situated on the highest point in Saint-Estèphe next to Château Haut-Marbuzet and Tour de Pez. The terroir is typically limestone-clay. A very hands-on approach in the vineyard includes green harvesting, leaf and bunch thinning to allow better circulation of air and manual harvest parcel by parcel when the grapes have reached maturity. The vinification in cement tanks is traditional with a long maceration and daily pumping over; thereafter the wine is aged in barriques for twelve to eighteen months. The blend is quite unusual with a high proportion of Cabernet Franc (about 25%) giving compelling fragrance to the wines. As well as meaty dishes (jugged hare, venison, grilled beef) this would go well with a variety of cheese – camembert and brébis to name but two.

2006 CHATEAU COUTELIN-MERVILLE

R

Petrus – What is the wine about? Imagine a cathedral lit with every light and line focused on the high altar. And on the altar, very reverently placed, intensely there, a stave of oak, a punnet of blackcurrants and the gospel according to Robert Parker.

(With apologies to HG Wells)

An old winebibber having been smashed in a railway collision, some wine was poured on his lips to revive him.” Pauillac, 1873,” he murmured and died.
*Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914),
 "The Devil's Dictionary", 1911*

PAUILLAC

Bond had a thing for Chateau Batailley. He could recognise with his eyes wide shut that classic blackcurrant and cedar nose and playful minerality. It was fragrant, sweet, and spicy, an expansive wine that at any moment could turn violent, pin you in an arm lock and render you unconscious.

| | | |
|------|---------------------------|---|
| 2013 | CHATEAU GRAND PUY-LACOSTE | R |
|------|---------------------------|---|

SAINT-JULIEN

| | | |
|------|-----------------------|---|
| 2016 | CHATEAU LALANDE-BORIE | R |
|------|-----------------------|---|

SAINT-JULIEN

| | | |
|------|-----------------------|---|
| 2012 | CHATEAU LANGOA-BARTON | R |
|------|-----------------------|---|

MARGAUX

Rauzan-Ségla made a stellar wine in this vintage and its second wine ain't half bad either. A fragrant nose of violets and roses mixed with ripe cassis. Very supple and concentrated on the palate. Firm tannins. Quite savoury on the finish. Yum.

| | | |
|------|-------|---|
| 2017 | SEGLA | R |
|------|-------|---|

MARGAUX

Château Paveil de Luze is a small family estate in Soussans in the Médoc. It is an old property dating back to the 17th century. The Baron Alfred de Luze purchased the estate in 1862, and his descendants have held it ever since. It lies on deep, well-drained gravel soils that are ideal for Cabernet Sauvignon. The vines are an average of 20 years old. This wine spent 18 months in new oak barrels. It is a classic Margaux blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (65%), Merlot (30%), and Cabernet Franc (5%). Beautiful garnet colour. Supple nose of black fruit and herbs. Ripe, juicy fruit across the palate with good underlying acidity. Some gentle spice and herb flavours. Velvety tannins and a long, smooth finish. It is not what you would call a Parker wine.

| | | |
|------|------------------------|---|
| 2014 | CHATEAU PAVEIL DE LUZE | R |
|------|------------------------|---|

CHATEAU BOIS DE LA GRAVETTE, LUCIE MANCAIS, MOULIS - Organic

| | | |
|------|---------|---|
| 2022 | IDYLLIK | R |
| 2022 | OUPS | R |
| 2020 | LISTRAC | R |

Bernard: The older the wine the gooder it is

Manny: The more expensive the wine the gooder it is

Black Books

The perfect English murder... care of Midsomer Murders

Being nailed to a lawn by croquet hoops whilst a trebuchet, operated by an unseen hand, fires first growth clarets at your stricken body.

A bottle arcs into the sky and explodes on the ground narrowly missing its victim.

Would be victim: "That's a bloody Château Margaux 78!!"

"How I like claret! ...It fills one's mouth with a gushing freshness, then goes down to cool and feverless; then, you do not feel it quarrelling with one's liver. No; 'tis rather a peace-maker and lies as quiet as it did in the grape. Then it is as fragrant as the Queen Bee, and the more ethereal part mounts into the brain, not assaulting the cerebral apartments, like a bully looking for his trull, and hurrying from door to door, bouncing against the wainscot, but rather walks like Aladdin about his enchanted palace, so gently that you do not feel his step."

John Keats (1795-1821)

SAUTERNES

You know it's not bad, but you should really try a Jurançon or a Vouvray. Oh, I said that before. The quality of this second growth estate has improved markedly since the mid-1980s. The location is just to the north of the village of

Sauternes on gravelly hillside beds with a southwest orientation. Yields are low (about 15hl/ha) and the blend is Sémillon (55%), Sauvignon (40%) and Muscadelle (5%). This high proportion of Sauvignon and the refusal to use any new oak (the wine is aged in stainless steel and 5+yr old oak barrels for 24-36 months) gives Filhot a fruitier, more aromatic quality than some of the bigger-boned Sauternes. No, better than a slap on the shins with a warm kipper.

2016

CHATEAU FILHOT – ½ bottle

Sw

Bordeaux, Basic – This is what I feel about honest-to-badness Bordeaux (just substitute descending cru classifications for schools). 'We class schools, you see, into four grades: Leading School, First-Rate School, Good School, and School. Frankly', said Mr Levy, 'School is pretty bad.' (Decline and Fall – Evelyn Waugh).

- The Alternative Wine Glossary



The necessary result of a Bordeaux vertical

Beaujolais-palooza!

My great mate Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber has an enormous cellar full of the last century's best Beaujolais vintages. He... has his cellar rigged up with a quadraphonic high-fidelity phonograph set on a continuous loop. This device plays his hit musicals repeatedly at considerable volume. The wines seem to love it, for they are amongst the finest examples of aged Beaujolais that I've ever tasted.

Sound and Wine – Oberon Kant

Crude Beaujolais

– that's fruit flananas, isn't it? Up to a point. There is now more to these wines than jam today. The Beaujolais-Villages and Régnié from Domaine de La Plaigne have impressive colour and extract; the Brouilly from Domaine Cret des Garanches is enticingly juicy but with the sort of tannin to tackle food and the quartet from Didier Desvignes (there's a name for a *vigneron* are certainly no bubblegum bimbos. And now to prove that Gamay from old vines on poor soils can compete with the posh neighbours in Burgundy: welcome salty Chenas from Paul-Henri Thillardon; meaty Morgon from Domaine Chamonard; elegant Chiroubles and Fleurie from Gilles Paris & classy cru Bojers from Romain Zordan. Here be premier *cru-sading* Beaujolais, intense, naturally made wines from old vines and low yields using minimal sulphur. Gimme that Gamay!

LYON HEARTY CUISINE

The most obvious reason for Lyon's reputation as a leading gastronomic centre of the world is that it is so well situated – it has access to the very best food supplies. It is near "the Dauphine", one of the first regions of France where potatoes were successfully cultivated (in the seventeenth century); it is near the Charolais for beef, the farms of Bresse for poultry, the Auvergne for lamb, the lakes of the Dombes and Bourget for carp and frogs, Savoy for mushrooms, and innumerable rivers for fish. And this is not a recent phenomenon, the result of modern marketing. Before the end of the nineteenth century, travellers were already enchanted by the animated markets by the Saone.

Lyon sausages have always been famous. In an English cookbook of 1865, they were recommended for breakfast. Nowadays the best sausages are made from leg of pork that has been stuffed into the rosette, the long pig's gut measuring about twenty inches. The meat is salted twenty-four hours before being cooked. To it are added small pieces of pork, taken from the firmest parts of the flesh that have been soaked in marc (a spirit distilled from the skins and pips of grapes after the wine has been made) and pepper and other seasonings. Another form of sausage is the andouillette, which in Lyon is a tripe sausage based on veal rather than pork. Edouard Herriot, who was mayor of Lyon from 1905 to 1957, used to say that there were only two things that left an unmentionable taste in the mouth, politics and andouillette, and it is perhaps because of this opinion that the Lyonnais started to use veal.

Look out too for the local *salamis Jésus* and *rosette de Lyon*. The most typical meat dish is *pot au feu*, a selection of boiled meats served with leeks and mustard. More adventurous meat-lovers can try the unusual *cervelas pistaché et 147uuee147* – sausages boiled in fat and dotted with pistachios and truffles. Still further courage is needed to assay *sabodet* (pig's head sausage) or other Lyonnais favourites such as *tablier de sapeur* (tripe), *gratins* (fried pork fat) or *crubeens* (pig's trotters). Delicious dishes include slabs of pâté wrapped in pastry (*pâté en croûte*), and those various aforementioned sausages for which the city is famous – including *boudin blanc* (veal sausage) and the air-dried or boiled *147rocyamid de Lyon*.

The potato was "the truffle of the poor," and Stendhal claimed that in Lyon he discovered twenty different ways of cooking potatoes, at least ten of which were unknown in Paris. In the neighbouring province of the Bourbonnais, where the potato is also abundant and important in the diet of poor people, there is a potato dish called le paté de pommes de terre, which is known in the Lyonnais as *pommes de terre à la paté*. (Vive la difference!)

Another popular local dish is *quenelles* (dumplings), which can be made from meat, fish, poultry, or cheese, and are usually served with a crayfish sauce. If you find that you have *four quenelles* on your plate, don't announce the fact too loudly! For something less carnivorous opt for a platter of freshwater crayfish (*l'écrevisse*), *paillasson* (fried hashed potatoes) or a Lyonnais salad, which will contain boiled eggs and bacon pieces (well, a bit of meat).

Good local cheeses include the creamy blue-veined Bresse Bleu, Cerveau de Canuts, a soft cheese with herbs, and the soft goat's cheese Saint Marcellin. Finish off with a regional dessert – white nougat from Montélimar, *marrons glacés* (sweetened chestnuts) from the Ardèche and Lyon's speciality, rich chocolate cakes. That may finish you off.

Although Lyon looks south to the Rhône, its true partner-in-wine is Beaujolais (the local Côtes du Lyonnais wines are Gamay). A primeur wine with that familiar slight prickle of gas is good to slug with fish and country salads as well as soft cheese. A Beaujolais-Villages would suit a plate of charcuterie. Chiroubles and Brouilly, although fruity, still have sufficient weight and acidity to tackle dishes like pig's trotters. Régnié would also trough well with various parts of the pig, while an aromatic Fleurie will happily wash down equally aromatic andouillette. Morgon, one of the more full-bodied and robust of the cru Beaujolais, could cope with game and beef. Overall, the Beaujolais wines are adaptable, juicy and fruity. Gamay may not hit great heights, but when you're eating... simplicity is a friend to simplicity.

The constant intimate link with the land which makes him love and desire it with a passion such as you might feel for someone else's wife whom you care for and take in your arms but can never possess; that land which, after you have coveted it in such suffering for centuries, you finally obtain by conquest and make your own, the sole joy and light of your life. And this desire which had been built up over the centuries, this possession seemingly never to be achieved, explained his love for his own plot, his passion for land, the largest possible amount of land, the rich, heavy lump of soil you can touch and weigh in your hand.

Emile Zola – *The Earth*

DOMAINE DIDIER DESVIGNES, Morgon

Didier Desvignes is another grower who believes that great wines are produced from healthy and mature grapes. His main aim, therefore, is to reduce the vigour of the vine, treat each parcel of vines according to its needs and practise a strict green harvest. Manual harvest and selection allied to a respect for the equilibrium of the vines and the soil by treatment with organic manures creates wines, which express a balance between the aromatic richness of the grape variety and natural sugars and acidity. Traditional vinification techniques reflect the quality and character of each parcel of grapes. For the Morgons greater extraction of material gives greater weight, intensity, and capacity. For the Chiroubles and Fleurie the objective is to create deliciously aromatic wines.

A delicious, purple-robed wine throbbing with floral aromas – roses, irises and elderflowers – the Chiroubles is the lightest and sweetest of the cru Beaujolais. The vineyard has a favourable east to south-east exposition on granitic slopes. After a five to seven-day carbonic maceration the wine remains in tank before assemblage. The Fleurie (vines on pink granite) is made in the same fashion with an extra couple of day's maceration. A lovely nose of violets greets you, whilst in the mouth pure finesse and suppleness leads to notes of mineral. This would flow throughout the meal with bird of any feather- roast partridge stuffed with herbs might be one choice.

The Morgon, from a single vineyard with exceptional terroir, is ample and balanced with robust cherry and apricot fruit. The Morgon wines, particularly the Charmes, will morgonner as the French would say, in other words, develop slowly and uniquely, eventually taking on the characteristics and qualities of a red Burgundy. The vines grow on shale with deposits of ferrous oxide and manganese sometimes called terre pourrie or rotten soil. The resultant wines exhibit aromas of kirsch and fruit eaux de vie as well as subtler mineral characteristics inherited from the schistose terroir. The expression "the fruit of Beaujolais, the charm of Burgundy" describes this à point. Another coup de cuvee for this top grower.

| | | |
|--------|--------------------|---|
| 2022 | CHIROUBLES | R |
| 2023 | FLEURIE | R |
| 2023 | FLEURIE – ½ bottle | R |
| 2023 | MORGON | R |
| 2022/3 | MORGON CHARMES | R |

DOMAINE DE LA PLAIGNE, GILLES & CECILE ROUX, Beaujolais

"Beaujolais is nature with its fragrances, its light, its infinity, evening rest and morning enthusiasm." Jules Chauvet

Consistently good wines with great depth of fruit and concentration from vineyards on sandy granitic soils. Gilles and Cécile Roux harvest by hand with a strict selection ensuring wines of concentration.

The Beaujolais-Villages has very good colour and avoids the boiled sweets clichés being vivid crimson with blackberry and cherry fruit. Plenty of wine here to tackle a steak, but best with fish such as pike and salmon with a sorrel sauce.

The Régnié, still a comparatively infant cru (albeit from 40-year-old vines), is very firm with compact tannins and needs food. Blood sausage, if you are that way inclined, or Jambon persillé. Recently, we tried a bottle of the 1990 and swelp me if we weren't supping complex, aromatic Burgundy. So, age that Beaujolais, but do remember that your investment can go down as well as up.

| | | |
|------|--------------------------------|---|
| 2022 | BEAUJOLAIS-VILLAGES | R |
| 2022 | BEAUJOLAIS-VILLAGES – ½ bottle | R |
| 2021 | REGNIE | R |

The Gamay grape is thought to be a mutant of the Pinot Noir, which first appeared in the village of Gamay, south of Beaune, in the 1360s. The grape brought relief to the village growers following the decline of the Black Death. In contrast to the Pinot Noir variety, Gamay ripened two weeks earlier and was less difficult to cultivate. It also produced a strong, fruitier wine in a much larger abundance. In July 1395, the Duke of Burgundy, Philippe the Bold, outlawed the cultivation of Gamay as being “a very bad and disloyal plant”-due in part to the variety occupying land that could be used for the more “elegant” Pinot Noir. 60 years later, Philippe the Good, issued another edict against Gamay in which he stated the reasoning for the ban is that “*The Dukes of Burgundy are known as the lords of the best wines in Christendom. We will maintain our reputation*”. The edicts had the effect of pushing Gamay plantings southward, out of the main region of Burgundy and into the granite-based soils of Beaujolais where the grape thrived.

DOMAINE YVON METRAS, Fleurie – Organic – on allocation

The terrain in Fleurie is similar throughout the vineyards and made up of crystalline granites which contribute to the wine's finesse and charm. Yvon Métras possesses parcels of vines in the sector of La Madone (this refers to the chapel of the Madonna that surmounts the rounded hillock of Fleurie), an area with such steep gradients that he is compelled to work with the aid of a long winch! Everything is done naturally on this parcel, as with the others he owns – no chemicals are used whatsoever. Métras's aim is to raise the level of Fleurie to a higher plane; he uses no sulphur during vinification, nor does he chaptalize, but allows the wines to express themselves naturally. The Beaujolais (baby Fleurie) holds the promise of the countryside in the spring: it is light, bright, balanced with a silky and supple character and an initial bouquet of irises and violets leading to subtle notes of meat and smoky red fruit. On tasting, delicious is the first descriptor that springs to mind for the wine is fluid and fresh with lacy tannins, bright acid and pure flavours and a long caressing finish. Dangerously easy to drink. The older vine Fleurie has stones for bones, gripping granitic minerality that chisels the straightest of lines across the tongue. And the merest suggestion of cherrystones and gooseberries. Don't expect any change from this wine unless you serve it from the carafe. Oh-so-pale and good beyond the pale.

DOMAINE REMY PASSOT, Chiroubles

Domaine Remy Passot lies largely in the commune of Chiroubles itself in the heart of the cru Beaujolais region. Chiroubles is perched 400m above sea level atop poor granitic soils. The village is set around a 12th century church that is at the centre of a territory that climbs to the west up to the slopes of Mont Avenas, which peaks at 700m and overlooks the village and houses a tasting chalet. Passot also has vineyards in Fleurie and Morgon. The estate, which has a long history, has established a reputation for consistency. Grapes are harvested manually to ensure optimal quality and, once the bunches have been sorted, they are put into stainless steel vats and undergo semi-carbonic maceration. Over the next eight to twelve days run-off juice is pumped over the cap (once or twice a day). Vatting time varies depending on the cru and the potential of each climat. The run-off juice is drawn off into some high-potential vats to improve the extraction of flavours, aromas, and tannins. The wine is then matured in old oak tuns, before bottling the following spring. The Fleurie shows all the finesse one would expect of this appellation. Vibrant purple it is beautifully fruity, with raspberry, cherry, and summer fruit aromas.

2021 FLEURIE VIEILLES VIGNES

R

MARIE LAPIERRE & JEAN-CLAUDE CHANUDET, Beaujolais – Organic

Marcel Lapierre was Monsieur Morgon and very much the godfather of Gamay. Marie Lapierre, his wife, makes the wine at Château Cambon. These wines are au naturel; the wild yeasts are practically gnawing at your ankles. Intended to express terroir and possess a cool freshness, equilibrium, and fruit; veritably these are vins des soifs. The Raisins Gaulois is fun incarnate – drinking this wine offers indecent pleasure. You have to like a cheekily-monikered wine with a cartoon label of a geezer swallowing a bunch of grapes (evidently taking his wine in tablet form). Gummy Gamay, do not pass go, do not collect tannin, a redcurrant jam jamboree which just manages to steer clear of sweetness by virtue of a thwack of liquorice on the finish. You're madder than Mad Jack McMad if you don't serve this well chilled. The Beaujolais, from eighty-year-old vines is wilder; in the murk lurks a jungle of brambly fruit with a whiff of the beast. “La Cuvée du Chat” drinks more like a Morgon. It comes from the granitic soils of a tiny 2.5-hectare parcel bought by Jean-Claude Chanudet and Marie Lapierre from a friend in 2010. The parcel of vines belonged to Jules Chauvet, once upon a wine. Chanudet and Lapierre took over and began the conversion to organic agriculture. The beautiful Gamay grapes from these 80-year-old vines are handpicked in October, after which carbonic maceration with natural yeasts occurs in an enamel tank with some pumping over to stimulate activity. The wine is then moved to foudres to rest on lees before finally being bottled with minimal SO2.

2023 CHATEAU CAMBON BLANC

W

2023 VDF GAMAY RAISINS GAULOIS

R

2023 VDF GAMAY RAISINS GAULOIS – 5-litre BIB

R

2023 CHATEAU CAMBON BEAUJOLAIS

R

2021 CHANUDET CUVÉE DE CHAT

R

A MATTER OF PRONUNCIATION

Is that Rully as in Scully?
 (As in Mulder)
 (As in Bosch)
 No, that's tosh
 It should be Rully as in truly
 Is it really?
 No that's Reuilly from the Loire
 The Lower?
 No mid-Loire
 Bette Middler?
 And it's pronounced Roy
 But you haven't mentioned Brouilly
 Brewery?
 No Brouilly as in Artero Ui
 I tell you what.
 What?
 It's hard to know Rully.
 Noted. Duly.

DOMAINE SYLVIE GENIN DUFATRE, Brouilly

Classic Brouilly where the ebullient, youthful Gamay fronts a rich, serious wine. Green practices and low yields (33hl/ha) lend this wine its more mineral backbone whilst the Gamay provides the classic strawberry and raspberry fruit aromas. The palate, marked by suppleness, fleshiness and finesse, has a peppery bite on the finish, which lifts it above the run-of-the-mill Gamay. A must with hearty Lyonnais food: poached sausages paired with creamy warm potatoes or coquelet flavoured with tarragon.

| | | |
|------|---------------------|---|
| 2023 | BROUILLY | R |
| 2023 | BROUILLY – ½ bottle | R |

DOMAINE JEAN-CLAUDE LAPALU, Brouilly – Biodynamic conversion
Gamayflies ~ People who only drink Beaujolais nouveau but don't investigate the cru stuff.

I've always thought of Brouilly as one quaff away from straight Beau Jolly, in other words red wine lolly. With Jean-Claude Lapalu's wine you can detect the fists behind the fruit. This is one of the new crew of sternly made rock steady cru Beaujolais. Grapes are hand-picked and sorted, loaded by conveyor to avoid damage, and given neither SO2 nor cultured yeasts during the fermentation. During the 8-10 day maceration a wooden grill is used to enhance extraction. The wine stays at least a half year on its fine lees gaining power and complexity. And yet the Brouillys are neither heavy nor clumsy and one could easily imagine them ageing ten to fifteen years. The old vines were old when Jean-Claude's grandfather began farming them in 1940. Is this where the schist of Côte de Brouilly touches the signature granite of Brouilly? It seems almost to inhabit a hypothetical halfway house between Beaujolais and Priorat! The old vines Brouilly is the combination of two cuvées, one made by carbonic maceration, the other a traditional cuvaision with destemmed grapes, (Jean-Claude only uses indigenous yeasts and doesn't use any sulphur during Vinification (there is only some added at the bottling and then only in very small quantities: 2gr/hl). The cuvaision lasts for 10 to 20 days. The two cuvées are then assembled after their malolactic fermentation and spend the winter in stainless steel tanks. The dark red fruits on the nose and palate can't disguise a probing minerality; if ever granite was translated into liquid this is the case. Croix des Rameaux, from beautifully exposed prime parcels of eighty-year-old vines and aged in three-to-five-year-old barriques after a long cuvaision, disports a wonderfully wild nose of leather, tar and red cherry and palate-punching dark fruits: stylistically it seems to straddle Burgundy and the Rhône.

| | | |
|---------|-------------------------------------|----|
| 2019 | MONT BLANC BRUT ZERO | Sp |
| 2021 | FEU FOLLET GRINGET | W |
| 2022 | BEAUJOLAIS-VILLAGES VIEILLES VIGNES | R |
| 2022 | BROUILLY VIEILLES VIGNES | R |
| 2022 | BROUILLY VIELLEX VIGNES ~ magnum | R |
| 2021 | BROUILLY CROIX DES RAMEAUX | R |
| 2020/21 | EAU FORTE | R |
| 2019 | LE RANG DU MERLE | R |
| 2019 | ALMA MATER | R |

DOMAINE THILLARDON, PAUL-HENRI TILLARDON, Chénas– Biodynamic

Paul-Henri Thillardon first settled in Chénas in 2008, and because it was one of the overlooked appellations in the Beaujolais, he was able to find great vineyards that no one else wanted. Additionally, there were no well-known producers in the appellation, so it was a bit of a blank slate. Having jokingly established his “homestead farm” in the “wild west” of Chénas, Paul-Henri was soon joined by his brother, Charles, and sister, Aude, and now the Thillardon clan is fully entrenched in Chénas. Today, the family farms 14 hectares in Chénas and Moulin-à-Vent and is committed to sound environmental practices like replanting hedges around their vineyards to protect biodiversity, as well as keeping a variety of animals on the farm just behind the winery. The Thillardons were committed to organic farming since the beginning, but in the early years, the wines were rather extracted, as Paul-Henri felt he needed to make “big” wines to stand out. In 2015, after hanging out with mentors like Jean-Louis Dutraive and Max Breton, he decided to make the wines in a style that he loved drinking and began following the famous carbonic, no SO2 vinification practised by the masters of Gamay. After hand harvesting, the whole clusters of grapes are kept in cold storage at 8-10°C, naturally fermented in concrete tanks with no punchdowns or pumpovers, and then aged in concrete tanks and used barrels. The goal is to preserve the freshness of the wine and make serious wines that are fun and easy to drink. Of course, we must not forget their prized vineyard - the century old plot above the winery, known as Chassignol. This steep slope is ploughed entirely by horse and is widely reputed as one of the best terroirs in Beaujolais. The plot is a monopole farmed exclusively by the Thillardons, and it produces powerhouse Gamay loaded with bountiful and marked by a light texture. Although Chénas is often overlooked in favour of the more famous crus, the Thillardons have been working hard to change that, and it’s clear from their wines that they have succeeded beyond all expectation.

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|------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 2021 | BLANC AU SUD DE NORD | W |
| 2021 | GEORGES BLANC | W |
| 2022 | NEPTUNE BLANC | W |
| 2023 | CHENAS VIBRATIONS | R |
| 2022 | CHENAS BLEMONTS | R |
| 2022 | CHENAS LES CARRIERES | R |
| 2022 | CHENAS CHASSIGNOL | R |
| 2022 | MOULIN-A-VENT ALIZES VIEILLES VIGNES | R |

DOMAINE GILLES PARIS– Organic conversion

Gilles Paris, born in Quincié-en-Beaujolais, is one of five brothers. It must be in the genes as each one of them is involved in the viticultural world in one way or another. Gilles produced his first wines in 2005, having moved to Chiroubles with his now ex-wife Christine. Her family had some vines within the Cru there. Initially his winemaking style leaned more towards using conventional methods, but it didn’t take long before deciding that he preferred the more natural approach instead, with native yeast fermentations and zero sulphur additions. Gilles makes a full range of wines from Beaujolais-Villages and multiple crus. They are all clean, fresh, and classic Beaujolais. In Beaujolais, the soils are mainly granitic, but every terroir has a particular form of granite. Chiroubles has the highest granite rock component which prevent the roots to go too deep. It gives light and fine wines. Cuvée Terroir is a blend of five plots, all located at least 400m altitude on slopes. They are exposed to the sun which provides great maturity but are also more at risk of heatwaves. Grand Pré is a plateau located at the crossroad between Chiroubles, Fleurie and Morgon. The vines are more than 50yo and split into three plots of 1ha altogether. In Beaujolais, not like anywhere else, vines are planted 1000 vines per hectare to reduce the yield and increase the quality of the Gamay fruit. Vines are aged between 30 and 50yo. They are gobelet cut around February and manually harvested in baskets mid-September. There is no use of chemical products, only use home-made treatment made from sulphur and copper. The vines are manually worked all year long but no tractors for this cuvee as the hills are too sloped. Organic conversion will be complete by the end of 2023. After harvest, grapes are cooled down to 10 degrees, then in vat in whole clusters fermented with indigenous yeast. Once the fermentation has started, grapes are able to auto-protect themselves with the gas they produce. The grapes are then pressed after 2 or 3 weeks and matured in concrete vat.

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|------|---------------------|---|
| 2020 | CHIROUBLES TERROIRS | R |
| 2021 | FLEURIE GRAND PRE | R |

CHATEAU DU GRAND-PRE, ROMAIN ZORDAN – Organic/Biodynamic

The Château de Grand Pré comprises a beautiful 18th Century castle complete with vaulted cellars, a “lieu dit” vineyard and an eight-hectare family domain in the Beaujolais region. The winery is in the heart of Fleurie where they own six hectares of vineyard, with a further two hectares in the village of Morgon. When Louis and Renée Bertrand bought the domain in 1972, the vines were old, and the cellars were in ruins. They took the estate in hand and gave it a new lease of life, replanting and rebuilding. Today it is run by their grandson Romain Zordan, who has brought a modern and organic approach, with sustainable cultivation in the vineyard. The estate has been certified organic since 2012. Naturally vinified, these wines are a true expression of their Beaujolais terroir.

Fleurie is renowned for the elegance and finesse of its wines, which is often attributed to the pink granite soils. The vines are pruned very precisely into a goblet shape and a green harvest is performed encouraging concentration in the remaining berries. The vines are 30 years old and yield approximately 40 hectolitres per hectare. The granitic soil in the vineyard imparts a mineral characteristic to the resulting wine. The grapes underwent multiple sorting processes in the vineyard and cellar. Carbonic maceration took place for 10 to 15 days, to gently extract the complexity of aromas. This wine was vinified without the addition of sulphur and only minimal sulphur was added at bottling. Fermentation took place using wild yeasts that are naturally present on the grape skins, retaining the typicity of the terroir. The wine was then aged for several months in 600 litre oak barrels. The wine was bottled without filtration, resulting in a slightly cloudy style.

The Morgon terroir is complex. Located on the smooth slopes of Mont de Py, the soil consists of blue volcanic shists, sand and the Saone’s river sediments, which impart the wine with more power and structure than the other Crus. Chateau de Grand Pré farms organically. The vines are pruned very precisely into a Goblet shape and a green harvest, results in a higher concentration of flavour in the berries. The vines are over 40 years old, so yields are very low at approximately 35 hectolitres per hectare. The soil comprises decomposed rock and crumbly schist. Grass is maintained in between the rows, to preserve the natural ecosystem of the vineyard. The grapes are harvested by hand at optimal ripeness.

Rich, powerful and balanced, with an appealing nose of raspberries, cherries, and a hint of smokiness. The ripe red fruits combine with powerful tannins on the palate with a long, firm finish.

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|------|---------|---|
| 2021 | FLEURIE | R |
| 2021 | MORGON | R |

DOMAINE CHAMONARD, JEAN-CLAUDE CHANUDET, Morgon – Organic practising

The domaine Joseph Chamonard is a small estate located in the heart of Beaujolais and managed by Geneviève and Jean-Claude Chanudet (known as “Le Chat”). The domaine has been established in the appellations of Morgon and Fleurie since the 18th century, and the age of the vines is between 60 and 90 years old. The terroir is composed of pink granite, decomposed rocks, and friable schists, with the vines facing south. The Morgon plots (Les Chênes, Corcelette, Les Grands Cras and le Colombier) are located in the commune of Villié-Morgon. Domaine Chamonard also cultivates half a hectare of vines on the most beautiful hill of Fleurie, 400 metres above sea level.

The vines are cultivated organically, in accordance with respect for the environment: without chemicals, by manual harvest with light tillage of the soil. In the cellars, only indigenous yeasts are used during fermentation and intervention is minimal, in the same vein as natural wines.

The grapes come from 3.5 hectares of massale-selected vines, with an average age of 60 years mainly from parcels located in the localities of Le Colombier (near Corcelette), Les Grands Cras, Les Chênes and Château Gaillard. The grapes are hand-harvested at optimum maturity. The whole clusters are put into vats for semi-carbonic vinification and the fermentation begins spontaneously thanks to the indigenous yeasts. Carbonic maceration lasts on average between 12 and 30 days, pressing is done with an old vertical wooden press and the second part of fermentation takes place in vats then ends in casks, demi-muids and old wooden barrels with a further period of 8-10 months on the lees.

The Morgon has an irony, earthy mineral note with some reductive notes on opening. After an hour or so open, high toned black and plummy fruits emerge along with crushed violet and purple flowers to flesh out the wine’s irony minerality. It’s a dark toned, spicy, herbal, and liquorice-y Beaujolais with a soft, pretty, texture that gives way to pleasant and mouth-coating tannins on the finish.

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|------|-----------------------|---|
| 2019 | MORGON LE CLOS DE LYS | R |
| 2015 | MORGON LE CLOS DE LYS | R |

DOMAINE DU MOULIN D’EOLE, ELISA GUERIN, Moulin-à-Vent ~ organic farming

The Guerin’s family estate, Domaine du Moulin D’Eole was established in 1907, and has developed and expanded over the years within the Moulin-à-Vent appellation. Philippe Guérin took over the domain in 1985 and widened it by buying vines over the emblematic terroir “Les Thorins”. “Family of wine producers for 3 generations, in true craftsman, we dedicate ourselves to vines and the wines”. In 2005, Philippe Guérin and his wife Nathalie, with whom he works on the estate, added Chiroubles to their domaine. Philippe is always in search of the expression of the terroirs, and they work with respect for the environment, he currently maintains 4ha in Moulin-à-Vent, along with 1ha in Chiroubles, with plans to transfer more vineyards to his daughter, Elisa, in the future. Each wine is harvested by hand, and all are vinified and bottled at the domain. This family of winegrowers is deep rooted in the terroir.

| | | |
|------|---------------------------|---|
| 2022 | MOULIN-A-VENT LES THORINS | R |
|------|---------------------------|---|

He took a swig of the *friand*, tasted fruit and freshness, a flavour that turned briefly and looked back over its shoulder at the summer before last, but didn't pause even to shade its eyes.
Elizabeth Knox – *The Vintner's Luck*

SOUTHERN BURGUNDY

It is very difficult to generalise about Burgundy. As with any region it is often a matter of "follow the grower". And then what's good for whites isn't necessarily great for reds (and vice versa).

The consistent quality in the Mâconnais and Chalonais continues to delight. These regions are beginning to give the better-known appellations a run for their money. Or our money, I should say. Taste the Givrys from Domaine Parize for richness, acidity, complexity and fruitiness. In Rully, the soils and expositions favour Chardonnay and *Jean-Baptiste Ponsot's* whites have that fine citric freshness that one associates with this appellation. Mercurey is where the most intense examples of Pinot Noir are to be found. Domaine *Emile Juillot* makes earthy wines, and the estate is moving towards fully organic practices.

The wines from the Mâconnais are arguably even better. Christophe Thibert's wine thrill with their delicacy and purity. The wines from *Philippe & Gerard Valette*, including an old-vines Mâcon-Chaintré and a stunning Pouilly-Fuissé reveal meticulous work in the vineyard with relatively late harvesting and careful vinification using natural yeasts and minimal sulphur yields wines of remarkable concentration. *Julien Guillot* (Clos des Vignes du Maynes) also produces exceptional whites – Mâcon-Cruzille – and reds (mainly from Gamay) with penetrating acidity and exceptional minerality. His terroir is extraordinary – a geological scrapyard of minerals that seem to migrate into the core of the wines themselves.

In Burgundy we talk about the grower rather than the vintage. We look for consistency of tension and fine acidity in the whites and the reds. Climate change and global warming has meant that growers are having to set up their vineyards differently

THE COTE D'OR

We decided this year to give our Burghound a Beaune or several to gnaw on and supplement our meagre selection with some great names. New to the fold are *Patrick Miolane* (old-fashioned beetrooty red Saint-Aubin); *Didier Larue* (mineral white Saint-Aubin from old vines); *Hubert Lamy* (superlative wines); *Coffinet-Duvernay* (rich yet restrained Chassagnes) and *Sylvain Bzikot* (pleasing Pulignys).

Jean Javillier (Volnay and Pommard) produces brilliant value Beaunes. Simple and unextracted they illustrate amply that Pinot without new oak is more charming than a convention of Leslie Phillips.

Reality Check – The Low-Sulphur Brigade

Northern Exposure. Each year we receive a tiny allocation of wines from *Alice & Olivier de Moor*. We treasure them more than any grand cru Burgundy. The Chablis cuvées do not conform to expectation – and are rather wonderful for that. Jean & Catherine Montanet (Domaine de la Cadette/Montanet-Thoden) make super fine, chalky-pure whites and reds.

Another natural wine hero is Nicolas Vauthier, the brains behind the Vini Viti Vinci, negoce operation, or the ayatollah of Irancy. Pinots that are brilliantly drinkable, Chardonnays and Aligotés made in the oxidative vein.

For hardcore purists (describes us to a t) there are the bristling whites and wildly cavorting reds of Dominique & Catherine Derain, the puncturing antidote to thickly buttered Chardonnays and claggy Pinots.

BURGUNDY FOOD AND WINE

Burgundy food is big-hearted, rich and comes in large portions. As the region is known for its heavy red wines and Charollais beef cattle, wine and beef are a common feature of Burgundy food. The eponymous boeuf bourguignon mixes these two elements to make a traditional Burgundian recipe. The beef is marinated in the wine and then slow cooked with mushrooms, baby onions, carrots and lardons (bits of bacon). Coq au vin is also made in this way, but with a chicken instead of beef. All dishes described as being à la Bourguignonne will involve a similar sauce. On a related theme, the meurette dishes are also made with red wine (but no mushrooms), then flambéed with marc brandy and served with eggs, fish, red meat or poultry.

Cream-based sauces are common in Burgundy, as are mustard sauces: the andouillette de Mâcon, for example, is served with a mustard sauce. Mustard is a regional speciality. It was introduced by the Romans and now there are hundreds of varieties made with everything from honey to tarragon, with flavours ranging from cauterising and fiery hot to pleasantly mild. A classic dish might be veal kidneys à la moutarde (the Dijon mustard made with verjus not wine vinegar). A good Savigny-lès-Beaune would pick up the earthy notes of the kidneys and add some sweetness to the liaison.

Burgundy snails (escargots) are prepared by stewing the snails with Chablis, carrots, onions, and shallots for several hours, then stuffing them with garlic and parsley butter before finishing them off in the oven. Black snails, especially those raised on grape leaves, are the best in France. Bourgogne-Aligoté is a typical partner; a mineral Chablis and other acid-forward whiter Burgundies would serve equally.

Other than beef, Burgundy has a range of meats including various types of ham, from the Jambon persillé (parsley-flavoured ham in a white wine aspic) to ham from the Morvan hills served in a creamy saupiquet sauce; poussins from Bresse; rable de lièvre à la Pivon (saddle of hare); and tête de veau sansiot (calf's head). Although not near the coast, river fish abound and are sometimes served as a *pauchouse*, poached in white wine, lardons, garlic, butter and onions. Pike, perch, salmon, trout, and carp, may be used (amongst others), red or white wine accompanied by a village Burgundy of either colour. The potée Mirabelle red is a vegetable soup cooked with bacon and pork bits, as above.

Famous cheeses from Burgundy include Chaource, which is creamy and white; St-Florentin from the Yonne valley; the orange-skinned Époisses; and many types of chèvre (goat's cheese) from Morvan (try Goisot's superb Saint Bris with this). A type of cheesecake called gougère is delicious served warm with a glass of Chablis.

I want a BLT with my DRC

There are few greater gastronomic pleasures than drinking great wine with simple, wholesome food. Red wines, be they humble or aristocratic, are choosy about the company they keep. The rules of engagement are more guidelines than commandments etched into glass. The only qualification is that the flavours are good and that nothing clashes violently. One could, after all, happily drink a Vosne-Romanée with dishes as diverse as oeufs en meurette, fricassee of cepes, duck with turnips, Bresse chicken and feathered game. Coq au vin is a casserole made with coquerel that needs to be simmered for a long period in red Burgundy. Although the pot is traditionally meant to be favoured (and flavoured) with Gevrey-Chambertin, a humbler Pinot will suffice with Grand Cru Chambertin exclusively reserved for drinking.

The last word should go to Anthony Bourdain, who, in his *Les Halles Cookbook*, writes forcefully about côte de boeuf: "Serve it with French fried potatoes and a staggeringly expensive bottle of Burgundy in a cheap glass. Just to show them who's the daddy."

STORY OF AN HISTORIC DOMAINE

With remnants of an old Roman wall on the property, an 1100-year-old winemaking heritage dating back to the powerful medieval monks of Cluny, and nothing but *selection massale* to replant the vineyards (no clones), the Guillot family has every reason to believe that they are the oldest organically farmed winery in France. Julien Guillot is the contemporary steward of this land, worked by his family since 1954. That his grandfather was never seduced by the seemingly magical powers of chemical herbicides and pesticides at the height of their post-war popularity has allowed the Clos to be continuously run by nature's good graces, abundant soil nutrients, and an ancient *savoir faire* passed down through generations of dutiful guardians.

Julien takes his curator's role seriously. In 1998, he took the farming practices one step deeper into biodynamic viticulture, a much stricter approach to the science of organic farming that is thought to have been originally established by the Romans and perfected by the monks of Cluny. He is such an enthusiastic student of history that in 2009 and 2010, he recreated a medieval harvest and the transportation of the barrels by oxcart to Cluny 9 months later. But as Julien notes, in those times, wines had an alcohol level of only 8%, which is one factor that led him to become interested in climate change.

With a legacy like Clos des Vignes du Maynes, in an area of Burgundy known for mass-produced, industrial wines, it's easy to understand why Julien is such an advocate for tradition. The grapes are harvested by hand and fermented in old oak *foudres*. Fruit undergoes partial whole-cluster fermentation, without any additional sulphur or foreign yeast cultures, and Julien leaves the finished wines unfinned and unfiltered to showcase the layers of fruit. He is a disciple of Jules Chauvet and works without sulphur.

**DOMAINE DU CORPS DE GARDE, JEAN-HUGUES & GUILHEM GOISOT, Côtes d'Auxerre – *Biodynamic* –
*Demeter certified***

Alligator Wine by Screamin' Jay Hawkins:

“Take the blood out of an alligator
Take the left eye of a fish, yeah
Take the skin off of a frog, yeah
And mix it up in a dish
Add a cup of grease swamp water
And then countin' one to nine
Spit over your left shoulder
And you got alligator wine”

The Goisots are perfectionists and this shows in their winemaking. They believe in the primacy of terroir and harvest as late as possible to maximise the potential of the grapes. The domaine has existed since the 15th century and Jean-Hugues started working on the wines at the age of sixteen. The Goisots firmly believe that great wine begins in the vineyard and have worked in organic viticulture since 1993 to protect the soil and nourish the vines. No fertilizers, insecticides or weedkillers are used; wild or natural yeasts are encouraged. We start with the red, a Pinot Noir – with a sliverette of César – made with rigour and imagination as La Revue du Vin de France might say. This wine touches the hem of nature. The purity of the nose delights – a gentle perfume suggesting dried flowers and red fruits. The attack is angular and mineral with the fruit racing along the tongue. The Aligoté is benchmark: green-gold, a touch “nerveux”, ripe yet racy. Described by the Guide Hachette as the “best Aligoté in the Yonne”, a statement we would find it hard to disavow. (And an equally good Aligoté in the Hither.) Goisot's electric, old vine Aligoté is drawn from parcels of 40 and 90 plus year old vines, planted on the high, cool slopes of St-Bris. Aligoté is notorious for requiring old vines and the right soils to produce wines of quality, and Goisot's holdings – in the lieux-dits of Croix Rougeot, Côte de Coutance and Côte de la Canne – nail the brief. The soils are made up of ancient clays, littered with fossilised oyster shells (limestone), several inches long. Goisot's biodynamic farming and ripe harvesting results in a far more textured, pulpy wine than you might normally associate with this variety. This was fermented with its native yeasts and raised entirely in tank. It's a nutty, creamy, spicy and delicious Aligoté with pear, almond oil and white pepper notes. The (Sauvignon de) Saint Bris is equally stunning: aromatic with notes of peach skins and richly textured. Jean-Hugues has been described as “The Pope of Saint Bris”. We are collecting popes on our wine list (q.v. Gilbert Geoffroy in Côtes de Duras). When we get a quorum, we will convene them all and elect an über-pope (after we've ceremonially incinerated the vine clippings), a pope for all seasons and all grape varieties.

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|------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 2023 | BOURGOGNE-ALIGOTE | W |
| 2022 | SAINT BRIS EXOXYRA VIRGULA | W |
| 2022 | BOURGOGNE PINOT NOIR, CORPS DE GARDE | R |

DOMAINE DE LA CADETTE, JEAN & CATHERINE MONTANET, Vézelay – *Organic*

The estate was created by members of the Montanet family and their friends. They cleared the land and replanted the slopes with 12.5 hectares of vines between 1987 and 1997. Some plots used to belong to Catherine Montanet's family. 18 plots of land spread more or less evenly over the four rural districts which carry the Vézelay appellation: Asquins, Saint-Père, Tharoiseau and Vézelay. The vines are 20 years old on average. The geology here is quite unusual as while the granite Morvan massif was coming into being it forced limestone strata up to the surface. Most of the vineyards are located on the most ancient strata, the Bajocian, or upper and lower Bathonian limestone and others on Liassic marlstone. The intention is to make honest and authentic wines which reflect the distinctive character of their region and the climate of a particular year. The Montanets do not resort to so-called “modern” artificial means in their wine making process to achieve this goal. Naturally enough, they hand-pick their grapes and the wine is produced using traditional skills. César is an ancient red grape from northern Burgundy. It makes dark, tannic wines that are softened by blending with Pinot Noir. Cuvée L'Hermitage is a blend of Pinot Noir and César. The Melon (same grape as Muscadet) has a pale lemon-yellow colour, a bright, clean nose, a zingy palate reminiscent of lime-zest and oyster shell and just a hint of ginger and white pepper from the yeast lees. Oysters and smoked fish, beware; this wine has your number and is coming to get you. La Saulnier vineyard is a beautiful parcel of land situated on an old road once used by salt smugglers, who extracted contraband salt from the water at the nearby “Fontaines Salées”. This wine was bottled in March after spending approximately six months in vats. It has a liveliness and freshness that is very appealing for such an elegant wine. The wine is bright and fine – silver bells and cockle shells – another wine is our famed collection of oystercatchers.

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|------|---|---|
| 2022 | MELON BLANC | W |
| 2023 | BOURGOGNE-VEZELAY “GALERNE” BLANC | W |
| 2022 | BOURGOGNE-VEZELAY “LES SAULNIERS” BLANC | W |
| 2022 | CHABLIS SOEUR CADETTE | W |
| 2022 | BOURGOGNE ROUGE “CUVEE L'ERMITAGE” | R |
| 2022 | BOURGOGNE ROUGE “CUVEE GARANCE” | R |

REGION DE CHABLIS

Oyster – (i) A person who liberally sprinkles his conversation with Yiddish expressions (from The Washington Post); (ii) A bivalve to be washed down with a good glass of Chablis.

...like a gloomy Analytical Chemist; always seeming to say, after ‘Chablis, Sir?’ – ‘You wouldn’t if you knew what it was made of.’

Charles Dickens – *Our Mutual Friend*

DOMAINE GERARD TREMBLAY, Chablis

Gérard Tremblay and his wife, Hélène, oversee a domain that they inherited in a line of five generations, but which they have mostly built themselves. With 80 acres of vines under production, most of them in the best Premier Cru and Grand Cru appellations, their list of Chablis is among the most prestigious in the region. Tremblay is known locally as an accomplished wine maker. He is justly famous for his ability to draw out the typicity of distinct appellations, underlining the terroir of his vines vintage after vintage.

The domain has a superb new winery, allowing them excellent conditions in which to bring out the quality of the fruit that these vineyards produce. The entire winery works by gravity, avoiding unnecessary manipulations of the fruit or pumping of juices.

Grapes are brought directly from the fields and put into pneumatic presses. The juice is then left to settle for more 12 hours before being stocked in stainless steel tanks with individual temperature controls. Strict hygiene and careful temperature control are the keys to mastering quality fermentation in Chardonnay. It is a delicate phase, and it is not surprising to find that the best winemakers in white are perfectionists to an extreme. Average yearly production is around 1760 hectolitres, giving approximately 230,000 bottles per year. Much of the wine is sold directly at the property, though they do export a limited quantity of their wine to carefully selected markets. They are adamant the Tremblay wines only appear on wine lists or in specialty shops that can do justice to the quality product they are working to produce. Understandably, their wines have been noticed by the Guide Hachette, Robert Parker, Dussert-Gerber (who ranks their Grand Cru ‘Vaudésir’ as one of the top white Burgundies); Revue des Vins de France; Decanter; Cuisine et Vins de France; Sommelier, etc.

*The Petit Chablis is uncomplicated but delightfully crisp and refreshing with easy graceful flavours, the olfactory equivalent of smelling soft rain on a spring morning (which is what I do for a living!). The basic Chablis is from 10–30-year-old vines grown on Kimmeridgean marl. This terrain is formed from *exogira virgule* (fossilised oyster shells) and the specific *gout-à-terroir* is said to derive from this. As well as the trademark oyster-shell aromas there is a further ripeness and secondary hints of mushroom, leaf, and honey. The acidity bolts all the flavours into position and accentuates the richness and the length of the wine. The forty-year-old vines in the Montmain vineyard contribute to the extra weight in this wine. 30% of the wine is aged in futs de chêne. A fine wine with a profound mineral nose, deceptive weight, and a lingering finish this would go well with something rich and sweet such as scallops or chicken. Set between Preuses and Grenouilles, the Vaudésir climat is divided into two parts by the track called “le chemin des Vaudésirs”. It has a double orientation, as roughly half of its vines face due south, whilst the remainder face south-west.*

Very steep in places, its soil type seems rather lighter than most, and contains less lime. This increasing “earthiness” tends to mark the wines, which can be drunk young if one is looking for crispness. The full structure of the wines will take several years to develop however, as with all the Grands Crus. Their extreme delicacy has given Vaudésir the reputation of being the most feminine of all the climats.

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|------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 2023 | PETIT CHABLIS | W |
| 2023 | CHABLIS | W |
| 2023 | CHABLIS – ½ bottle | W |
| 2022 | CHABLIS 1er CRU “MONTMAIN” | W |
| 2022 | CHABLIS 1er CRU “MONTMAIN” – ½ bottle | W |
| 2022 | CHABLIS 1er CRU “COTE DE LECHET” | W |
| 2022 | CHABLIS GRAND CRU “VAUDESIR” | W |
| 2021 | CHABLIS GRAND CRU “VAUDESIR” – magnum | W |

I pour the '85 Chablis into tall glasses. Anouk drinks lemonade from hers with exaggerated sophistication. Narcisse expresses interest in the tartlet's ingredients, praises the virtues of the misshapen Roussette tomato as opposed to the tasteless uniformity of the European Moneyspinner... I catch Caro watching Armande with a look of disapproval. The Chablis is cool and tart, and I drink more of it than I should. Colours begin to seem brighter, sounds take on a cut-glass crispness. I bring a herb salad to clear the palate, then foie gras on warm toast. We pass from the political situation, to the Basque separatists, to ladies' fashions via the best way to grow rocket and the superiority of wild over cultivated lettuce. The Chablis runs smooth throughout. Then the vol-au-vents, light as a puff of summer air, then elderflower sorbet followed by plateau de fruits de mer with grilled langoustines, grey shrimps, prawns, oysters, berniques, spider-crabs, greens and pearly-whites and purples, a mermaid's cache of delicacies which gives off a nostalgic salt smell, like childhood days at the seaside... Impossible to remain aloof with such a dish; it demands attention, informality. I bring more of the Chablis; eyes brighten, faces made rosy with the effort of extracting the shellfish's elusive flesh...

Chocolat – Joanne Harris

COLETTE GROS, Chablis – Organic (Conversion)

The Gautheron family has been cultivating vines in Chablis for five generations. The current head of the Domaine Alain Gautheron, is working with his wife and son Cyril to carry on the family's traditions. This estate makes classic Chablis with a clear light gold colour, glinting with emerald-green. In the mouth the wine is dry as apple-parings and steely with perhaps just a delicate hint of violets and mint. Well balanced with lively acidity, the mouth presents notes of hazelnut and biscuits which add a certain charm and length to the finish. If ever a wine smacked of the terroir: the hard white limestone and Kimmeridgean soils, if ever a wine seemed to be a combination of light, stone, and water, bright, unyielding and limpid, then Chablis describes that wine. That swathe of acidity will carve through and wash down myriad dishes: from seafood to andouillette chablisienne, snails, curried lamb, fish with sorrel or Comté.

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|------|-----------------------------|---|
| 2022 | CHABLIS | W |
| 2022 | CHABLIS 1er CRU "FOURNEAUX" | W |



The famous spring icicle harvest of Chablis.

“The year listed on the bottle is not an expiration date – so that 1997 wine is safe to drink”.

Frasier

ALICE & OLIVIER DE MOOR, Chablis – Organic

All the wines from Alice & Olivier are on allocation.

Husband and wife team, Olivier and Alice de Moor met while working at a large Chablis estate. Both had worked separately in a variety of vineyards around the world, as vineyard manager and oenologist respectively so when they decided to establish their own estate, in 1994, they had more than enough knowledge between them to take their wines and vines in a very exciting direction, very different to that of their neighbours. The spot they chose was in Courgis, a small village 7km SW of Chablis, where Olivier grew up and where he had planted some of his own vines five years earlier while studying for his diploma in winemaking and viticulture. They began their estate by planting three parcels of Chablis. At the time they were still employed elsewhere and for the next three years they worked their parcels of vines while tending those of other winemakers to make a living. They leased a small parcel in Saint-Bris and later, in 1996, they planted a large plot in Chitry with Aligoté and Chardonnay. Since then, they have made several further developments including the building of a large, high-ceilinged winery which allows them to do all their cellar work by gravity, and their vineyards total just under 8-hectares.

The De Moors have worked their vines organically since 2005, a rarity in the area. Rigorous pruning, sensible de-budding and careful canopy management with manual leaf thinning are all carried out to control the yields and ensure the best, most expressive grapes. Wild grasses are allowed to grow between the rows, and they work the vines using a horse. Winemaking is as simple as possible. The grapes are hand-harvested, pressed into tank or barrel, where they undergo a wild yeast fermentation. Ageing in tank/barrel takes place for a further year. Who are those “masked harvesters”, kemo sabe? Alice & Olivier de Moor, that’s who. Typical of the warm nature of the vintage this is a light golden Chablis fermented in old barrels with a certain waxy texture in the mouth and notes of dry honey, ginger-spiked butter, and cinnamon-spiced apples. The De Moors are one of the few growers who work organically and without sulphur in the Chablis region. Hi-ho, Sulphur and away!

Fermented and aged in old oak the 1902 is Aligoté to age, extremely tight and high in stony acidity with citrus fruits and herbal aromas, very dense and long. This winespeak does not do justice to a wine which shimmers with authority – it has dense – or intense – transparency in the way that only wines with “perfect pitch” acidity can seem to glisten. Then the nose – glacier water buffing up a river stone, gorse flowers drenched with sea spray, all nostril-arching brilliance and then into the palate – linear, citric (juice plus pith), tears-of-chalk-stony, with tensile strength and just a smattering of lees spice. Liquid steel, this wine is an exhilarating skate across the palate. To coin a phrase, it takes you hither and Yonne. Humeur du Temps has crystalline fruit giving a really tense and thrilling experience. Succulence arrives in the shape of quince and clementine, embittered by grapefruit and kumquat and given a mineral dusting with impressions of gypsum and chalk. This is Chablis at its most thrilling and incisive, wonderfully concentrated yet buoyant and lifted.

Whether from their own vineyards or from fruit bought from friends and neighbours these are wonderfully intense and tensile wines. Released in small quantities, they are on allocation., Please enquire.

VINI VITI VINCI, NICOLAS VAUTHIER – Organic.

These are the stick-a-brown-bag-over-the-bottle wines of Vini Viti Vinci in northern Burgundy (parental guidance labels) made by Nicolas Vauthier, the Ayatollah of Iran-cy. Nicolas Vauthier has been a big fan of non-interventionist wines, at the forefront of promoting the wines he loves, for donkey’s years. He opened Aux Crieurs de Vin, a wonderful natural wine bar/store/restaurant in the city of Troyes and ran it for ten years. Eventually, having been surrounded by so much good wine, good times and conversations, Nicolas decided he wanted to make some wine for himself.

What he has created is a micro “negoce” house in Avallon, in the northern part of Burgundy near Chablis. Nicolas buys organically grown grapes ‘a pied’, still on the vine, harvests them with his own pickers, and then, in the spirit of minimal intervention, lets the wine make itself, intervening as little as possible. Wonderfully vibrant fruity aromas, satin textures and a vibrant, mineral core characterise the reds. He works with partial carbonic maceration which helps to make his northern Burgundy wines fruitier and more delicious. The fermentation takes place in large old wooden foudres with no sulphur – only a drop in the bottle. The only thing ripe about Vauthier’s wines are the labels, as the Kenny Everett used to say, it’s all done in the best possible taste.

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|------|-----------------------------|---|
| 2022 | BOURGOGNE-ALIGOTE BREAU | W |
| 2022 | COTES D’AUXERRE BREAU | W |
| 2021 | COULANGES VINEUSE BLANC | W |
| 2021 | BOURGOGNE ROUQUINS ROUGE | R |
| 2017 | IRANCY ROUGE BUTEIX | R |
| 2016 | COULANGES VINEUSE GENERIQUE | R |

“Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?”

“To the curious incident of the oak in Chardonnay”.

“There was no oak in the Chardonnay”.

“That was the curious thing”.

“Holmes, for the life of me, I cannot tell what this wine is”.

“It’s all there in front of you, my dear fellow. You know my methods, Watson, apply them”.

Obediently, I wrote down each sensation with as much method as I could muster: “Lemon entry in the mouth, smooth vanillin...”

“Lemon entry, my dear Watson?” said Holmes quizzically peering over my shoulder.

MACONNAIS & CHALONNAIS

DOMAINE CHRISTOPHE THIBERT, Pouilly

Pouilly-Fuissé – One of the easiest wines to type on a conventional keyboard

~ The Alternative Wine Glossary

Great wines that don’t receive the recognition they deserve, because their qualities are less overt than others. The Thiberts espouse natural remedies in the vineyard, working the soil to control vigour and yields. Severe bunch and leaf thinning and 159ira raisonnée (no use of anti-rot sprays or insecticides here), aerating the soil to allow the roots to search more deeply for water and harvesting by hand at the maximum of maturity ensures wines of concentration and complexity. The Mâcon-Fuissé is really a mini-Pouilly. With its lovely nose of honey, pear and apple and great mouthfeel it will have you checking the label to see if you’re not drinking a more illustrious name! Les Scélés is a real vin de pierre, dry, stony, taut – ideally it could use three years bottle age but does mellow considerably with sole or turbot. This serious proposition is from 45-year-old vines with high density planting on limestone marne soil. Vinification and ageing is traditional in foudres (70%), the rest in futs de chêne. The wine remains on the lees before bottling. The Non-Filtré (50-year-old vines) is impressive and then some. The aromas suggest cinnamon butter and warm brioche on the nose, the mouth is full with white peaches and comice pears to the fore, while the finish is spicy with a recurrence of the cinnamon notes, hints of vanilla from the oak and a fine citrus acidity to provide balance and definition. Uncompromising wine-making. With these dry round mineral wines you might investigate traditional dishes such as oysters au gratin, andouillette sausage cooked in white wine, blanquette de veau, veal fricassee with chanterelles and goats’ cheese (such as Saint-Marcellin or Bouton de Culotte).

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|------|---------------------------------|---|
| 2020 | MACON-FUISSE “BOIS DE LA CROIX” | W |
| 2020 | POUILLY-FUISSE “HERITAGE” | W |
| 2018 | SAINT-VERAN | W |

MAISON VALETTE, PHILIPPE VALETTE, Mâcon – *Organic practising*

Working the soil, chemical-free viticulture, short pruning, the Valettes do a huge amount of work amongst the vines to maximise the expression of their terroir. This effort from one of the region’s steadfastly independent families in the village of Chaintré, 10km south of Mâcon, is from vines aged 60 years and above planted on clay-silica soils. Harvest is manual in late September and the entire harvest is pressed slowly with a pneumatic press. Vinification is natural: without sulphur, without yeasts, chaptalisation, or acidification. Elevage is for twenty-six months on the fine lees in tank (20%) and futs de chêne (80%). Ripe apple, honey, lemon, and grey mineral all come together in a distinctly mature, winey nose. Clarity of fruit and good acidity show through, with a lush profile than Chablis but a long, almost crystalline finish. On the nose, fresh citrus, minerally and leesy notes abound, while the palate’s emphatic, zippy, with a generous mealy texture. The Pouilly-Fuissé is an assembly of several different terroirs: Clos Reyssié, Clos de Mr Noly, Chevrières and Plantes Vieilles. The vines are around 50 years old on limestone-clay. The harvest is in October when the grapes have reached full maturity and elevage is thirty-six months on the fine lees in futs de chêne. With lovely intensity of colour, the Pouilly bequeaths aromas of white flowers, hazelnuts, and grapefruit – in the mouth the wine combines richness, tension and acidity and a sensation of powerful minerality.

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|------|----------------------------------|---|
| NV | MACON-CHAI NTRE VIEILLES VIGNES | W |
| 2018 | POUILLY-FUISSE | W |
| NV | ET POURTANT VIRE CLESSE ~ magnum | W |

DOMAINE CELINE & LAURENT TRIPOZ, Mâcon – Biodynamic

All the Tripoz vineyards (11 hectares) are in or just outside of Loché, where the cellar is located. With vines on eastern exposures rooted in clay loaded with limestone, the Céline and Laurent believe that the only way to express a sense of terroir is to work in the most natural manner. Having been completely free of herbicides and chemicals since 2001 they have been certified organic and biodynamic since 2006. The Crémant de Bourgogne is 100% Chardonnay from various plots around the property. Laurent and Celine decided early on that they had to invest to make everything at the property instead of sending their juice to a “champagnisateur.” After a few years of doing two versions, one with dosage and one without, they decided to make only one cuvee without any additions, dosage or otherwise, which has become one of the most successful sparkling wines of the region. The Pouilly Loché “Reserve” is from vines outside the village, in the Pouilly AOC. This wine sees a long élevage in oak for almost two years and is the domaine’s most ageworthy and complex wine.

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|------|-----------------------------|----|
| 2020 | CREMANT DE BOURGOGNE NATURE | Sp |
| 2022 | MACON CUVÉE DU CLOCHER | W |
| 2021 | POUILLY-LOCHE 1ere RESERVE | W |

DOMAINE DES VIGNES DU MAYNES, JULIEN GUILLOT, Mâcon – Biodynamic

Once upon a time, dear reader, Les Vignes du Maynes (planted originally in the 10th century) belonged to the monks of the Cluny abbey and subsequently became the property of the powerful Comtes de Montrevel (1557).

Fast forward a few centuries and Pierre Guillot takes over the domaine and starts practising organic farming and 160eolian160tion with conviction and dynamism ever since, respecting both the consumer and nature. Today, the Domaine des Vignes du Maynes comprises about 6.5 hectares. Facing due east, the vines benefit from the rising sun. They grow on a terroir of a clay and limestone mixture. Avoidance of weedkiller and modest yields characterize these authentic wines produced from Pinot Noir, Gamay, and Chardonnay. From the time the grapes are picked by hand to the time the wines are bottled neither additives nor SO2 are used.

The pressing operation is slow, carried out on wooden wine presses dating from 1895. Fermentation takes the form of carbonic maceration over a period of ten days (Jules-Chauvet method). All wines, regardless of creed or colour, are left on the lees in oak barrels for eleven months producing wines full of character.

Aragonite is white Mâcon which undergoes two strict selections. Fermentation is in barrels with wild yeast. The wine is left on the lees and aged eleven months, without chaptalization or the addition of artificial yeast. Its striking appearance may be described as a lovely pale gold. Initially, the nose releases voluptuous aromas of exotic fruit and white flowers (acacia). Once it has opened up, the bouquet evolves, and notes of citrus fruit and pineapple may be distinguished along with pollen, truffle and grilled almond. The Bourgogne Rouge is a solid citizen. Grapes for this wine are not destemmed at harvest.

Thorough extraction of colouring and aromatic substances of Pinot Noir produces a well-rounded wine with lots of personality. Its striking colour of pomegranate invites you to discover a nose bursting with red berries and pervaded by notes of macerated blackcurrants. On the palate, this airy, fruity wine is superbly balanced. The Gamay grapes harvested in Mâcon-Cruzille Rouge yield approximately 38 hl/ha. The Jules Chauvet method is used for semi-carbonic maceration, lasting thirteen days. This intense ruby red Burgundy’s nose releases spicy aromas of mango and musk, as well as cooked cherries and delightfully juggles notes of sandalwood and an aromatic array of red berries (wild cherries). Monster crunch mark 2. Manganite is a greyish soil with a high metallic and crystalline content that militates into the flavour of the wine.

Stonefruit, earth, iron filings. It is sappy and stony, and the acidity is nicely coiled like a cobra about to strike. The Bourgogne Rouge Auguste the Pinot Fin and under this dorsal is a mouth with the bite of a Great White (or, in this case, a Great Red). I haven’t tasted a Pinot Noir of this mineral intensity for a very long time. It is difficult to describe – liquidised rocks, perhaps? – cloudy cherry-red colour a natural Griotte cherries, wild strawberries, menthol, saffron plus a fizzing bright yeasty quality. Wow – this makes 95% Burgundy taste flabby. So pure – the terroir of the monastery.

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| 2022/23 | MACON-CRUZILLE BLANC “AU QUIN” | W |
| 2022 | MACON-CRUZILLE BLANC «ARAGONITE » | W |
| NV | VIN DE FRANCE MEGAMIX ROUGE | R |
| 2022/23 | BOURGOGNE ROUGE « LES CRAYS » | R |
| 2022 | MACON-CRUZILLE ROUGE “MANGANITE” | R |
| 2023 | MACON ROUGE “910” ~ on allocation | R |
| 2022 | BOURGOGNE ROUGE “AUGUSTE” | R |

LES CADOLLES DE CHARDONNAY, NICOLAS & PATRICK LAUGERE, Mâcon – Organic methods

Also called a cabotte (hut) in the Beaune region, caborde near Auxerre, caborne in Lyon or even casèle in southern France, the cadole describes a hut, a term from the Latin casa. These rustic buildings, although often at risk with contemporary agricultural land being developed, remain inseparable from a typical wine-making landscape among others. Made from dried or bricked-up stones, the Laugeres are pleased to have these different types of buildings on their vineyards and have restored them as a tribute to the age-old work of their ancestors. This is how the Les Cadolles de Chardonnay estate came to be. Their uncle, Marcel, maintained the cadole that he inherited from his father-in-law, Pierre Piguet, back in 1945! Like a sentry box, Marcel's cadole watches over the adjoining vineyards of the place called Nécuge. Thanks to the water from the Marcel cadole, they will never lack in wine. In tribute, they christened their first Mâcon-Chardonnay vintage "La cadole à Marcel". The Mâcon-Chardonnay comes from blending plots of land all planted with Chardonnay and situated on the very uplands of the village of Chardonnay. All the maturity of these southeast-facing vines, thanks to their vantage point, is expressed in their fruit. The plots themselves are in Nécuge, La Luquette and La Roche. The last name indicates the very close presence of the stone quarry of Chardonnay from which the village houses were built. Farming is pretty well organic, and the fruit is hand-harvested from 30 year old vines. The wine was fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in a stainless-steel vat. Typical Mâcon wine, mineral, expressive with citrus fruit and white flower notes.

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| 2022 | MACON CHARDONNAY "LA CADOLE A MARCEL" | W |
| 2022 | MACON ROUGE « LA CADOLE A MARCEL » | R |

DOMAINE JEAN-BAPTISTE PONSOT, Rully

Just a few miles south of the Côte d'Or, the village of Rully produces distinguished, elegant wines. The mineral rich limestone soil accentuates the grapes natural acidity, making the wine fresh in youth and rich with age. Domaine Ponsot was created in 1954 by Lucien Ponsot. The soil is worked throughout the vegetative cycle and no herbicides are used. Yields are controlled by various measures and vineyard health is maintained by severe debudding and canopy management (leaf removal to allow better photosynthesis). After the must has settled it is transferred into barrels for the fermentation (20% of which are new) with regular batonnage for a period of three months. It is then matured for eleven months in barrel and three months in vat before bottling. The basic Rully Blanc is crisp and flinty with the engaging citrus fruit flavours, whilst the Montpalais reaches an extra level with vibrant pears, minerals, and green apples sheathed in some sympathetic oak.

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| 2022 | RULLY BLANC "EN BAS DE VAUVRY" | W |
| 2022 | RULLY BLANC 1 ^{er} CRU "MONTPALAIS" | W |

COTE DE BEAUNE**DOMAINE DERAINE, JULIAN ALTABER, Saint-Aubin – Biodynamic**

Dominique and Catherine Derain adopt a minimalist approach. They farm biodynamically, hand harvest, do not chaptalize or acidify and use the barest amount of sulphur in their winemaking approach. All the fruit is hand-picked, and they destem 90% of their red grapes before fermentation, which occurs in wooden vats. After fermentation the wine is aged in old oak casks for 12-18 months. The couple never use SO2 during the winemaking process, adding only a small amount at bottling for stabilization. The Saint-Aubin Rouge is marked with bright acidity, vibrant cherry fruit, Asian spices and lovely balance. This is a silky number that should provide several years of great drinking. The Saint-Aubin vines are situated on a slope with an eastern exposure and the soil is lime-clay with brown gravel. This is a model Côte de Beaune wine expressing red flowers (roses, cherry-blossom) and then in the mouth cascades of stone fruit supported by lively, lacy acidity. A gem. With its aromas of white flowers, custard apple, lemon curd, buttermilk and citrus, at once ample, generous and mineral, the "Puligny-manqué" (Saint-Aubin en Vesvau) has a brilliant curve of acidity and embraces so many contradictory notes with its tender quality allied to remarkable driving purity. You look for the oak, you look for the tartness – they are absent – what remains is the wine pure and not so simple, absolutely natural, everything in its place... From a tiny plot (less than 1/3 hectare) of low yielding vines grown in the brown clay soils in Puligny village Bourgogne Blanc "La Combe" is tighter than a coiled spring and more nervous than a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. Former apprentice, Julian Altaber, has taken over the domaine and the farming and winemaking, and the wines continue to be precise and exuding tension.

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| NV | METHODE TRADITIONELLE CHUT BRUT | Sp |
| 2020/21 | BOURGOGNE BLANC "LA COMBE" | W |
| 2022 | BOURGOGNE BLANC "CORVEE AUX MOINES" | W |
| 2022 | BOURGOGNE BLANC | W |
| 2021 | SAINT-AUBIN BLANC | W |
| 2020 | SAINT-AUBIN 1 ^{ER} CRU EN REMILLY | W |
| 2021 | SAINT-AUBIN 1 ^{ER} CRU SENTIER DU CLOU | W |
| 2020 | SAINT-AUBIN ROUGE "LE BAN" | R |

Nose – a term embracing the aroma and bouquet of wine. A strange thought occurs: do wine tasters' noses evolve to match their speciality? Would a sherry sniffer eventually end up with a beak like a sandpiper, ideal for poking into a copita, and would a burgundy lover's hooter swell to resemble a big reddish-purple truffle?

DOMAINE PATRICK MIOLANE, Saint-Aubin

This village Puligny shares many of the qualities found in a St. Aubin, but with more intensity and power. The Puligny comes from a parcel of vines planted in the early 1960s on alluvial soils. The harvest is manual with the grapes transported in small cases to the winery and sorted further on the table de tri. After pressing the juice is chilled down for debourbage and undergoes an alcoholic followed by malolactic fermentation. Batonnage is practiced to give more aromatic richness to the wine. Half of the wine is raised in tank and half in futs de chêne of which 20% of new Burgundy barrels. Yellow straw in colour with a nose of hawthorn and holly, candied apples, and pears. On the palate it is round, generous, ample, and delicate in a texture that lingers on the palate for a long finish. The acidity is just amazing here. Several years in bottle will reward patience as you can sense the shimmering nervosity of the wine. Here again we get the sense that the wine is dancing on the palate. It's very hard to describe this sensation to those accustomed to the heavy and clumsy character of Chardonnay's made elsewhere in the world. "C'est un vin gourmand qui révèle dès aujourd'hui une facilité gustative. "Get your gustatory kicks as you sup this wine with a fillet of sea bass – which the estate recommends you cook with 162irabelle de Géméné, a dish assuredly aimed at the chitterling classes. Les Perrières is a parcel of south-east facing vines situated just behind the domaine. The micro-climate contributes to the amazing character of the wine. This Saint-Aubin is dark red, fluid, almost twinkling. The nose is seductive, marked by liquorice and cassis and with a certain animal character that contributes an extra dimension. Elegant and lifted the palate is completed by the signature Perrières minerality which raises this wine to a level where it might be confused with some of the finer Burgundies of the region. This finesse steers our putative food match towards fish such as 162irabe à la peau croustillante sur une fondue d'échalote et sauce au vin rouge. If that's a bit too complicated to rustle up in ye olde microwave, try it with salmon and a beurre blanc reduction.

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| 2022 | SAINT-AUBIN BLANC | W |
| 2022 | CHASSAGNE-MONTACHET BLANC "CANIERE" | W |
| 2022 | PULIGNY-MONTRACHET | W |
| 2021 | SAINT-AUBIN 1 ^{er} CRU PERRIERES ROUGE | R |

DOMAINE CELINE & CHRISTIAN PERRIN, Ladoix – Organic

The 5th generation of vignerons vinifying at this family domaine which is now fully organic. The Bourgogne Rouge comes from vines in Savigny on clay soils. Hand harvested grapes (35 hl/ha), the wine undergoes a fifteen-day maceration in cement before élevage in futs de chene of 5-6 years. The Ladoix Blanc is pressed straight into barrels and ferments with native yeasts, naturally completing its malolactic.

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| 2023 | BOURGOGNE-ALIGOTE | W |
| 2022 | LADOIX BLANC « SUR LES VRIS » | W |
| 2022 | MEURSAULT SOUS LA VELLE | W |
| 2022 | BOURGOGNE PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2021 | LADOIX ROUGE « LES BRIQUOTTES » | R |

DOMAINE LARUE, DIDIER & DENIS LARUE, Saint-Aubin

Situated in the very heart of Saint-Aubin Domaine Larue also produces a particularly fine example of Puligny. The Garenne vineyard is a mere 0.6 hectare in size. The viticulture is exacting: lutte raisonnée, working the soil, green harvest, manual harvest. Fermentation is in barrique, a third of which are new and there is a further élevage on the lees with regular batonnage. The wine displays classic honey, butter and citrus overlaid with hazelnut and pain grille and the striking palate offers equilibrium between minerality and sweetness. Try this, if you will, with medallions of monkfish in a saffron sauce or poulet de volaille aux morilles. Clear pale lemon in colour, this fruity and floral Saint-Aubin, from vines over 40 years old, has a delicate bouquet with an intimation of oatmeal. The palate has fresh white peach and is nicely complex and not too heavy. You will like the Meursault-styled earthiness on the finish. With nice acidity and good, clean length, this will develop and keep very well.

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| 2022 | SAINT-AUBIN BLANC 1 ^{er} CRU « LES COMBES » | W |
| 2022 | PULIGNY-MONTRACHET « LE TREZIN » | W |
| 2022 | PULIGNY-MONTRACHET « SOUS LE PUIT » | W |
| 2022 | PULIGNY-MONTACHET 1 ^{ER} CRY « LA GARENNE » | W |

Limestone Cowboy

I've been walkin' these vineyards for so long
Singin' the same old song
I know every crack in the dirt between the vines
Where patience and shoot-thinning's the name of the game
And lazy guys scarper at the first sign of rain
There's been no thought of compromisin'
On the path to my natural horizon
But I'm gonna be where the sunlight shines on me
Like a limestone cowboy
Ploughing the rows on a horse trained by Olivier Cousin
Like a limestone cowboy
Getting messages and tweets from people I don't even know
And orders comin' over the phone
Well, I really don't mind the rain
When I can spray powdered sulphur over the terrain
Something I never needed to do when I worked in Spain
That's workin' the right way
And I dream of the things I'll do
With a Nomblot egg and a barrel of glouglou
There'll be no compromisin'
On the path to my natural horizon
But I'm gonna be where the sunlight shines on me
Like a limestone cowboy...

JEAN-MARIE BERRUX, Saint-Romain – Organic

Jean-Marie's family comes from the Savoie region and he himself was born in Chambéry. One branch of his family owned a farm, producing apples and breeding cattle. As a child, he used to spend his weekends on the farm, and would participate in the traditional transhumance of the cattle (transhumance is the transferring of the cattle to their summer 'alpages' (pastures at a high altitude). These youthful experiences influenced Jean-Marie profoundly, for having worked in advertising for a long period, he decided to completely change profession, follow his heart, and become a farmer. With the intention of producing natural wines, Jean-Marie and his wife settled in Burgundy in 2000 and purchased their first parcel of Chardonnay vines in 2004 (they weren't interested in renting).

While Jean-Marie's winery is located in Meursault, the vines for the Pinot are in the commune of Aluze (by Santenay), grow on clay-limestone soils. Farming is organic.

The grapes for this cuvée are manually harvested over the course of one weekend, then chilled at the winery on reception and cold-pressed with the juice settling overnight. The must was then placed in stainless steel vat to begin its wild yeast fermentation and then transferred into six oak barrels (used Burgundy barriques of 228-litres) for one year of ageing, followed by a further six months in stainless steel vat. It is bottled without filtration, fining, and no sulphur is added whatsoever.

The name Non de Gu' is Jean-Marie's homage to his father who passed away in 2020. He explains that this phrase is Savoie patois and used to express irritation, incomprehension, or surprise, just like the French phrases « mince alors » or « bon sang » and « nom de Dieu ». His father would exclaim "NondeGu". Regarding 'Le Petit Têtu' that name derives from the nickname his family gave him when he jacked in his career in advertising to become farmer and natural vigneron. We are also big fans of Le Petit Têtu Bourgogne Blanc from a vineyard near Puligny and showing the quality of organic farming on limestone-clay soils. The wine is fermented in used Burgundy barrels and matured in them for a further twelve months. Sporting liquid crystallised fruits on the nose, it is crisp, coiled Chardonnay, replete/slender with vivid whipcrack acidity and bedrock minerals. There's a sea-spray, sea-shelly salinity, and a kind of delicate lime-zest filigree acidity. Epatant.

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| 2021 | BOURGOGNE CHARDONNAY "LE PETIT TETU" | W |
| 2021 | BOURGOGNE PINOT NOIR « NONDEGU » | R |

DOMAINE COFFINET-DUVERNAY, Chassagne

Domaine Coffinet is a family estate handed down from generation to generation from 1860 in the village of Chassagne-Montrachet. A significant plot due to its considerable surface area, "Les Blanchots Dessous" lies just underneath "Criots-Bâtard-Montrachet". The vines grow on a deep clay-calcareous soil with some marl and face south near the base of the slope at two hundred metres altitude. The grapes for the wine are carefully harvested and sorted. After the must settles, the fermentation takes place in barrels (30% new oak) and is subsequently matured for fourteen to sixteen months in barriques depending on the vintage. The wine undergoes fining but no filtration. Bold aromas of citrus and ripe peach emerge from the glass. This is an intense style, quite full, with a sense of opulence. Very mineral, and with a layered depth. An exciting premier cru that shows a fine arc of fruit and a fascinating, lingering minerality. Try with brill (whatever happened to brill?) with a white wine sauce or some grilled red mullet.

"Les Fairendes" is a premier cru vineyard of some twenty-seven acres of 42-year-old vines, based on the Morgeot AOC. The lowest part of the plot is mostly marl and planted with Pinot Noir, the highest part is very rocky on brown limestone and is planted with Chardonnay. The estate is worked following the sustainable farming philosophy. They practise green harvesting depending on the vintage. Yields are a very reasonable 40-45hl/ha with the grapes manually picked in the third week of September. Expressive, almost racy nose of bright, mineral lemon fruit. The complex palate shows a good concentration of tight mineral fruit with some rich nuttiness underneath.

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| 2022 | CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET "BLANCHOTS DESSOUS" | W |
| 2022 | CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET 1 ^{er} CRU "FAIRENDES" | W |
| 2022 | CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET 1 ^{er} CRU "BLANCHOTS DESSUS" | W |
| 2022 | CHASSAGNE-MONTRACHET 1 ^{er} CRU "DENT DE CHIEN" | W |
| 2022 | BATARD-MONTRACHET | W |

DOMAINE SYLVAIN BZIKOT, Puligny

Sylvain Bzikot makes wines with real personality. The 13.2-hectare estate was originally created by his grandparents at the beginning of the 1940s. They arrived (as Polish immigrants) in Meursault to work in the vineyards as their friends and relations did before them. After a few years working in the fields, they began as "metayer fermier" and subsequently bought a few tiny parcels of land which they planted progressively. At the time farming was polycultural, not only vines but also cereal and cattle. Now that his parents have retired Sylvain is totally in charge of vineyard operations and has been developing estate bottling (started twenty years ago). Vineyard work is traditional with an emphasis on 164roc raisonnée. All the grapes for the village wines are handpicked, then a pneumatic press is used to aid soft extraction, and the wines are clarified in thermoregulated tanks. Upbringing for the village Puligny is in 50% new and one year old oak and 50% tank, whilst the 1er cru wines sees 2/3 new oak and 1/3 tank. After eight to ten months, once the alcoholic and malolactic fermentations are finished, the wines are assembled in stainless steel for several months, fined, very slightly filtered and bottled. Evoking grace and refinement Bzikot's village Puligny-Montrachet also has richness and density, seductive aromas of fresh butter, hazelnut and fresh fruits and a lovely citrus freshness to round off. The Perrières raises the game a notch with its finely constructed palate and smoky, stony, mineral quality reflected on the nose. Terrific purity expressed here from the outset.

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| 2022 | BOURGOGNE BLANC | W |
| 2022 | PULIGNY-MONTRACHET | W |
| 2022 | PULIGNY-MONTRACHET – ½ bottle | W |
| 2022 | PULIGNY-MONTRACHET 1 ^{er} CRU "LES FOLATIERES" | W |
| 2022 | PULIGNY-MONTRACHET 1 ^{ER} CRU « LES PERRIERES » | W |

... the odour of Burgundy, and the smell of French sauces, and the sight of clean napkins and long loaves, knocked as a very welcome visitor at the door of our inner man.

JEROME K. JEROME
Three Men in a Boat

DOMAINE JEAN JAVILLIER, Volnay – Organic

Jean Javillier has 7.5 hectares in the famous village of Meursault in the Côte de Beaune. He converted to organic farming in 1972, something unheard of locally in those days. Today his sons Alain and Thierry run the domaine. It took the family almost fifteen years to effectively grasp how to farm and make wine organically although they have been certified since 1976. The soils are fertilised with compost made up of organic fertilisers – a mixture of horse and cow dung. The minimum number of treatments are used in the vineyard (sulphur for oidium and copper for mildew) and yields are limited to 35-45 hl/ha. The cuvaion is relatively brief about twelve days with natural yeasts. The wines stay in tonneaux or cement tanks for 12-15 months before bottling. The Volnay is very pretty, a vermilion-hued Burgundy with delicate aromas of framboise and mure, soft yet rich tannins. The wine is always flattering in its infancy, on the floral side, before developing the classic truffle and sous-bois bouquet. The Pommard is ripe, plush, and chunky; it would accompany feathered game happily.

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| 2022 | MEURSAULT | W |
| 2022 | MEURSAULT CUVÉE JEAN | W |
| 2022 | VOLNAY-VILLAGES | R |
| 2022 | VOLNAY 1 ^{ER} CRU “CLOS DES CHENES” | R |
| 2022 | POMMARD 1 ^{ER} CRU | R |

DOMAINE RENAUD BOYER, Meursault – Biodynamic

Renaud Boyer cultivates his 5-hectares by hand and horse with great passion following strict organic and natural principles when making his wine, without additives or sulphur. From his holdings on the chalky fossilised soils of Saint Romain (40% of production come from these vines), the stony limestone plot of Les Reuchaux in Puligny-Montrachet to the clay heavy soils of Beaune, these are truly pure wines.

Renaud, originally from Meursault, trained to be an engineer before switching careers and becoming a vigneron of land in Saint-Romain, previously belonging to uncle, Thierry Guyot, an organics enthusiast who had been working the vines free of chemicals since the 1980's. He has since converted to biodynamic status and is certified by Ecocert. The vines are now spread between the Beaune, Puligny-Montrachet and Saint Romain. As you might expect of someone who looks to Emmanuel Houillon, Patrick Meyer and Philippe Jambon for inspiration and guidance, his work in the cellar is kept to a minimum. The Chardonnays are directly pressed, slowly over a period of 6-7 hours. Pinot Noir is whole bunch macerated for approximately three weeks. There are no pump overs and only one pigeage is done at the end of maceration. Renaud is not looking for extraction or colour, instead choosing purity and favouring immediacy. He works with gravity for transfer to barrel where the wines remain on lees for a minimum of twelve-months ageing. All wines are unfiltered and unfiltered, and Renaud stopped adding sulphur in 2008.

The Saint-Romain Rouge is fascinating, revealing wild forest and bramble berries. It has a nervous quality and a heightened complexity. There's a lovely freshness here on the palate, with more high-toned wild mountain fruits and soft herbs and some red iron-laced minerality. The wine finishes on a note of ferrous earthiness and savouriness.

Made from 80-year-old vines planted in white marl soils, Renaud's Saint-Romain Blanc is wonderful white Burgundy, being lavish, concentrated, textured, mineral and dense. Aromatically it is exotic, bursting with marmalised fruit and spice. The acidity is defined and offsets the density, and in every way, this Saint-Romain possesses that energy you only find in great natural wines.

The Puligny-Montrachet Les Reuchaux is equally brilliant. It has the tightly wound texture one might expect of classy wines from this appellation. Initially one gets citrus pith and crystallised fruits (grapefruit, lemon & orange), There's an additional rich oatmeal aromatic from the lees. Powerful and mouth-filling with a driving intensity. A delicious wine with layers of complexity, white peach (flesh and stone) and yellow citrus flavours, white spice, savoury elements and digestible minerality.

We receive occasional parcels of these glorious Burgundies, Please enquire.

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ULIZ, ANTOINE PETITPREZ, Beaune – Biodynamic methods

Antoine's philosophy is to "express the terroir and respect the vintage". He develops mutually beneficial partnerships by consulting with organic farmers in exchange for their agreement to sell him grapes. His strategic networking allows him to acquire superior fruit contracts with growers and to consult with them on their vineyard practices throughout every aspect of harvest. All of Antoine's farmers plough for good biological activity in the soil and use organic and biodynamic farming methods. No chemical products are used. The Santenay is sourced entirely from the Les Cornières' vineyard, a large parcel (over 10 ha) that is eastern-facing and due west from the village. The vineyard is named after the trees that grow there, which bear small, reddish pears. The wine is unfinned and bottled with zero sulphur.

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| 2018 | CHOREY-LES-BEAUNE | R |
| 2018 | COTES-DE-NUITS VAUCRAINS | R |
| 2019 | COTES-DE-NUITS CHAMPS PERDRIX | |

DOMAINE FABRICE & ANTONIN LACOUR, COTES DU COUCHOIS, Beaune – Organic methods

This father and son team run a 13-ha estate in the appellations Côtes du Couchois, Hautes Côtes de Beaune and Bourgogne. Antonin, in his mid-twenties (captain of Couches rugby team) is now working full time at the estate. The Côtes du Couchois is a tiny appellation (a mere 8 ha planted) located south of Maranges, at altitude between 300 to 420m. The rich soils in these areas gives the wines good tannic structure, and saline character. This relatively unknown area of Burgundy is the source of authentic and very well priced wines. With the arrival of Antonin, the Lacours are converting to farming in sustainable manner and are adopting low intervention approach in the cellar.

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| 2022 | BOURGOGNE ROUGE « LE MONDELOT » | R |
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COTE DE NUITS

DOMAINE HERESZTYN-MAZZINI, Gevrey-Chambertin – Organic

“The First Duty of wine is to be Red ... the second is to be a Burgundy”

An estate founded by a former Polish vineyard worker of Louis Trapet. Domaine Heresztyn has been one of the consistently fine producers in Gevrey Chambertin. However, as Florence Heresztyn increasingly takes the reins, they have clearly reached another level of quality. The vineyard is now undergoing conversion to biodynamic viticulture. As Clive Coates remarks: “Now they are amongst the top in the village: elegant, composed, full of fruit, full of definition. A major address these days.” These are wonderful glossy precocious wines with eloquent morello cherry and bilberry fruit and a certain stoniness that betokens good ageing potential. Plenty of energy, vinosity, and concentration here. The 2001 and 2002s are rich and forward and an hour or two in a carafe eases out spectacular violet aromas and warm toasty fruit. We have a range of vintages now for those of you who like to get vertical.

The Bourgogne Pinot Noir comes from vines grown on sand, clay and stony chalk, a terroir that confers elegance and fruit. Both the soil and the vineyard are worked to ensure high quality fruit: leaf-thinning, green harvesting and lutte raisonnée. The grapes undergo a pre-fermentation maceration in stainless steel and concrete for eight days, then a further five days alcoholic fermentation before being aged in futs de chêne for sixteen months. The Gevrey-Chambertin vieilles vignes from 50-year-old parcels planted on deep limestone-clay soils is a firm favourite. It is aged in Allier and Tronçais barrels (40% new) for up to eighteen months. The nose is expansive, yielding aromas of strawberry, blackcurrant and violet and the mouth is sensual with pure fruit flavours lingering on the tongue. The luminous, lacy Chambolle-Musigny, from two lieux-dits (aux Echanges and aux Badoits) and 65-year-old low-yielding parcels, could be described as à point. This would go well with braised duck in red wine, navarin of spring lamb and cheese such as Brillat-Savarin and Citeaux.

Gevrey-Chambertin Les Goulots is a premier cru parcel located on limestone-rich soils on the border of a forest. Undergoing a similar upbringing to the other wines it is marked by strong mineral flavours and a certain vivacity, while the La Perrière is the more obviously charming with cherry-fruit aromas and harmonious tannins. The Morey-Saint-Denis 1er cru Les Millandes is one of the best we have tasted. From 65-year-old vines and low yields (37hl/ha) this vivid ruby-red wine has a stunning bouquet of myrtle, blackberries, sloes and bramble not to mention floral notes of violets and jasmine, a sustained palate with exquisite finesse and length. One to age and to drink with guinea fowl with cabbage, rabbit in mustard sauce and cheese (Epoisses, Munster, Livarot etc.) Clos Saint-Denis is situated in Morey-Saint-Denis between Clos de la Roche and Clos des Lambrays. The vineyard is planted on Liassic and Triassic limestone, a terrain that allows the roots of the vines to delve deep for mineral nourishment. Heresztyn’s wine is delightful; the subtle weaving of fragrances (black fruits, gingerbread, prunes, musk) hints at a Grand Cru with nuance rather than sheer power, a point reinforced by the tender fruity palate, aromatic, pretty, oozing finesse. The tannins, nevertheless, remind you that this is a true vin de garde. Gird your best loin of venison or saddle up your meanest hare.

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| 2018/18 | BOURGOGNE PINOT NOIR HERESZTYN-MAZZINI | R |
| 2019/20 | CHAMBOLLE MUSIGNY | R |
| 2020 | GEVREY-CHAMBERTIN VIEILLES VIGNES | R |
| 2018 | GEVREY-CHAMBERTIN 1 ^{er} CRU “LES GOULOTS” | R |
| 2017-20 | GEVREY-CHAMBERTIN 1 ^{er} CRU “LA PERRIERE” | R |
| 2014,18 | MOREY SAINT-DENIS 1 ^{er} CRU “LES MILLANDES” | R |
| 2018 | CLOS ST DENIS GRAND CRU | R |

Her Dad still opens Chambertin
 As the candle burns away
 It was the favourite of Napoleon
 That's what he liked to say.
 And all that he said
 All of us there were tasting history
 And all through the night
 In glass-filtered light, tasting history

Al Stewart – *Down In The Cellar*

DOMAINE GILLES BALLORIN, Morey-Saint-Denis – *Biodynamic*

Setting up a new wine domain represents a challenge in Burgundy, there are so many well-established names producing great wines. Gilles and Fabienne Ballorin were not perturbed, however, at the thought of competition, they started in Brochon, moving to Morey-St-Denis in 2007 in the Côte de Nuits and already they are carving out a good reputation for themselves with their biodynamic wines. In Burgundy, a map of who owns what in the vineyards is like a mosaic, there are many small-scale producers with small sections in different vineyards. In the Côte de Nuits, Domaine Ballorin & F has vines all along the strip from Chenôve to Comblanchien: 23 ares of vines in Fixin (les Chenevières), 10 ares in Nuits St. Georges (les Damodes), 80 ares in Chenôve, 25 ares Marsanny Rose, one hectare in Marsannay (Les Echezots) for example. They have holdings in eleven different vineyards in all, the most recent acquisitions being Très Girard in Morey and Clos du Roy in Marsannay. The production reads like a restaurant wine list with red, white and rosé including Bourgogne Aligoté (Le Hardi), Bourgogne Pinot Noir (Le Bon), Bourgogne Passetoutgrain (Le Téméraire) and Bourgogne Blanc. They work hard all year round to produce mature grapes so that nothing extra is needed during 168eolian168tion. The answer lies in the soil: 'The grapes are good if the soil is healthy' says Fabienne, 'sometimes you can smell the life in the soil.' The wines are natural – ambient ferments with indigenous yeasts in resin-coated vats and stainless-steel tanks resulting in a natural malo, no filtration, no fining, and less than 30 mg/l of sulphur. The Aligoté, named in recognition of Philippe Le Hardi who prohibited planting of Gamay in Burgundy (nobody's perfect), is golden yellow with greenish glints, has a buttery texture with delicate aromas of ripe citrus and warm pear-skin. Chenevières comes from the Old French word for Cotton Fields, to which once, centuries ago, this low-lying vineyard may have been planted. The soil here is a mixture of soil and gravel, and the character of fruit tends towards that harder character Fixin has been known to embody. Highly aware of this fact, Gilles tends to treat this cuvee particularly gently, as well as using canopy management and careful control of temperature at fermentation to ensure a gentler extraction. It is more structured than the Marsannays, with bright minerality following on the heels of the rich entry, with rounder fruit from the heavier clays in this soil.

| | | |
|---------|----------------------------------|---|
| 2019/22 | MARSANNAY BLANC | W |
| 2022 | MARSANNAY ROUGE « LES AMOUREUX » | R |
| 2020 | FIXIN « LES CHENEVRIERES » | R |
| 2022 | NUITS-ST-GEORGES « LES DAMODES » | R |

DOMAINE BART, Marsannay

Bart: Oh, I'm starving! Mom, can we go Catholic so we can get communion wafers and booze?
Marge: No, no one's going Catholic. Three children are enough, thank you.

Pierre Bart is the sixth generation at Domaine Bart. Since 2009 he has run the domaine and its 22 hectares of vines together with his mother and his uncle. There is a strong focus on Marsannay, coupled with a few parcels in Fixin, Gevrey-Chambertin, Chambolle-Musigny and Santenay. Pierre's grandmother was from the same family as Domaine Bruno Clair and inherited part of the vines when it was divided up. This is where the Bonnes Mares and Chambertin Clos de Beze parcels originated from. When Pierre's uncle arrived at the domain, he then increased the size of the domain, mainly in Marsannay. He chose to improve quality, both in terms of equipment and in terms of winemaking. It's good to show some Burgundies from these vintages. Starting with Marsannay Les Finottes we have an engaging little wine that "plays the flute rather than the trumpet" as the saying goes. Fruity and forward it conveys a delicious fruit medley of 168lumies cherries, strawberries, and rhubarb with a bit of pruney development. Les Champs Salomon, a healthy Marsannay with sweet currant, black cherry and saturated plum fruit; conveys also notes of cinnamon, ginger, and candied oranges. On the mid-palate there are more stone, straw and hay aspects interspersed with spices. Clive Coates, in his article on Best-Value Red Burgundy Producers mentions Marsannay as the source for good medium-structured, unextracted Pinot Noir and cites Bart as one of the growers to look out for.

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|------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 2021 | MARSANNAY ROUGE "LES FINOTTES" | R |
| 2021 | MARSANNAY ROUGE "LES CHAMPS SALOMON" | R |

CHAMPAGNE

Come quickly – I am tasting stars!

Dom Perignon (wouldn't it be great if he really said that?)

Garçon! A bottle of your second cheapest champagne! – Homer (Simpson)

BETTER THE DEVILLE YOU KNOW

Notice to all customers. Battery acid containing bubbles is not worth listing as house champagne. As Aldous Huxley described it: "The taste of an apple peeled with a steel knife". We should discard the security blanket of branding – that way madness, badness and Liebfraumilch lies – and search vigorously for examples made with craft and care. What is in the bottle should matter more than the label and its attestation of provenance. That may sound trite, but there is a cultural conservatism which not only allows, but also actively conspires with the con tricks that go on in the name of brand recognition.

We believe in growers' champagnes from vineyards that have been properly farmed, where the quality of grapes is paramount. The majority of artisan growers work in the Côte des Bars in the south of the region, nearer to Chablis than the heart of champagne. The fruit from these well-tended vineyards is richer and riper on the golden-toned end of the spectrum. The resultant wines are that much more vinous – try Marie-Courtin for their richness and purity, Val Frison's Goustan, a brut nature style with nutty oxidative notes. Happily, we have supplemented these beauties with five new producers, making a variety of champagnes from throughout the region from their own vineyards that are farmed organically and even biodynamically in some cases. Once you have at least tried a good grower's champagne you are unlikely ever again to be seduced by the ephemeral promise of the emperor's new bubbles.

CHAMPAGNE JEAN-PAUL DEVILLE, Reims

Champagne Nomenclatura

A good mousse – *bubbles the size of tennis balls*

A fine mousse – *bubbles the size of ping pong balls*

Gentle mousse – *one bubble the size of a football*

A Nice Moose – *a bubbling caribou who'll stand you a bloody good glass of champagne*

Our house champagne for a many a moon. Lush wines with a relatively high proportion of Pinot Noir and a fair amount of bottle age for depth. The vintage 2002 is for those who like their champagne as snug as a bug in a bottle of Krug.

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|----|--|-------|
| NV | JEAN-PAUL DEVILLE CARTE NOIRE NV | Sp |
| NV | JEAN-PAUL DEVILLE HELIOS CARTE D'OR NV | Sp |
| NV | JEAN-PAUL DEVILLE HELIOS CARTE D'OR – ½ bottle | Sp |
| NV | JEAN-PAUL DEVILLE OPALIS BLANC DE BLANCS | Sp |
| NV | JEAN-PAUL DEVILLE SAPPHEIROS ROSE | Sp/Ro |

CHAMPAGNE LAURENT PERRIER

| | | |
|----|-------------------------------|-------|
| NV | LAURENT PERRIER LA CUVÉE BRUT | Sp |
| NV | LAURENT PERRIER ROSE | Sp/Ro |

CHAMPAGNE LOUIS ROEDERER

| | | |
|------|--|-------|
| NV | LOUIS ROEDERER COLLECTION 244 | Sp |
| NV | LOUIS ROEDERER COLLECTION 244 – ½ bottle | Sp |
| NV | LOUIS ROEDERER COLLECTION 241 - magnum | Sp |
| 2014 | LOUIS ROEDERER BRUT VINTAGE | Sp |
| 2016 | LOUIS ROEDERER BLANC DE BLANCS | Sp |
| 2016 | LOUIS ROEDERER ROSE | Sp/Ro |
| 2012 | LOUIS ROEDERER BRUT NATURE | Sp |

RECIPE

Champagne Cocktails

4 cockerels
1 bottle Krug champagne

Nail the cockerels to your worktops, ensuring that they are facing the wall. Shake the bottle vigorously and then uncork it. Immediately thrust the foaming neck of the bottle up the rear of each cockerel in turn. Seal each rear with time-delay window putty. Now retire to a safe distance before the whole thing blows. Have a small sherry at your local inn.

John Henry Dixon – *How To Peel An Otter*

CHAMPAGNE DES COTANNES/ VAL' FRISON, Ville-sur-Arce – Organic

Thierry de Marne took over his family's vines in the village of Ville-sur-Arce in 1997, selling his grapes to the local cooperative. He began converting his vineyards to organic viticulture in 2003. And in 2007 the first vintage eligible for organic certification. He began to make small quantities of his own champagne. He released his first wines in 2010, but in typically bureaucratic French fashion, the CIVC didn't allow him to market the wines under his own name, de Marne: they felt it implied that they came from the Marne, when in fact they were from the Aube. To satisfy the authorities, de Marne combined his name with that of his wife Valérie Frison and a new champagne estate was born. While de Marne and Frison (they separated last year and allowed Valérie to start making her own wine) own a total of six hectares of vines in Ville-sur-Arce, two and a half hectares are still sold to the co-operative each year. Just one hectare to produce wine from, meaning that quantities are necessarily small:

In the inaugural vintage of 2007, de Marne made just 4,000 bottles. Most of de Marne's vines are Pinot Noir, with just five percent of his total surface planted with Chardonnay. As is typical for this area, Kimmeridgian soils dominate, although de Marne draws a distinction between parcels that contain white clay and yellow clay (argile blanche and argile jaune). He also has two Chardonnay parcels that lie on Portlandian soil, and one of these—Les Cotannes—is bottled separately. All parcels are allowed to grow a natural cover crop, which is ploughed in March to prevent the vines from having too much competition for nutrients; de Marne notes that a different set of plants grows in each parcel, reflecting subtle differences in terroir

In 2009, however, de Marne built his own winemaking facility, installing a 2000-kilogram pneumatic press and since then he has made all of his wines there. Vinification takes place in second hand barriques, purchased from La Chablisienne, and the wines are fermented with indigenous yeasts. They are never chaptalized, and they are allowed to go through a natural malolactic.

For now, Val Frison produces two different champagnes. Lalore is a blanc de blancs from Les Cotannes, and while it demonstrates the voluptuous depth expected of the Aube, Frison is careful not to harvest the grapes at excessive levels of ripeness: She prefers to pick at around 11.2 of potential alcohol

Goustan Brut Nature is from three parcels on one hectare. Pinot on Kimmeridgean clay, and Portlandian limestone. Indigenous yeast fermentation takes place in used barriques resulting in a natural malo and finally tirage is done without filtering or fining. This stands as the non-vintage brut even though it's all 2012 juice. Rich, expressive fruit notes of white cherry with a wonderfully savoury lip-smacking note all framed by a persistent Chablis like minerality and acidity that keeps everything in harmony.

The Lalore is pure Chardonnay from the Aube – its beautiful texture and fine bubbles reveal a herbal palate that reminds one of wild rocket. The terroir inflection is reminiscent of superior white Burgundy. Indigenous fermentation with wild yeasts in used barriques from Chablis, naturally occurring malo and tirage without filtering or fining.

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|------|------------------------------------|----|
| NV | GOUSTAN BRUT NATURE | Sp |
| NV | GOUSTAN BRUT NATURE – magnum | Sp |
| NV | LALORE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT NATURE | Sp |
| 2017 | PORTLANDIA | Sp |
| 2014 | DE MARNE HOLISTIQUE | Sp |
| NV | DE MARNE HOLISTIQUE ~ magnum | Sp |

[The three musketeers and D'Artagnan are escaping from the Cardinal's men in his own coach] Porthos: Champagne? Athos: We're in the middle of a chase, Porthos. Porthos: You're right – something red.

The Three Musketeers (1993)

CHAMPAGNE MARIE-COURTIN, DOMINIQUE MOREAU, Côte des Bars – Biodynamic (Certified Demeter)

Champagne Marie Courtin is in the village of Polisot in the Côte des Bars, in the southern part of the Champagne region.

With its slightly warmer temperatures, this area is particularly prized for its Pinot Noir grapes. Combined with the

Kimmeridgian limestone sub soils, the champagnes retain a freshness similar to Chablis, which is closer to Polisot than

Reims! In fact, many of the Grand Marques source their Pinot Noir from the Côte des Bars because of this unique combination of texture and delineation that the sub-zone provides.

Dominique Moreau created the estate in 2005 with a vision to produce a series of single-vineyard, single varietal, single vintage Champagnes from biodynamically-grown grapes that are farmed and elaborated with meticulous care. This philosophy is in stark contrast with the predominant mindset in Champagne which is all about blending grapes, vineyards, and vintages (for a consistent product), and with a tendency towards very high yields and full-on chemical treatments. Dominique named her estate after her grandmother, Marie Courtin, whom she describes as a “woman of the earth”. Most of her wines come from a hillside vineyard of 40–45-year-old, massale-selection Pinot Noir in Polisot (located the next town over from Celles-sur-Ource, where Cédric Bouchard lives and works). The combination of low yields, clay-limestone soils (with bands of Kimmeridgian) and an east/southeast exposure gives the wines both power and cut, with an intense brininess and minerality at their core.

The estate makes several cuvées, the largest of which are called “Résonance” and “Éfflorescence”, the former fermented in stainless steel, the latter in used barriques. The grapes for Efflorescence tend to come from the bottom of the hill, which she says, “has greater power and potential”. At harvest, the grapes are all harvested by hand. The wines are fermented with natural yeasts that have been selected from their vineyards and cultivated separately. These native yeasts are used for both the primary and secondary fermentations. Lastly, there is no dosage added upon disgorgement.

The estate also produces tiny amounts of a Blanc de Blanc (from Chardonnay), a Rose, and a cuvee made without any added SO2. The style of all her wines is super-energetic and chiselled, though with an underlying power from both her viticultural practices and the terroirs and varietals that she exploits. These are spectacular wines at the table as they combine multiple vectors of complexity, power, and delineation that all play off each other depending on the dishes they are served with.

Along with Dominique's intense dedication to the care of her vineyards and her winemaking, she also embraces a spiritual philosophy in her production and viticulture. In one particular technique, she uses pendulums (often used in energy healing practices) in both the vineyard and cellar to aid in evaluating both the evolution of the grapes on the vine as well as the wine during élevage. She explains that the pendulum changes its natural rhythm and swing based on the energy emitted from a living being, whether person, vineyard, or wine.

The names of the wines carry spiritual significance for Dominique as well. “Résonance” refers to the balancing energies of earth and sky that affect the creation of a wine from its surrounding terroir. For Dominique, “Efflorescence” refers to “something that evolves in perpetuity”. Starting with the evolution encouraged by the small oxygen exchange in barrel, she feels that this wine will show a very different face at each stage of its development in bottle. She recommends that both wines be served in traditional white wine glasses to allow for their development through increased aeration.

Resonance is from biodynamically farmed Pinot Noir sourced from massale selection vines 35-40 years in age from a single parcel located in Polisot (Côte des Bar). The fruit for Resonance comes from the top of the slope where there is little topsoil with clay and Kimmeridgian limestone bands like those found in Chablis. The wine is fermented in stainless steel using native yeasts for both fermentations, aged in stainless steel and bottled with no dosage. Efflorescence is also farmed biodynamically, and hand harvested and vinified in used barriques using natural yeasts (for both fermentations) and aged sur lie for three years and bottled with zero dosage. This bottling is made from grapes from the bottom of the hill, which Dominique believes results in greater power and aging potential. Zero dosage, natch. Eloquence is Chardonnay on clays and Kimmeridgian marls, farmed biodynamically and harvested by hand. It is fermented in used barriques using natural yeasts and then aged in same and bottled with zero dosage. It is normally a blend of two vintages.

Striking aromatic nuance and lift, although it is a bit less expressive on the palate. White flowers, lemon peel, mint and white pepper are some of the signatures, while distinctly mineral-inflected veins of salinity recall the wines of Chablis, whose vineyards are closer to the Aube than those of the central Champagne districts. Concordance is 100% Pinot Noir. Harvest is from massale selection vines 35-40 years in age from a single, 2.5-hectare parcel located in Polisot (Côte des Bar). Fermented in tank using wild yeasts, aged in same and bottled with zero dosage and zero sulphur added after three years sur lie. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of apple, tart orange, warm biscuits, lovely minerality and a gentle top note of yeastiness. The wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex on the palate, with pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and lovely mineral drive resulting in a long and zesty finish.

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| 2019 | PRESENCE ~ Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc – zero dosage | Sp |
| 2020 | RESONANCE EXTRA BRUT ~ Pinot Noir | Sp |
| 2019 | INDULGENCE EXTRA BRUT ROSE ~ Pinot Noir | Sp/Ro |
| 2017 | CONCORDANCE EXTRA BRUT SANS SOUFRE ~ Pinot Noir | Sp |
| 2018 | ELOQUENCE BLANC DE BLANCS EXTRA BRUT | Sp |
| 2016 | EFFLORESCENCE EXTRA BRUT | Sp |
| 2020 | BLANC DE BLANCS AMPHORA | Sp |
| 2020 | BLANC DE NOIRS AMPHORA | Sp |

CHAMPAGNE MAISON MAURICE CHOPPIN, Epernay ~ organic farming

Nestled in Damery, just a few kilometres from Épernay, Maison Maurice Choppin has been working the unique terroirs of the Marne Valley for more than seven generations. Proud of his family heritage and renowned for his humble approach, Benjamin Choppin makes natural and distinctive wines which are powerful, well-rounded, and balanced. The estate has been certified Haute Valeur Environnementale (HVE 3) since 2018 and respects the strictest specifications which contribute to the preservation of Champagne's unique terroirs, while the vineyards are managed according to organic principles with all the plots surrounded by trees, meadows or wildflowers to promote biodiversity. The vinification is as natural as possible with indigenous yeasts and barrel fermentation and malo occurs naturally. The wine rests on the lees before disgorgement and are bottled extra brut 2-3 g/l.

Les Arpents comprises 85% Pinot Meunier, 10 % Chardonnay & 5% Pinot Noir from various plots across the 6.5 ha estate. All the grapes are manually harvested and vinified in oak barrels (three vintages), fermentation occurring with native yeasts, followed by a period of ageing on lees. Spontaneous malolactic also takes place. After tirage the wine is matured for 20 months in the cool cellars and disgorged at least 6 months before sale. The wine is not filtered, fined or chaptalized and only a very small amount of sulphites added. A 3 g/l extra-brut style. It is mid-weight, fresh and accessible in style with a distinctive spicy note. Les Mi-Cotes is a blend of 60 % Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Meunier also vinified in oak with indigenous yeasts and then aged for 36 months in bottle before disgorging, while L'Age et Raison is a vintage wine composed of 80 % Chardonnay & 20% Pinot Meunier old vines), also aged for three years in the cellars but disgorged at least 12 months before sale. Finally, there is Epinette from 100% Chardonnay old vines fermented in 500-litre used oak barrels and aged for 48 months in their cellars, before disgorging at least 12 months before release. This is a wonderfully fine wine with great nerve, chalky energy and length.

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| NV | LES ARPENTS | Sp |
| NV | LES MI-COTES | Sp |
| NV | EPINETTES BLANC DE BLANCS | Sp |
| 2017 | L'AGE ET RAISON | Sp |

CHAMPAGNE MAXIME BLIN, Trigny – Organic certified, Ecocert

This domaine created in 1947 by Robert Blin, Maxime's grandfather. They became 'vignerons indépendants' in 1988 under the impetus of Gilles, Maxime's father. Maxime returned to the estate in 2005, followed by his wife Claire in 2013. Maxime and Claire chose to go down the organic route in 2018 and the vineyard has been certified organic since 2021 and the first organic wine arrived in 2022. The vines cover an area of 12 hectares, (made up of 50% Pinot Noir, 35% Pinot Meunier and 25% Chardonnay) Vines which are on average twenty years old. The 12 hectares of vines they cultivate are exclusively planted in the village of Trigny, making the champagnes from the estate 'mono-crus' or single-village wines, which is very rare in the Champagne region. For the last few years, they have been practising 'enherbement' (maintaining grass cover between the vines) on some plots and using alternative methods to work the soil.

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|------|------------------------------------|----|
| NV | CARTE BLANCHE ZERO DOSAGE | Sp |
| NV | CARTE BLANCHE ZERO DOSAGE ~ magnum | Sp |
| NV | GRANDE TRADITION | Sp |
| 2010 | AILES DE PSYCHE | Sp |

CHAMPAGNE HUGUENOT-TASSIN, Celles-sur-Ource

Created in 1984, Maison Huguenot Tassin was passed on in 2008 to a second generation of winegrowers, Edouard and Adeline Huguenot. With respect as its core value, Huguenot Tassin practices sustainable viticulture which adapts to the needs of the vine to produce better quality grapes. Voluntarily reducing productivity, the 6 hectares or so that make up the Huguenot-Tassin estate are the subject of passion and focus, which has become rare in Champagne vineyards today. Maison Huguenot-Tassin is committed daily to viticulture that is more respectful of nature. They are part of Terra Vitis, an association of French winegrowers who have been pioneers in sustainable viticulture for more than 15 years. The Terra Vitis approach is regulated by specifications highlighting 6 principles of action. These principles encourage them to rely on an ecological production method, to produce wines without a negative impact on the environment.

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| NV | SIGNATURE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT | Sp |
| NV | FIOLES ROSEE | Sp/Ro |

“Kilgore Trout once wrote a short story which was a dialogue between two pieces of yeast. They were discussing the possible purposes of life as they ate sugar and suffocated in their own excrement. Because of their limited intelligence, they never came close to guessing that they were making champagne.”

Breakfast of Champions ~ Kurt Vonnegut

CHAMPAGNE HUGUES-GODME, Verzenay ~ Biodynamic, certified by Biodyvin

After Emile, Joseph and Bertrand, Hugues is the fifth generation to grow champagne in Verzenay. He has provided 40 years of technical knowledge necessary for the management of the vineyards and the development of their wines. He owns 11 hectares, 40 plots of vines spread over 4 villages of the Montagne de Reims Verzenay, Verzy, Villers-Marmery and Villedommange. Since 2006, they began farming organically (certified in 2013) then biodynamically (certified in 2014). For Godmé, top-quality vineyard work is of utmost importance for later quality in the glass. "When I see the grapes hanging on the vine, I already know how the champagne will taste later." This philosophy allows Godmé to produce Champagnes expressing the subtlety and strength of the terroirs of which they are from. Hugues is deeply committed to organic farming. The vines are farmed biodynamically. This approach, ploughing, cover cropping and homeopathic treatments, results in the grapes developing better than neighbouring vineyards. The roots are deeper, in a more mineral-rich environment, thereby generating soil-driven grapes that are at once riper with higher concentrations of sugar and acidity.

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|------|-----------------------|----|
| NV | TERRES D'UNIONS | Sp |
| NV | BLANC DE NOIRS | Sp |
| 2012 | LES CHAMPS ST MARTIN | Sp |
| 2021 | LES ALOUETTES ST BETS | Sp |

CHAMPAGNE VAUVERSIN, LAURENT VAUVERIN, Oger, Cotes des Blancs ~ Organic certified

Champagne Vauversin is spread across 3 hectares of vines and is in the Grand Cru town of Oger, between the equally famous towns of Avize and Le-Mesnil-sur-Oger on the Côte des Blancs. The family has been involved in viticulture since 1640. In 2011, Laurent was the fourth generation to produce champagne under its own name. Only Chardonnay is grown, the annual production is only 18,000 bottles. He wants to create the best possible and most sensible transition, between preserving centuries of experience and new, contemporary impulses and visions. The first thing he did was to convert to organic viticulture - in 2014 the winery received certification, making it the first organic company in Oger. Biodiversity in the vineyard was particularly important to him. You can see a multitude of herbs and shrubs when you enter the vineyards of Vauversin. Laurent believes that when a positive energy is cultivated in the soil and the vines, it is carried over to the people who enjoy his champagnes. He is a calm, quiet guy and his champagnes are the same: poetic, quiet, floral, subtle, light-footed, almost ethereal, calm, calm but also somehow playful, nothing clumsy, wild, but also straightforward, clean and long. All champagnes are vinified with wild yeasts and are not filtered. They contain very little sulphur (less than 35mg / l). The riddling takes place by hand in the natural cellar.

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|------|--------------------------|----|
| NV | ORIGINAL | Sp |
| NV | ORDAGE PERPETUAL | Sp |
| 2019 | LES CRAYERES BRUT NATURE | Sp |
| 2018 | ROSSIGNOL | Sp |
| 2018 | ORPAIR | Sp |

The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness.

Spring – Gerard Manley Hopkins

CHATEAU DE HAUTEVILLE, ERIC BORDELET, Charchigne – *Biodynamic*

You will not adam and eve these apples and pears. It's as if thirsty trees have sucked up a myriad of minerals and earth-bound flavours and concentrated them into wrinkly fruits to be pressed into apple champagne. "Swift, slow, sweet, sour, adazzle, dim" as Hopkins wrote – could be a tasting note for a cider.

It was Didier Dagueneau who convinced Eric Borgelet, former sommelier at Paris's three-star Arpège restaurant, to develop a new, artisan style of cider, a natural product of character and thirst-quenching ability, which would also work with a wide range of different food. And so, Eric refurbished his family's ancestral orchards and ciderworks and would use his knowledge of viticulture to push for the highest level of quality.

The biodynamically farmed orchards – covering roughly nineteen hectares – are situated in southern Normandy where the Domfrontais extends between the boundaries of the Mayenne and the Orne. The land is composed of schists and sedimentary rocks dating back to the pre-Cambrian period three million years ago. The granite and broken schists form a complex soil and sub-soil that provides the foundation for the terrain.

There are more apples in these brews to shake your pomme-pommes at. Those used include the poetically named Douce Moene, Sang de boeuf, Tete de Brebie, Rambaud, Closette, Marie Menard, Barberie, Javron etc. etc., whilst fifteen or so varieties of pears such as Autricotin, De Cloche, Certeau (originating in the champagne region), Petit Fauset, Connerie, Domfront and Rouge Vigny make up the perry brigade.

Then the pomology (which is not reading the future in apple pips, surprisingly), a process of selection, crushing, pressing, and settling. The natural traditional fermentation takes place in vat or barrel and in bottle over weeks and months according to the amount of residual sugar in the respective cuvées and therefore without the addition of any sugar (chaptalisation). The Sydre Brut is a classic dry cider, tender or mellow in the mouth, yet also lively with plenty of acidity and extremely refreshing. This would wash down those marvellous Breton galettes or crepes, and it would be pretty good also with charcuterie or cheese.

The name "Argelette" has been used since long ago to describe the nature of the terrain composed of fractured rocks and poor soil where the apple trees found it difficult to flourish and pushed their roots deep into the ground yielding small apples with a wild, concentrated flavour. The branches of the trees are pulled down and tied to restrict the sap which makes the small fruit work harder, giving the cider more structure rather than more juice. This prestige cuvee is made from a rigorous selection of over twenty different varieties (40% bitter; 40% sweet and 20% tangy/acidulous) The cider is made according to traditional maceration techniques and has several grams per litre of residual sugar but is loaded with the stony character of the eponymous soil along with delicious flavours of caramel, baked apples, and crunchy apple-skin. The result is a drink of great quality, almost vinous and mouth-filling, with sufficient length and aroma to match with creamy dishes or spice-inflected ones as well as cheeses or vanilla-based desserts.

The Poiré Granit is the sublime expression of fruit from ancient trees, now measuring over twenty metres, which like all the other trees in the orchard have never been sprayed. The tradition says that it takes one hundred years for the trees to grow, one hundred years to produce the fruit and one hundred years to die. Treat this like a wine; like the ciders it has an edgy earthiness and terrific structure. Borgelet often serves it with pan-fried scallops; it would probably also work beautifully with goat's cheese.

With an Ecocert certification for organic farming and a scrupulous and scrumpy-tious attention to detail Eric Borgelet makes wonderful natural products that are far removed from the denatured, gassy drinks that masquerade under the cider label. His classic ciders can age for five to seven years, with the Granit and Argelette able to go to ten years to develop superb complexity of flavour. Borgelet says that the impression of sweetness improves with age, the same as with older wines. To which we say "Pip, pip hooray!"

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|------|---|---------|
| 2023 | SYDRE BRUT – 5.5% – 75cl | CIDER |
| 2022 | SYDRE ARGELETTE – 4% – 75cl | CIDER |
| 2017 | SIDRE NOUVELLE VAGUE – 20 litre key leg | CIDEKEY |
| 2023 | POIRE AUTHENTIQUE – 4% | PERRY |
| 2022 | POIRE GRANIT – 3.5% – 75cl | PERRY |

*How a lush-kept, plush-capped sloe
Will, mouthed to flesh-burst,
Gush! – flush the man, the being with it, sour or
sweet,
Brim, in a flash, full!*
Gerard Manley Hopkins

I love the countryside. I feel myself linked to it in all my emotions.
My oldest childhood memories have the flavour of the
earth.
Federico Garcia Lorca

I've said it before and I'll say it again, Spain's problem lies in the marketing of their wines. Every so often they seem to convince themselves that they are the biggest thing since sliced Cloudy Bay Sauvignon. As soon as a grower produces something vaguely original and worthwhile prices rocket stratospherically as if to anticipate a stampede of bullish demand. Thus Rioja has fallen prey to millennial madness, mediocre Ribera del Duero requires a mortgage, and one is forced to look further afield: Navarra, Toro or Carinena, for example.

The quality is, to put it mildly, variable. A recent tasting of top producers of Ribera del Duero revealed too much oak masking dusty-dry fruit. Trading on the reputation of the DO evidently attenuates quality. We can't win – in one camp the growers too insular to accept that they are producing underwined oak; in the other those who genuflect utterly to the altar of internationalist style (Pomerolisation across the nations), or as Tennyson felicitously phrased it: "Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null/Dead perfection, no more". Extraction + alcohol + new oak = gimme some Txakoli for gawd's sake!

At the cheaper end I've noticed several disturbing trends: a disproportionately high number of oxidised wines, secondly, the use of carbonic maceration to mask poor quality fruit and finally the inaccurate blending of 175rocyam wine into a base joven which results in a dull fruit soup with oak croutons swimming the backstroke. The potential is outstanding and there are good examples of how it should be done, just not enough.

The Newish Spain

For some Spanish growers, novelty means replacing new American oak with new French oak. We are interested in those souls who seek to express the individuality of indigenous grape varieties and the typicity of the soil and the climate.

One of most attractive regions currently is greater Galicia. Terras Gauda, in Rias Baixas, has been a fixture on our list for many years. The Albariño-based wines are zesty and ocean-breezy with an additional mineral inflection from the Caiño. Ribeira Sacra, Ribeiro and Valdeorras have provided us with a variety of crunchy whites and reds. From complex mineral Godello to floral, fruity Loureiro, from savoury Mencia to grippy Merencao, the wines vividly recall the climatic confluence of stony hills and Atlantic-charged freshness. Our Galician growers, if they work with wood, use it sparingly. At times this is heroic viticulture from vines clinging to precipitous slopes rising out of river canyons.

For world class Grenache, look no further than the mountain vineyards of Gredos. The story of Comando G, a project dedicated to Garnacha on granite is well-documented. Down in Jaen in eastern Andalucía, Pedro Olivares is experimenting like crazy. Over in Penedes, various producers are demonstrating that Xarel.lo is a truly noble variety, capable of making great sparkling wines and mineral whites. One of the most exciting developments are movements in the greater Jerez/Cadiz region to rediscover indigenous grape varieties and to make unfortified still wines. Bodegas Cota 45 are in the forefront of this movement.

No other country can do value like Spain. The wines of Bodegas Pirineos in Somontano are fresh and fruity, their 3404 and Montsierra ranges being especially good in this regard. The Gran Cerdo trio have been banging the drum for buck for a few years. Brilliant value may also be discovered in the classic region of Rioja and Navarra.

"The Spanish wine, my God, it is foul, catspiss is champagne compared, this is the sulphurous urination of some aged horse."

D.H. Lawrence
Letter From Parma to Rhys Davies

Rioja-ing through the ages...

LATE NEWS (1999): The price of grapes in Rioja has increased by 15-30%. The giants of the region have been buying grapes for double the price, squeezing out the smaller wineries. If Rioja were a person, he would be Don Quixote, *un entreverdo loco*, a muddlehead fool, tilting at the sacred glass ceiling of Value-for-Money.

LATER NEWS (2001): Last year the demand for Rioja fell by the percentage equivalent of the price rises. What does this tell you?

LATEST NEWS (2002): Forget Rioja!

LATER STILL (2006): Remember Rioja?

FINALLY (2023): How many Riojas do we have?



Map of Spanish Wine Regions

Just ripe: a cherry morning
soft rasp, brambly bite and
blackbird, as dark smokes
away; so sun blooms along
the edge of ample palettes.
Damsons beam over mouth-
buds, beyond the fruit into wit.
I sip bark and velvet.

Rioja – Helen Kidd

BODEGAS BENITO URBINA, RIOJA ALTA, Rioja

A family-run estate that practises organic methods. The bodega is situated in Cuzcurrita de Río Tirón, on the north-western edge of Rioja. It is an area that produces wines with a great capacity for ageing and is therefore excellent for the production of great wines – Reservas and Gran Reservas. Bds Benito Urbina, a family-owned, single estate winery, has 75 hectares of vineyards, 65 of Tempranillo, and 10 of Graziano, Mazuelo and Viura. Total production is about 460,000 kilos. Four generations of the family have dedicated themselves to the cultivation of their vineyards and the production of wine. In 1975 the bodega began to age and bottle their own wine in order to retain the special characteristics of a small single estate. Their sole objective, the production of quality wines, has been achieved as the result of careful viticulture using traditional techniques, harvesting by hand and avoiding the use of weed killers and pesticides. There has been a large investment in modern installations, de-stalking machinery, stainless steel fermentation tanks and bottling machinery. The Urbina Selección (12 months in American oak, 6 months in bottle) is a blend of Tempranillo with a little Graziano and is deliciously smooth with ripe damson fruit and a touch of mint from the oak. The Reserva contains Tempranillo, Mazuelo and Graziano and has more complex, caramelised aromas. The Gran Reservas are as polished as beeswaxed pieces of mahogany furniture in a stately home and age disgracefully well. All the wines are unfiltered.

| | | |
|------|------------------------------|---|
| 2015 | URBINA CRIANZA | R |
| 2000 | URBINA "SELECCION" | R |
| 2006 | URBINA RESERVA ESPECIAL | R |
| 2004 | URBINA GRAN RESERVA ESPECIAL | R |

VINA ALBERGADA, Rioja Alavesa

Bursting with sweet damson and soft plum fruit this young vines Tempranillo is deliciously easy-drinking and can happily be drunk chilled. Opaque purple-coloured, with layers of fruit the Rioja has an incredibly sweet mid-palate of black fruits intermixed with subtle spice, concentrated yet incredibly soft and elegant on the finish.

| | | |
|------|---|---|
| 2023 | VINA NABOR TEMPRANILLO – 20-litre key keg | R |
| 2023 | CAMINANTE TINTO | R |
| 2023 | RIOJA TINTO JOVEN | R |
| 2023 | VINA MUES | R |

VINA ILUSION, MARTIN ALONSO & GLORIA PLAZA, Rioja Baja – Organic

Viña Ilusión is a project brought to life by Martín Alonso and Gloria Plaza in the Rioja Baja sub-zone of the region. Here, in their chalky, iron laced clay soils at around 700m of altitude, the two organically farm their 5 hectares with the utmost care according to the Fukuoka (author of "One Straw Revolution") method. While it has been called "do nothing farming" for the lack of additions (neither chemical nor organic fertilizer) and general outlook that healthy cultivation is more about long-term planning and careful observation than it is about attempting to micromanage and control agriculture, Fukuoka farming has become trendy with some very respectable vignerons. Way before this came to pass, and before current luminaries such as Michael Pollan namechecked him, Alonso travelled to Japan nearly 30 years ago to learn from Fukuoka himself. Farming ideology aside, we should mention that this wine is a delicious, gulpable expression of Rioja: full of mixed berries and red fruits, juicy, delightful to drink.

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|------|---|---|
| 2023 | ILUSION RIOJA BLANCO ~ Tempranillo Blanco | W |
| 2022 | ILUSION RIOJA TINTO JOVEN | R |
| 2023 | RIOJA PRANA TINTO | R |
| 2022 | VINA ILUSION – 20-litre key keg | R |

Cervantes on connoisseurship – via Don Quixote: *“But now by the remembrance of her you love best, pray thee tell me, is not this your right Ciudad wine? “Thou hast a rare palate,’ answered the Squire of the Wood, ‘it is the very same, and of a good age too.’ ‘I thought so’ said Sancho, ‘but is it not strange now, that but turn me loose among a parcel of wine I shall find the difference? Adad! Sir, I no sooner clap my nose to a taster of wine, but I can tell the place, the grape, the flavour, the age, the strength, and the qualities of the parcel: and all this is natural to me, sir, I had two relations by the father’s side that were the nicest tasters that were known for a long time in la Mancha; of which two I will relate you a story that makes good what I said. It fell out on a time, that some wine was drawn fresh out of a hogshead and given to these same friends of mine to taste; and they were asked the opinions of the condition, the quality, the goodness, the badness of the wine, and all that. The one tried it with the tip of his tongue, the other only smelled it; the first said the wine tasted of iron; the second said, it had rather had a taste of goat’s leather. The vintner swore his vessel was clean, and the wine neat, and so pure that it could have no taste of any such thing.”*

BODEDA ALONSO & PEDRAJO, Rioja ~ Organic farming

Alonso & Pedrajo is a close and long-lasting friendship between two families who encouraged each other to embark on the dream journey of making their own wine. They wanted to live their project to the last drop. To attend and savour each stage with the attention and detail it requires. They moved from theory to practice in 2011. They chose the land, and, in October

2013, they had their first harvest. They have come a long yet very intense way. And they are proud of the first results: the respect and the minimum intervention in the cultivation and vinification techniques already allow them to produce wines that seek to surprise with their character and originality not forgetting the origin of the grapes of the most western Rioja at the foot of the Montes Obarenes. They are the first generation, the first in their family to dedicate themselves to the vineyard and to winemaking. For them, the pride is precisely to begin this adventure that is changing their way of living and of considering their future increasingly close to the land, the people, and the wine. They hope to be the origin that will allow future generations to say that the cultivation of vineyards has been a tradition in their family.

| | | |
|------|--------------------------------------|----|
| 2023 | NAUDA RIOJA BLANCO | W |
| 2023 | NAUDA RIOJA CLARETE | Ro |
| 2019 | SUANE RIOJA RESERVA BLANCO | W |
| 2019 | SUANE RIOJA RESERVA ROSADO | Ro |
| 2018 | SUANE RIOJA RESERVA TINTO | R |
| 2019 | LA PEQUENITA RIOJA MALVASIA MACERADO | Or |
| 2019 | LA PEQUENINA RIOA MATURANA MACERADO | Or |

On the opening of Hotel Viura in Rioja

On a road in Alavesa, cool wind in my hair
Warm smell of Rioja, rising up through the air
Up ahead in the distance, I saw a shimmering light
My thirst grew strong, I stopped on a whim
Had to refuel for the night.
There she stood in the doorway;
I heard the dinner bell
And I was thinking to myself,
'this could be Kevin or this could be Mel'.
Prices were a scandal, I turned ashen grey
There were voices down the corridor,
I thought I heard them say...

Welcome to the Hotel Viura, leaves you poorer
Makes you a basket case
I still got a parking space
Plenty of room at the Hotel Viura, mein fuhrer
Any time of year
It's extremely dear
You can only afford a beer...

So I called to the sommelier,
'please bring me my wine'
He said, 'we haven't had that spirit here since nineteen sixty nine'
And still those vintages are mouldering away,
Hidden in a cellar just out of sight...
Never ever to taste Cabernet

Welcome to the Hotel Viura, Albrecht Durer
Such an exclusive place
You'll leave the rat race
Shoulda called it Hotel Macabeu, oh hey ho
What a nice surprise, maybe they could advertise...

(With apologies to The Eagles)

GRAN CERDO, WII GONZALO GONZALO GRIJALBA, Rioja – Organic

Wii Gonzalo Gonzalo was born in Logroño, Spain and grew up among the vineyards that her parents cultivated in Fuenmayor. After studying biology in León and oenology in the university of Rioja, she dedicated himself to travelling through France and Italy where she met small vine-growers and winemakers and discovered new varieties of grape and technologies. After completing her oenologist training in an industrial winery, in 2003 she abandoned everything to give birth to Orgullo, a personal oenology project.

Fiercely protective of the terroir of his family vineyards Wii Gonzalo rejects market driven fashions, formulae, chemical treatments and conformism. Instead, she has sought out her own methods with respect for the land, the vineyards, and the ancestral traditions. She balances this respect with formal training in the latest oenological techniques and methods.

Wii Gonzalo was profoundly influenced in her choice of viticultural methods by the fact that her father became seriously ill from years of daily exposure to high-spec chemical fertilizers and herbicides while tending their vineyards in the 1970s, when they were regarded as the panacea for all vineyard problems. It was not clear at the time that chemicals that were perfectly safe in small doses had significant harmful effects from cumulative, long-term exposure. The soil itself suffered as well, losing its vitality as witnessed in the deadening of the biodiversity in the vineyard. Wildflowers, insects, earth worms, snails and the various organisms of the vineyard ecosystem were no longer present as they were even two generations ago.

The ladybug on the label of Orgullo is a symbol of the renewed vitality of the vineyards which Wii Gonzalo has worked long and hard to revive. The ladybug is one of the “good” insects that prey on aphids, mites, and other “bad” insects. The chemical treatments of the recent past minimized both the “good” and the “bad” and in the process the vitality of the vineyards.

However, this restored vigour requires plenty of vigilance and creative solutions to combat the various hazards that can befall vineyards, such as mildew, mould, and other pests. For this Wii Gonzalo keeps a close watch and has revived natural treatments and biodynamic practices used in the past to maintain healthy vineyards.

The 100% Tempranillo vineyards themselves were planted 35 years ago in the town of Fuenmayor in the La Tejera sub-region, which is an area between groves of trees along the Ebro River and Mount San Llorente in the heart of the Rioja Alta sub-zone. The soil is calcareous clay, and the vineyards are 4.5 hectares in size. Gonzalo and his helpers Teresa and Fernando tend the vines methodically, and with perfection in mind, year-round and work only with the best grapes they can coax from the land for Orgullo.

They also follow the lunar cycle in vineyard and the winery. In the end, Gran Cerdo is all about the purest expression of fruit with whole bunch fermentation, no filtration, no stabilization, and minimal sulphur. The wine has real character, all the juicy elements of Tempranillo, with no dirty oak to mask its charm. It has a natural way about it but with no funkiness.

With its cherry-red, purplish, brilliant colour Gran Cerdo reveals primary notes of fresh fruit, strawberries, raspberries, cherries, and violets with clean mineral tones from the granite.

This little natural wine is phenomenal value.

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|------|-------------------|----|
| 2023 | GRAN CERDO BLANCO | W |
| 2023 | GRAN CERDO TINTO | R |
| 2023 | GRAN CERDO ROSADO | Ro |

The Problem of Writing a Poem in the Shape of a Glass of Wine

When I started this poem I had it in mind
its shape would resemble a glass of wine,
but, foolish me, for every line that I wrote,
a glass of Rioja I'd despatch down my throat.
For a time, all was fine, the world was pleasant
& good: my words took shape, the poem behaved
as it should. It kept its form & its line but as I drank
more, the words started to blur like they hadn't before
& it went & got worse, until the truth came to me:
it seemed my poem wasn't quite as
I'd hoped it would be;
some of
the lines
were too long,
and
my
spelling
had
gone
wrong,
and the rhyme scheme an shape
had completely
disappeared by the
end
off
it

Bran Bilstone

BODEGA CLASSICA, Rioja

Bodega Classica is part of Vintae, a group of six wineries across different regions of Spain. Started in 1999 by Riojan entrepreneur José Miguel Arambarri Terrero, he first established Bodega Castillo de Maetierra, the only exclusively white wine producer in Rioja, specialising in Muscat which had long been forgotten in the region. The success of the wines has resulted in the creation of a new "Protected Geographical Indication" for white wines in the Community of La Rioja called Valles de Sadacia.

His two sons, Ricardo and José Miguel, who now run the company, have expanded the project to include a traditional Rioja winery in Bodega Classica, and a more modern take of Rioja with Maetierra Dominum as well as bodegas in Toro, Ribera del Duero and Navarra.

Vineyards here are at relatively high altitudes for Rioja, around 500-600 metres. The climate is continental but with cooling Atlantic influence allows grapes to ripen slowly maintain good acidity. Soils are generally pebbles on chalk rich clay.

100% Tempranillo, the grapes are sourced from a selection of vineyards in Rioja Alta, most of which are from San Vicente de la Sonsierra.

Fermentation at 28 degrees centigrade, 2-week maceration, malolactic fermentation in tank, the wine is only lightly filtered. The wine is a blend of 75% Crianza Rioja (minimum 12 months ageing in new French and American oak barrels, six months in bottle) and 25% younger Rioja (aged for 4 months in new French and US oak barrels).

The result is a wine with all the silky softness you would expect from a Crianza but much juicier and with more red fruit flavour. A perfect introduction to the reds from Rioja. Local matches would include lamb chops cooked over a BBQ of vine cuttings, roast suckling pig or small pork kebabs marinated in paprika, garlic olive oil and coriander. This type of wine is great with char-grilled red meats and vegetables and for the classic match go for rosemary roasted lamb.

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|------|-----------------------|---|
| 2023 | RIOJA BLANCO "PHAROS" | W |
| 2019 | RIOJA MONTESE | R |

HACIENDA GRIMON, Rioja – Organic

Hacienda Grimón is run by the Oliváns, a family with a long winemaking tradition in Rioja. Grimón was established by Paco Grimón who runs the bodega and his brother Eliseo who takes care of the viticulture. Their 25 hectares of vineyards are based in the Valle de Jubera, a secluded and little-known corner of Rioja Alta with a great viticultural history. Viticulture is organic – "always has been here, why do I need certification?" – with no use of herbicides and pesticides, sheep manure is used as fertilizer. Hand harvesting is employed for all their vineyards. Great care is taken to provide the healthiest grapes of the highest quality, as nearly all the wines will experience extended ageing.

75% of the vineyards are planted to Tempranillo, 15% to Garnacha and 10% to Graciano. Plots range from 10 to 45-years-old. The straight Rioja Tempranillo is fermented and aged in stainless steel, with no carbonic maceration which is the usual method used for Rioja juvenes. The wine is made from the same fruit that goes into the Crianza (see below). Paco was reluctant to make this wine as he only wants to make oak aged wines, but we asked very him nicely! We wanted to show Tempranillo without any oak influence in all its juicy glory. This is as serious as joven Rioja gets, quite full bodied, nice tannic bite but juicy nonetheless.

The Crianza is a rigorous selection of grapes from three different vineyard parcels. The wine is aged for 16 months in French and American oak. Aromas of black fruits with black pepper and sweet spices. The palate is quite full bodied for a Crianza due to the quality of fruit used and longer than average ageing in oak. The ripe tannins and fresh acidity balance the richness of the fruit which results in an elegant and classy Rioja, a serious Crianza and cut above most others you will try.

The Reserva is more structured with more prominent oak flavours. Dense plummy fruit and a good tannic structure.

These wines are not oak wollipops.

| | | |
|------|-------------------------|---|
| 2023 | SAUVIGNON | W |
| 2021 | COMO LO HARIA MI ABUELO | R |
| 2023 | RIOJA TEMPRANILLO | R |
| 2021 | RIOJA CRIANZA | R |
| 2020 | RIOJA RESERVA | R |

The sense of taste is cultivated, much like our ear for jazz: free of prejudices, with a spirit of curiosity, and not taking anything too seriously... every neophyte was handed a large rosy grape by the master, with the instruction to eat it in no fewer than twenty minutes...

During those interminable twenty minutes, I touched, looked at, smelled, turned over in my mouth with excruciating slowness, and finally, sweating, swallowed the famous grape. Ten years later, I can describe its shape, its texture, its temperature, its taste, and smell.

The Tip of the Tongue – Aphrodite – Isabel Allende

MAETIERRA DOMINUM, Rioja – Organic

In addition to following organic viticulture practices, the vineyards of Maetierra Dominum have in common the age and quality of its vines. The differences between the vineyards, despite their geographical proximity, reside in the soils, altitude, and orientation, which provide the grapes from each one of the four pagos with particular characteristics.

Old vineyards located in four different sub-areas of 'Rioja' for their microclimates and soils. All four vineyards are gobelet-trained, which is a tradition in Riojan viticulture and a more natural system that favours photosynthesis and requires a manual harvest, that is, the grapes are picked manually without the use of any machinery. The four estates, the four vineyards property of Maetierra Dominum, are located at a few kilometres from each other. However, their soils, altitude, climate, and orientation differentiate them. If these four vineyards have something in common, it is the quality of the grapes they produce and their age, as they are all over 100 years old. The four estates are small, and they mostly grow the Tempranillo variety, although there are also a few scattered Garnacha vines, which provide fruity nuances, and Graciano vines, which add colour and body to the wine.

Both varieties are used in the final coupage of Maetierra Dominum wines together with the Tempranillo variety. As well as the varieties, the altitude, orientation and soils in the four estates provide the wine with different qualities. Three of the estates have limestone-clay soils and one has a ferrous-clay soil.

Old vines (some up to 100 years old) with low yields, goblet-trained, selected, after years of research from vineyards located in four different districts, chosen for their soils and mesoclimates, which constitute the various "pagos" – or "four estates" – whose grapes go to produce the wines. Harvesting is carried out by hand throughout the month of October cluster by cluster.

The grapes are placed in 15 kg boxes and undergo a selection process at the winery.

The grapes are sorted, and gravity fed and then fermented in 500 litre open-topped barrels before being aged for more than 14 months in new, French oak casks made by different cooperages and with oak from forests of different origins. Each year, in accordance with the special characteristics of each harvest, the wine remains in the barrel for the optimum period needed in order to obtain a perfect balance between the fruit and the fine nuances of the casks. The wine's evolution is completed with a prolonged period of ageing in the bottle.

2018 GAVANZA RIOJA RESERVA

R

2018 GAVANZA RIOJA RESERVA – magnum

R

AROA, Navarra – Organic methods

There have been vineyards in this region since Roman times. Many centuries passed, and the vines were kept until the 1970s and 80s, when many were removed to give way to cereal fields. AROA arrived in 1998 and began to reactivate the vineyards.

"Where the grape is pressed, that this marvellous process of the transformation of the grape into "divine liquid: wine" took place.

AROA defend the concept of "terroir", the individuality of the wines from a specific area, with their own cultural identity, by using a small-scale artisan approach, making full use of current technology, both in the vineyard and the wine cellar.

AROA, a Basque word, in the context of agriculture, means: "The optimum, ideal moment to work the land".

These are in Gorozin and Zurukoain, Valle de Deierri, in the heart of Tierra Estella, one of the five sub-zones which make up the Denomination of Navarre.

There are three vineyards: Burunziain, Ernobeleta and Aritzarotz, which make up a surface area of 20 hectares. In each of the same we find red grape varieties. There are seven vineyards whose name are: Burunziain, Ernobeleta, Aritzarotz, Magdalena, El cerraio, San Lorenzo and Apalaz comprising an area of 20 hectares, in them we find grape varieties: Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Garnatxa, and white varieties such as Garnatxa white and Muscat. The soil is clay – limestone, fresh, being on the edge of the Mediterranean climate with Atlantic influence climate, sheltered by the mountains of Urbasa and Andía. The winters are cold and hard, and hot dry summers, occurring in the summer high temperature difference between day and night, promoting the formation of high content of polyphenols. Furthermore, the maturation period is very long favouring a good phenolic ripeness.

The Garnacha Blanco is pale lemon in colour and has remarkable freshness and an almost salty minerality. The red is made without added sulphur and exhibits bright cranberry fruit with a floral lift. A delightful pair.

2023 AROA LAIA GARNACHA BLANCO

W

2023 AROA GARNACHA TINTO SIN SULFITOS

R

VINICOLA CORELLANA, Navarra – Organic methods

Vinícola Corellana is a dream shared by three friends who are united by their authentic passion: wine. Therefore, in 1989, they started the winery, whose vineyards are situated in the Ribera Baja region of Navarra, an area known for its excellent market garden, vegetables and, of course for its vine growing culture. The winery represents the perfect blend between tradition and modernity, whose capacity reaches around 2 million litres and which is equipped with all the modern technical necessities.

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| 2023 | REVERTE ABRAZOS GARNACHA BLANCO | W |
| 2023 | REVERTE ABRAZOS GARNACHA TINTO | R |

BODEGAS PIRINEOS, Somontano

This range of wines is about fruit; young, fresh, vibrant wines with character imbued by the mountain terroir. In the Vero Valley in Somontano, characterised by its beautiful limestone canyons indigenous grapes (Moristel) grow on the neighbouring slopes to Spanish classics (Tempranillo, Garnacha & Macabeu) and more international varieties (Chardonnay & Cabernet Sauvignon). The white is a pleasant blend of Macabeo and Chardonnay with a smidgin of Gewurztraminer. Aromas of pineapple, banana, apple and peach, overlay a background of aromatic herbs. Dry, smooth & fresh, with well-balanced fruit to acidity and a surprisingly long finish. Ideal aperitif or for accompanying white fish, oysters and a variety of other seafood and shellfish. Try too with pork & poultry dishes and lightly spiced food. Made from Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon with a little Moristel this is an intensely fruity wine with a cherry red colour and aromas redolent of forest fruits and violets. Juicy, tasty and smooth in the mouth with lovely freshness.

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|------|---|----|
| 2023 | 3404 BLANCO | W |
| 2022 | MONTESIERRA CHARDONNAY-GEWURZTRAMINER-MACABEO | W |
| 2023 | BODEGAS PIRINEOS GEWURZTRAMINER | W |
| 2022 | 3404 TINTO | R |
| 2022 | MONTESIERRA CABERNET MERLOT TEMPRANILLO | R |
| 2023 | PRINCIPIO MORISTEL JOVEN | R |
| 2023 | 3404 ROSADO | Ro |

AGRICOLA LA CASTELLANA, Rueda

Vivid, crunchy Verdejo. Delicately fragrant with hints of green apple and fennel – great value for money.

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|------|--|----|
| 2023 | CASA MARIA VERDEJO BLANCO, CASTILLA-LEON | W |
| 2023 | VACCEOS TEMPRANILLO ROSADO D.O. RUEDA | Ro |

ANGEL RODRIGUEZ VIDAL, Rueda

Ángel Rodríguez Vidal is known in Rueda as the godfather of Verdejo and is credited with preserving and reviving Rueda's indigenous Verdejo grape. In the early 1970s, there arose a push to rip out Verdejo completely. Martinsancho, a vineyard of ancient Verdejo vines that had been in Ángel's family since 1784 and he refused to uproot them. Rodríguez went further and regrafted his other vineyards from the Martinsancho cuttings. As a result of his efforts, he is credited with having saved Verdejo. Today, the origins of most of the Verdejo vineyards in Rueda can be traced back to Martinsancho cuttings. Ángel Rodríguez's efforts have even been recognized by King Juan Carlos. They own all their own vineyards, and they only make this one wine, derived from terraced land, with a sandy loam structure. The top 30 cm is composed of pebbly and sandy ground. Below that is a high concentration of clay. Soils are very poor in organic material and remain warm at night due to the high concentration of pebbles and sand in the top layer. Verdejo is a very vigorous vine, it grows like a weed and produces an amazing amount of fruit, something like 30 or more bunches to a vine. This is simply too much to make very good wine. Most of Rueda is planted with irrigated wire-trained vines which permit higher yields and mechanical harvesting. The main thing to note about this producer is that the vineyards are planted with bush vines with a minimum age of 40 years old, grown without irrigation giving much lower yields (just a few bunches per vine) of intensely flavoured grapes which are hand harvested. Pale yellow-gold colour. Aromatics of pear, peach, grapefruit, and white flowers. On the palate, stone and orchard fruit with some citrus, a burst of mango fruit and loaded with balancing salty minerality. Very approachable and food friendly, not to mention outstanding value for money.

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| 2022 | MARTINSANCHO VERDEJO | W |
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VINOS BIO PEDRO OLIVARES, Murcia – Organic methods

This project in Murcia, is coordinated by Pedro Olivares and aims to develop organic natural wines from Bobal, Monastrell and Garnacha from vines between 50-80 years of age in different zones within the region of Murcia. Whilst all their vineyards are at high-altitude, they have also planted the highest vineyard in Europe at 1700 metres above sea level with the aim of producing white and sparkling wines, late harvest wines & even ice wines! Pedro writes: "This can only be achieved through dedication and effort. On each foot of land, we lay our heart and soul, whilst at the same time without renouncing the standards that characterize our work, an exceptionally personal viewpoint which is founded on the principles of bio dynamic agriculture. Indeed, we have taken this one step further, and have coined the phrase 'multi-dynamic agriculture'."

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|------|----------------------------|----|
| 2022 | LA MUSCAT BLANCO D'ARGILA" | Or |
| 2023 | ARCAL BLANCO | W |
| 2023 | MOLINERA TINTO | R |
| 2019 | BOBASTRELL | R |
| 2020 | BOBAL SERIE WILD | R |
| 2019 | MONASTRELL SERIE WILD | R |
| 2023 | BOBAL BASICO | R |
| 2023 | DEMORADO DULCE TINTO | Sw |

BODEGAS FUENTENARRO, PEREZ GARCIA, Ribera del Duero

Bodegas Fuentenarro is a family winery owned by the family Pérez Garcia. The winery is in the municipality of La Horra, Burgos, with a long winemaking tradition in the heart of Ribera del Duero. The wines come exclusively from family-owned vineyards. The youngest of these vineyards is 20 years old and the oldest 70 years, with different wines produced at each vineyard. The bodega is organic but not certified with sheep manure used for composting, the vines growing on a mixture of clay and chalk at an altitude of 800m-900m.

After a manual harvest usually in the first week of October the Tinta Fina grapes are taken to the ageing cellar which is built eight metres underground (resulting in a constant temperature throughout the year).

After a 20-day maceration the wine is fermented at 25 degrees before being aged four months ageing in medium toast oak barrels and then a further four months in bottle. The wine is unfiltered with only a gentle cold stabilization. Deep colour, classic nose of black fruits, rose petals, sweet spice, undergrowth. The palate is luscious, full of ripe fruits such as cherry, blueberry, blackcurrant with touches of spice, ripe tannin, and fresh acidity. Subtle oaked character but very drinkable. Drink with lechazo (slow roast suckling lamb) or, failing that, lamb chops.

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| 2022 | TINTA FINA CUATRO MESES EN BARRICA | R |
| 2020 | FUENTENARRO CRIANZA | R |
| 2019 | FUENTENARRO ESENZIAS | R |

ALFREDO MAESTRO TEJERO, Ribera del Duero – *Biodynamic methods*

Alfredo Maestro Tejero's vineyards are located within the Ribera del Duero D.O., but Alfredo prefers not to participate in the D.O., so the labels are registered as Vino de la Tierra de Castilla y León. His are completely natural wines, with no sulphur added in the vineyard or the winery. All vineyard treatments are natural, and many of them follow biodynamic practices. The Castrillo de Duero is 100% Tempranillo. Fermented in small stainless-steel vats and aged for 16 months in old French oak barrels. A rich Tempranillo that maintains its vibrancy, with great structure. The Almate is darkly coloured, opaque and mouth filling with lavender and toffee notes that stay from nose to finish while only tiny bit of reduction, maybe because of the low sulphur, shows on the nose, but quickly disappears to allow a sweet nose of roses, mineral and red berry fruits which lead to a dense palate of plum, cherry, and berry compote. The isolated Gredos mountain range lays 70 kilometres west of Madrid and is home to a mosaic of tiny old-vine vineyards planted mainly to Grenache. El Marciano comes from one such 70-year-old granitic site lying at a staggering 1,150 metres elevation. The grapes are mainly destemmed, 20% whole bunches were retained and fermented with wild yeasts in stainless steel vat of 2000 litres with daily stirrings. No filtration, no fining, no added sulphur. This gorgeous wine typifies Alfredo's delicate touch and respect for his land. It's juicy and flavoursome, laden with spicy blackberry aromas before a raspberry liquorice and fresh earth scented palate. The texture is rock-sculpted (the granite bedrock of the site lies just a few inches below the surface) and the acidity thrillingly bright, drawing all corners together. The label is a representation of the remote and barren, granite-ridden landscape that make up this wine's terroir. It depicts Alfredo directing his two green vineyard workers who clearly aren't up to scratch, perhaps not surprising given the harshness of the environment. El Marciano is the Martian. Lovamor (lovethelabel) is 100% Albillo, a white grape variety found both in the Ribera del Duero region as well as the environs of Madrid. Maestro's vines are 100-120 years old, planted on clay and limestone soil. The vineyard is 800-1100 metres in elevation located in the Ribera del Duero DO, although this is labelled "Vinos Blancos de Castilla y Leon". The grapes see six days of skin contact and are fermented without the use of oak. Native yeasts and no added sulphur. Only a few bottles of wine produced apparently. The colour of farmhouse butter, aromas of russet apples, medlars and a chalky finish. Quoth the raven "Love amor". Difficult to place, but incredibly moreish.

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|------|----------------------|----|
| 2022 | LOVAMOR | Or |
| 2022 | VINA ALMATE JOVEN | R |
| 2022 | EL MARCIANO | R |
| 2020 | VALDECASTRILLO TINTO | R |

Wines from Granada/Almeria – **Hola High Vineyards!**

Granada has everything to offer, from the Alhambra and the Albaicin to the intimate corners of nineteenth century Romanticism; from the enchantment of Oriental art to the dawn of the Gothic; from the flowering of the Renaissance to the exuberant brilliance of the Baroque. And if, from the point of view of the Arts, this rich diversity is overwhelming in its vitality without the dominance of one unilateral theme, Nature for her part provides analogous contrasts. In some places there is ruggedness, in other a delicacy full of half-tones; here is a city neither of the mountain nor of the plain. The Sierra and the lowland intertwine in a strange arabesque and this gives the landscape both strength and extraordinary variety. From the foot of the mountains to their summit there is an ascent of more than three thousand metres and from the region of perpetual snow it is possible to descend, in barely an hour, to a coast where every tropical fruit abounds. It would be difficult to find a land richer in variety and contrasts or one evoking emotions of greater depth and diversity."

Antonio Gallego y Burin – *Granada: An Artistic and Historical Guide to the City*

... and the vines

Eastern Andalucía is the most mountainous part of Spain (including Spain's highest peak, Mulhacen, at 11,424 ft (3,482 m) and has the second-highest vineyards in Europe. The combination of merciless sun all day and a massive temperature drop at night allows bodegas to make wines of quite astonishing quality.

The Alpujarra mountains are a particularly high-quality area, split between Contraviesa-Alpujarra in the province of Granada and Laujar-Alpujarra in the province of Almeria, with vineyards to 4,488 ft (1,368 m) making nearly mile-high wines of an extraordinary complexity, especially whites from the Vigiiega grape (extinct everywhere else on the mainland) and reds from Tempranillo, Garnacha, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The soil is schist, and there are no insect pests and almost no cryptogams at these altitudes.

COMANDO G, FERNANDO GARCIA & DANIEL JIMENEZ-LANDI, SIERRA DE GREDOS ~ *Organic methods*

Bodega Comando G is made up of Fernando García and Daniel Gómez Jiménez-Landi. They met in 2005 while at university where they forged their friendship based on a mutual passion: making first-rate Garnacha wines, which capture and express the terroir of the unique plots where the grapes are grown. Three years later, in 2008, they launched the bonho G (G for Garnacha) business venture. Although there are some who affectionately call them the ‘enochalados’ (‘crazy oenologists’) this ‘online cooperative bodega’ (as described by El Mundo Vino) is carrying out the very serious task of searching for old-vine vineyards planted with the Garnacha grape variety in the Sierra de Gredos, located between the provinces of Madrid and Ávila. And the truth is that their work represents an authentic breath of fresh air, both in the winemaking process — extracting the personality from each individual plot. There are three hectares of old Garnacha vines spread out among the villages of Cadalso de los Vidrios and Rozas de Puerto Real, near the Sierra de Gredos mountains, on granite soil and at an altitude of between 900 and 1,000 metres.

La Bruja is made from the grapes grown in two vineyards located in Cadalso de los Vidrios (Madrid) which together add up to 2.5 hectares of granite soils, planted with 50- to 80-year-old vines. The grapes from both vineyards are fermented and aged separately in wooden vats, using native yeasts and gentle maceration processes. Ageing takes place in French oak, first in 25-HL vats and then in 500-litre barrels, over a total of five months, which produces 5,000 bottles. This wine, according to its creators, is “jovial and young, it’s the pure essence of fresh fruit, and a great introduction to the world of our Garnacha wines”. Its enchanting labels — which show the ‘bruja’ (the witch) carrying out various winemaking tasks — change with every vintage.

Garnacha in this form, pale, fresh, and mineral, is Spain’s great red grape and bears a resemblance to Pinot Noir. Fernando Garcia is quoted as saying: “The three of us have a certain weakness for Burgundy Pinot Noir and we are convinced that our Garnachas can produce equally elegant wines as long as you look after the grapes and harvest early”.

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| 2022 | LA BRUJA DE ROJAS | R |
| 2022 | LA BRUJA DE ROJAS ~ magnum | R |
| 2022 | NAVATALGORDO | R |
| 2022 | VILLANUEVA | R |
| 2022 | ROZAS | R |
| 2021 | ROZAS 1er CRU | R |
| 2021 | LAS UMBRIAS | R |
| 2021 | LAS IRUELAS | R |
| 2021 | EL REVENTON | R |
| 2021 | TUMBA DEL REY MORO | R |
| 2021 | RUMBO AL NORTE | R |

CRISTO DEL HUMILLADERO, SIERRA DE GREDOS – *Organic*

Gre2 is a collaboration between Les Caves de Pyrene and Ricardo Feech who heads up the small, quality minded co-operative Cristo del Humilladero. The idea behind this and other projects is to create excellent value wines, from organically farmed grapes and as naturally as possible, wines that faithfully reflect the place they come from. 120 growers work some of the best Garnacha vineyards in the region. The winery, built from granite, dates from 1956. Its high vaulted ceilings and numerous 9000 litre cement tanks provide a great location for the traditional vinification of Garnacha. The village of Cadalso de los Vidrios is situated at the foot of the Sierra de Gredos. For centuries, workshops here made glass windows for the palaces of Spain from the granitic sands of the region. Geologically, this is very interesting area, with granite mother rock, granitic sand, schist, and other soils in a relatively small area. The 750m-900m altitude gives freshness to the wines. Harvest is manual and the wine is made from a combination of destemmed and whole bunch grapes and fermented with indigenous yeasts, mainly in cement, but also some wood and even amphorae. Free run juice is used (maceration is 4-6 weeks in total). Maturation takes place in cement tanks plus some old barrels. Music is played in the winery “to relax” the wines. The wine is bottled with a light filtration, no fining and a modest sulphur addition after the malo. This Garnacha is garnet in colour with vibrant melange of red fruits, laurel, and orange peel.

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| 2019 | GRE2 GARNACHA | R |
| A PIE DE TERRA, SIERRA DE GREDOS – <i>Organic</i> | | |
| 2022 | GRE2 GARNACHA | R |

Traslanzas was created in 1998 with the specific objective of making and selling a quality red wine from grapes grown within the boundaries of the Cigales Designation of Origin. The Cigales wine growing area in Castilla has a time-honoured tradition of wine-making and is historically associated with the production of rosé wine. (I didn't know that)

However, the enormous potential of such an excellent wine-producing area has resulted in many vineyards increasingly placing more emphasis on growing black grape varieties suited to making red wines. The excellent conditions contribute to red wines that show the required characteristics for today's markets: structure, length, elegance and personality.

Traslanzas is a society that was formed by a number of members, including the winemakers Ana Martín and Maria Pinacho. Their knowledge and expertise, together with quality grapes from the long-established vineyards of Maria's family, combine to produce the exceptional Traslanzas red wine.

Traslanzas is the name of a vineyard estate situated in the municipal district of Mucientes (Valladolid) which falls within the Cigales DO. The vineyard is dedicated to the cultivation of Tempranillo grapes, known as Tinto del País grapes in the Cigales region. The vines were first planted in 1945 by a local man, Aurelio Pinacho, meaning that they are now over half a century old.

Several unique factors contribute to the quality of production and combine to afford the wine a range of exceptional sensory characteristics. These factors include the maturity of the vines set amongst an exceptional Castilla estate; the traditional style of cultivation; a production of less than one kilogram of grapes per bunch ensuring quality rather than quantity; and a wine-making process that respects the characteristics of the grape. The vineyard nestles in a hollow between two adjoining hills and spreads across a gentle south-easterly facing slope, which is just less than 800 metres above sea level. It sits on low mountain subsoil dating back to the Pliocene era, which has evolved into dark brown agricultural soil with limestone content. The ground is scattered with boulders, which have the joint effect of reflecting the sun towards the lower parts of the vines and also help to retain accumulated heat on less sunny days.

Once the alcoholic fermentation has taken place and the wine has been macerated for three weeks, malolactic fermentation takes place in new oak barrels known as "Allier" and "Pennsylvania" barrels.

These are situated in an amazing old underground bodega where the wine will remain with the lees for at least 12 months.

The wine does not undergo any kind of fining or stabilizing treatments before it is bottled in December.

Traslanzas has a vibrant cherry-red colour and complex and elegant aromas. The primary aromas display hints of violet, lavender and fruits of the forest complemented by the secondary aromas that come from the Tempranillo variety, including those of black fruit and liquorice. Toasted wood aroma, cedar and hints of spices such as cloves, vanilla and cinnamon also feature. In the mouth, it is a wine of noticeable body (but not overbearing) and sweet tannins from the grape skins contribute to the overall sensation of the palate. The wine has a long, aromatic finish.

BODEGAS PITTACUM, ALFREDO MARQUES CALVA, Bierzo

Bodegas Pittacum was purchased several years ago by Terras Gauda who were looking to find a red wine with distinctive personality. The winery is located in Arganza, a town of longstanding vine-growing and wine-making heritage, nestled in the beautifully hilly landscape of the Bierzo region.

The Bierzo Tinto, made with the Mencia grape, is sourced from 50–90-year-old vineyards, located on poor slate soils so as carefully to force the process of ripening. Organic fertilisers are used, and green practices are employed throughout the vineyard to ensure the health of the vines. Once the timing of the picking of the different plots has been decided, the teams of grape-pickers make the first selection on the vine. Only the healthiest, ripest bunches are packed into 14-kilogram boxes, to prevent them from splitting or becoming bruised.

They are then sent straight to the winery, where they arrive in perfect condition, ready to be processed. The delivery area outside the winery is where the boxes are received on pallets and unloaded one by one onto the selection bench, where any below-standard bunches that happen to have slipped through are promptly removed. The selective extraction of tannins is carried out with manual cap-plunging, pumping-over and long macerations. Every day during the barrelling the wines are tasted, and with the aid of analytical monitoring of polyphenol compounds, the appropriate time for removal is determined.

Next, the grape skins are pressed in a vertical press working at low pressure-important if the wine is to be of optimal quality. Now is the time for malolactic fermentation, part of which is done in stainless-steel vats and the rest in oak casks.

After malolactic fermentation – and still without having undergone any kind of filtering or clarifying – the wine is moved to the aging casks.

Different oak sources and different vat curing levels to obtain the best results for each type of wine. The casks are located in a stone farmhouse, sheltered from sunlight and at ideal temperature and humidity level, for as long as necessary to reveal the potential of each harvest and characteristics of each type of wine. After aging, the wine is clarified with egg white and then coarsely filtered, bottled and stored.

The wine is intense cherry-red colour with a striking purplish rim, very clean and brilliant. It is marked by a complex bouquet, with a wide range of aromas including red fruits (blackberry, raspberry), liquorice and mineral tones, pleasant woody hints, spices – pepper and oregano – and an agreeable backdrop redolent of smoked cocoa. Warm in the mouth, with a significant concentration of fruit, dense and fleshy and sweet tannin it is a tasty wine to be savoured, with a persistent finish and retro-nasal qualities, plus pleasant balsamic resonance.

The wines are sensitive and true to the vintage. 2002 is a wine of bright fruit and delicious acidity, whereas 2003 has richer colour, sweeter fruit and more tannin. 2004 is stylistically between the two. Each wine, however, demonstrates the individuality and expressiveness of the Mencia grape.

The Aurea is from a single 1-hectare vineyard called Areixola located on an east-facing hillside slope with a particular microclimate favouring the production of aromatic Mencias. After a fifteen-day maceration period the grapes receive a smooth pressing. A further malolactic fermentation in new French barrels is followed by three months batonnage and ageing in new oak for 14 months. The wine is clarified with egg whites but left unfiltered. The Aurea has intense, expressive aromas: not only mature notes of roasted fruits (black cherries, sweet figs), toffee and cocoa, but also herbal notes such as rosemary and lemongrass. Dense in the mouth, but exceedingly elegant with smooth tannins, great balance and roundness. A very long finish and a complex aftertaste, very fruity with harmonious roasted and toasted flavours again apparent. For such a rich wine this is amazingly delicious.

Petit Pittacum is a robust yet refreshing Mencia oozing cherries and red plums as well as subtle notes of liquorice and red pepper. This all-purpose wine would happily network fish soup, stuffed peppers, tuna, and lomo.

Alfredo Marques Calva, the technical director of Pittacum, is both artist and artisan, constantly researching and experimenting in the winery. He is equally passionate about food, and a visit to his winery might include a lunch of tuna belly with superb pimentos, air-dried beef or slow cooked roast kid washed down with plenty of Pittacum.

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| 2023 | PETIT PITTACUM | R |
| 2020 | BIERZO TINTO | R |
| 2019 | BIERZO “AUREA” | R |

BODEGAS TERRAS GAUDA, Rías Baixas

Albariño wine is considered to be the Spanish “gold” of white wines for its colour and quality. But there’s also another theory that connects the wine to the metal – sounds daft but we’ll give it a whirl. The Romans originally colonized Galicia for its great mineral wealth, gold in particular; the system that they used for extracting the minerals was the “Terra Montium”, which consisted of excavating tunnels, then lighting a fire in them so that they would collapse, and with this system they literally managed to destroy mountains. But to excavate these tunnels they needed to soften the rock and to do so they used none other than vinegar! The origins and applications of Albariño were industrial then; centuries later the vine resurfaces, and delicious wines are made. As they say locally: “Although they took all the gold at least they left behind Albariño wine.”

Galicia is the land of percebes (barnacles) and wild horses; here they celebrate the famous “curros” (horse corrals). They round up all the wild horses to brand them and cut their manes; in Galician it is called “a rapa das bestas”. There is also a strong Celtic tradition of folk song and bagpipes.

The Galician vineyards of Rías Baixas are dominated by the influence of the Atlantic. This is a green, cloudy, damp region of pine, chestnut and oak clad hills with a coastline punctuated by rias (coastal inlets). The region has actually produced wines for many centuries, and by the middle of the 19th century, Galicia boasted 55,000 hectares of vines, although phylloxera and other diseases greatly reduced this amount. The wine scene remained moribund until the 1980s when Albariño, the region’s great white grape was “rediscovered” and found to yield excellent quality wines. Allied to this was investment in the technology of cold fermentation and stainless steel that exalted the flavours and aromas of the grape. Rías Baixas – low rivers – is named after the abovementioned fjord-like inlets. It has a markedly Atlantic climate with mild winters, coolish summers, high humidity and elevated rainfall. The wines of Terras Gauda are located in the subzone of O Rosal on the terraces that rise steeply above the river Miño which divides Spain from Portugal. The Abadia de San Campio (100% Albariño) is very attractive with citrus, grapefruit, pineapple and mandarin flavours. The O Rosal, a selective blend of the best Albariño grapes in the O Rosal subzone is mixed with the indigenous Loureira and Caiño Blanco (harvested in October), is greenish-yellow, evoking white flowers and green plums on the nose and filling out on the palate with fresh grape and apple compote flavours as well as peach kernel. Edged with superb acidity and a bristling minerality this reminds one of a really good Riesling. Both the wines have delicacy and persistence in equal measure. When in this corner of Spain drink with the harvest of the Atlantic and indulge in a Galician mariscada (seafood feast). Starting with pulpo a feira (Octopus fair-style), second course mussels, chocos (cuttlefish), clams, prawns, scallops, crabs and, of course, lobsters.

Terras Gauda is notable for owning around 85% of its own vineyards; the remainder of the grapes are provided under strict quality control agreements with local growers. Having this control allows the estate to pick later and more selectively (and over a greater period of time) than most others ensuring greater maturity and higher sugar levels in the grapes. The sheltered aspect of the vineyards surrounded by forest, the proximity to the Mino and to the sea, also promotes ripening. The result is that Terras Gauda is one of the few wineries that do not need to do a malolactic on any of their wines, which is why they taste so exceptionally fresh and bright.

What also distinguishes the Terras Gauda – as the estate wine is known – is the presence of the indigenous Caiño variety. Although approximately only 15% of the blend, this grape, which is virtually exclusive to Terras Gauda, gives a rich quality to the overall wine. The Caiño vineyards tend to be planted on steep slopes with lots of broken slates; the grape ripens late, but still has acidity and a strong mineral component. The effect is to lift the aromatic citrus nature of the Albariño, giving the wine an irresistible zesty length.

And so to La Mar the latest project from Bodegas Terras Gauda, a blend of Caiño Blanco (85%) and Albarino (15%).

A word from our sponsors about Caiño.

It is a native variety from the O Rosal sub-zone, now virtually extinct. Terras Gauda produces 90% of the Caiño throughout the region. A low yielding grape, the least productive of Galician white grape varieties, with small clusters and grapes Caiño provides very good structure and body resulting in wine with definition and depth. Naturally high acidity provides freshness and ensures perfect ageing. The grapes are harvested in the first week of October with excellent ripeness levels, good malic and tartaric acidity and a wide aromatic profile. After fermentation the wine remained on lees in tank for three months with batonnage. After a further period of ageing the wine was bottled in July.

La Mar has initial aromas of sweet hay and ripe tropical fruit (mango and fresh pineapple) as well as fine balsamics with particular accents of pine resin and finishing on notes of ripe peach and stone fruit. Great complexity with crunchy nectarine flavours seasoned with ginger and pepper, marked mineral tones, the whole ensemble soothed by slick acidity. The wine has plenty of extract followed by Caiño’s classic acid touch, ending on a saline note and the overall impression is of creamy-textured and rounded wine with lovely spice and the aforementioned balsamic flavours. There is definitely some ageing potential here.

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| 2023 | ALBARINO, ABADIA DE SAN CAMPIO | W |
| 2023 | TERRAS GAUDA “O ROSAL” | W |
| 2021/22 | “LA MAR” | W |



Why is Albariño such a firm favourite in London restaurants? Firstly, it is one of the few white wines from Spain with a strong identity. There is a common feeling that Spain should produce great wine; certainly, it produces a prodigious volume of wine, but the number of excellent drinkable whites is relatively insignificant. Albariño is one of the exceptions. Other than Galicia and northern Portugal, Albariño is hardly grown anywhere else in the world (there are a handful of examples coming out of California). Secondly, there is the romance of the region from which it originates. Centuries ago Galicia was believed to be the edge of the earth or civilisation, the place where land ended and an endless sea began. The name Finisterre is testament to this elemental frontier mentality. Galicia's spiritual capital is Santiago de Compostela. Here lies the body of St. James the Apostle. Millions of Christians make the pilgrimage each year, visiting the silver casket entombed beneath the altar of the grand cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Many come to atone for their sins, walking hundreds of miles over well-worn paths first navigated in the ninth century, when the apostle's remains were discovered. Others seek the miracle of healing, some climbing the granite steps at the entrance to the cathedral on their hands and knees.

One minor miracle is how viticulture thrives in such a region. The wet maritime climate seldom allows the grapes to fully ripen and one would imagine that the wine should normally either taste tart and thin or funky and mouldy, the result of moisture in the vineyards. Modern trellising systems and canopy management techniques have certainly helped to combat rot; meanwhile the best estates harvest manually and also do a triage on a selection bench. Albariño's flavours tease and please on multiple levels. Citric notes are plentiful; the Albariño disports ripe grapefruit, lime and kiwi; the wine also has good sugar levels balanced by wonderfully natural acids and crystalline minerality. Despite its high acidity, Albariño is not a wine that ages well. Although it is often compared to German Riesling, Albariño is meant to be drunk young because it has a tendency to oxidize quickly.

"I will be with you in the squeezing of a lemon"

The perfect accompaniment to a range of fish and shellfish from mussels, clams and oysters to sardines, mackerel, skate and hake, Albariño is the product of its environment, a true wine of the sea. It is a reminder of where water, sky and land meet; it quenches the thirst, lifts the spirits and can transport you to a wild, beautiful landscape.

O'Brien took the decanter by the neck and filled up the glasses with a dark-red liquid. It aroused in Winston dim memories of something seen long ago on a wall or a hoarding -- a vast bottle composed of electric lights which seemed to move up and down and pour its contents into a glass. Seen from the top the stuff looked almost black, but in the decanter it gleamed like a ruby. It had a sour-sweet smell. He saw Julia pick up her glass and sniff at it with frank curiosity.

'It is called wine,' said O'Brien with a faint smile. 'You will have read about it in books, no doubt.'

Winston took up his glass with a certain eagerness. Wine was a thing he had read and dreamed about. Like the glass paperweight or Mr Charrington's half-remembered rhymes, it belonged to the vanished, romantic past, the olden time as he liked to call it in his secret thoughts. For some reason he had always thought of wine as having an intensely sweet taste, like that of blackberry jam and an immediate intoxicating effect. Actually, when he came to swallow it, the stuff was distinctly disappointing. The truth was that after years of gin-drinking he could barely taste it. He set down the empty glass.

1984 ~ George Orwell

BODEGA MENGoba, GREGORY PEREZ, Bierzo – Organic methods

Bodega Mengoba's vineyards span over Espanillo, Valtuille, Villafranca de El Bierzo and Carracedo on the slate, calcareous and stony soils of these areas. Two varieties of grape are cultivated to make their white wine, Doña Blanca and Godello. The

Mencia vines are located in Espanillo at about 2500 ft above sea level. The vines are between 25 and 80 years old.

Winemaker Gregory Pérez takes great pride in the bodega's artisanal vineyard work; the vines are grown organically and ploughed by cows. Green pruning and integrated pest management are utilized, and they only intervene in the vineyard when necessary. The Bierzo Blanco (Godello and Dona Blanca) comes from different vineyards with diverse soil types ranging from calcareous-clay, stony and slate. After a manual harvest in small boxes and goes through a pneumatic press. The juice is fermented at low temperature, the fine lees selected for five-month batonnage. The plots of Mencia are located in Horta and

Vallafranca del Bierzo at 550 metres of altitude on clay soils with sand. The grapes are destemmed and crushed with a traditional vinification with pumping over during the fermentation which takes place in stainless steel. Incredibly purple and fruity it has flavours of sweet black cherries and damson, a dash of Mencia herbs (oregano and pepper) and a lovely fresh finish. Amazing value and perfect wine by the glass.

We have recently added a raft of new lines from Gregory, including some old vines Godello and Mencia and a fascinating example of the native Estaladina grape.

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| 2023 | BIERZO BREZO BLANCO | W |
| 2022 | GODELLO VIEJO SOBRE LIAS | W |
| 2022 | BIERZO BREZO TINTO | R |
| 2020 | BIERZO MENGoba MENCIA ALICANTE | R |
| 2021 | BIERZO MENCIA DE ESPANILLO | R |
| 2021 | ESTALADINA TINTO | R |

ADEGA SAMEIRAS, Ribeiro – Organic

Surrounded by mountainous terrain and sheltered from the oceanic influence, the cultivation of the vine is the dominant feature of the landscape of Ribeiro, occupying almost all the slopes. The DO is located in southern Galicia, in the north-western edge of the province of Ourense, in the confluence of the valleys formed by the rivers Miño, Avia, and Barbantiño Arnoia. The vineyards range from 75 to 400 metres above sea level in the valleys and on the hillsides, sometimes on steeply terraced slopes. At Sameirás they uphold the utmost respect for the environment, maintaining the integrity of soil and microbial activity by using only strictly necessary treatments and preventing erosion by the application of organic matter. Due to the variety of soils Adega Sameirás work with six grapes, matching each variety to its preferred terroir. They also work traditionally, for example, tying the branches with wicker, raffia and reed materials, which, once they cease to be useful, are ploughed back into the soil for organic matter. During the harvest Adega Sameirás only pick the ripest bunches, doing a severe triage on the vine. The wine is then fermented in stainless steel tanks at a controlled temperature. Produced from an intriguing blend of 55% Treixadura, 20% Albariño, 12% Godello, 8% Lado, 2% Loureira, 2% Torrontes and 1% Caño Blanco, this medium gold-coloured tank-aged wine offers a complex nose of minerals, honey, melon and citrus. Medium-bodied, it has a smooth texture, excellent underlying acidity, and a pure, long finish. It's a fruity little numero. The Tinto is every bit as interesting as the white, with the sort of crunchy minerality that tastes as if it is carved out of the very stone itself. A blend of local heroes – Sousón 30%, Caño Tinto 30%, Brancellao 20% & Mencia 20% it is a dark ruby-coloured sporting a multifaceted perfume of earth notes, Asian spices, lavender, menthol, mint, black cherry, and black raspberry. Elegantly styled, on the palate it has outstanding volume, grip, and length that appeals to both the intellect and the senses.

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| 2022 | SAMEIRAS BLANCO | W |
| 2022 | SAMEIRAS BLANCO 1040 COLHEITA | W |
| 2022 | SAMEIRAS TINTO | R |

The D.O. of Ribeira Sacra (or “sacred hillside”) is the most visually stunning of all Galicia’s four D.O.s. in North-West Spain. It is home to some of the most spectacular vineyards anywhere in the world, with slopes approaching 60% incline.

Ribeira Sacra is divided into five sub-zones following the rivers Miño and Sil (a tributary of the Miño) towards the city of Ourense: This one is Ribeiras do Sil with some of the steepest vineyards of the region spilling down to the river Sil. The

Romans entered Ribeira Sacra as early as 24 A.D. to extract gold from the river valleys. This required prodigious engineering feats such as the diversion of the Sil River—accomplished with slave labour by digging a 1,300-foot tunnel through what is now called Montefurado (“perforated mountain”). The Romans also used slave labour to plant terraced vineyards along the Sil and Minho riverbanks. Today, Ribeira Sacra growers still have to work like slaves to prune, tend, and harvest grapes from these improbably situated vines. A few sites, including Cividade, Marcelino, and Viña A Ferreira,

are so inaccessible that when the grapes are harvested, they are lowered to boats waiting on the Sil River, brought to landings that can be reached by road, and finally hauled to the wineries. All the vineyards have makeshift rails adapted from mining, with mechanical lifts that are winched up and down, carrying one person at a time, a few tools, and, during harvest, containers of grapes. Ribeira Sacra is where the men (and women) are truly vital, because the cosecheros (those who tend and harvest the vineyards) must also be capable of what is known as heroic viticulture. It is one of only two areas in Spain

(Catalunya’s Priorat is the other) that requires this “heroic viticulture”. The region’s steeply tiered slate bancales, or terraces, have a great deal to do with why the wines of Ribeira Sacra can be so profoundly terroir-driven, intriguing, and delicious, and why this area has the potential to produce wines as great as those from anywhere in Spain..

ADEGA GUIMARO, PEDRO RODRIGUEZ, Ribeira Sacra – Organic

Pedro descends from a long line of colleiteiras working in the Amandi area, Ribeira Sacra’s most prime subzone with south facing vineyards planted on slate, called Loxa locally, just above the river Sil. His parents Manolo and Carmen still work the vineyards daily. They also maintain a small finca of mixed agriculture, very common in Galicia, raising chickens, rabbits, pigs, and cultivating a sizable vegetable patch. The culmination of the family’s agrarian traditions manifested with the establishment of their adega in 1991. Before 1991, Pedro’s family produced small quantities of wine for their own consumption and sold their wine in garrafrones 20 litre glass containers- to local cantinas. It was an oenologist from León and soon to be a close family friend, Luis Buitrón, who was instrumental in the creation of the Ribeira Sacra D.O. and helped the Rodríguez family begin estate-bottling their wines. They named their winery Guímaro, which means “rebel” in Gallego a nickname of Pedro’s grandfather. Guímaro was one of the first adegas to join the appellation in 1996.

In the beginning the wines were simple juvenes, young wines that showed the slate-infused freshness of lush red fruit and supple texture, the kind of wines the area of Amandi was known for. They continue that tradition with their un-oaked Tinto an amazing value year in and year out.

In the early 2000’s Luis Buitrón introduced Pedro –who by then was in charge of his family estate- to the great winemaker Raúl Pérez of Bierzo. Raúl helped Pedro see the potential of his old vine holdings to produce profoundly expressive and age-worthy single plot wines. This led to significant improvements in the vineyard, such as reducing yields of the commonly over-cropped Mencía grape, eliminating chemicals in the vineyards, and paying attention to the different plots’ expositions, which greatly helps to preserve natural acidity in the grapes. Old-fashioned winemaking methods were reclaimed as well: wild yeast fermentation, foot treading in open-top vessels, raspon (stems) inclusion, working with low sulphur, and aging in used barrels. This approach gives us Finca Meixemán, Finca Capeliños, and the new Finca Pombeiras, some of the most distinctive and age-worthy wines being produced today on the “Sacred Banks”. Never resting on his laurels, Pedro is leading his estate to organic certification. He has undertaken a massive project of planting heirloom grape varieties at the highest elevations in Amandi. Grapes like Caiño, Merenzao (Trousseau), Sousón, Albariño and Treixadura will soon be part of Pedro’s never-ending search for authenticity in his native land. With this ever-evolving approach, no doubt, the future is looking bright at Guímaro.

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| 2023 | GUIMARO BLANCO | W |
| 2022 | GUIMARO CEPAS VIEJAS BLANCO | W |
| 2023 | GUIMARO TINTO JOVEN | R |
| 2022 | GUIMARO CAMINO REAL TINTO ~ Mencía, Alicante Bouschet, Sousón, Brancellao, Caiño Tinto... | R |
| 2020 | GUIMARO FINCA MEIXEMAN | R |
| 2021 | GUIMARO FINCA CAPELINOS | R |
| 2021 | GUIMARO FINCA POMBEIRAS | R |

BODEGA GODEVAL, Valdeorras

Godeval Winery is situated in the beautiful monastery of 13th century monastery of Xagoaza and is dedicated to the quality of the Godello grape. Only two wines are made – a classic style and a richer old vines wine. Vines in Valdeorras have an ancient heritage cultivated by the Romans who developed vineyards on the granitic and slate soils on the slopes bordering the River Sil. Godeval's vines are planted in the 1970's & 80s by the original founders of the winery on the steepest slopes and their south-facing aspect ensures maximum ripeness. Chemicals are virtually never used and harvest, needless to say, is manual. Soils are well-drained slates that both encourage deep root system whilst retaining the heat. The Godello has been reclaimed in Valdeorras as a noble indigenous variety. It is low yielding and gives wines of tremendous personality. Its aromatics are fruity (peach and ripe apple), floral and herbal with anise and fresh mint hints. Combined with the inherent lactic character of the grape and you have wines that work on several levels.

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| 2023 | VINA GODEVAL GODELLO | W |
| 2022 | GODEVAL GODELLO CEPAS VELHAS | W |

DOMINIO DEL UROGALLO, FRAN ASENSIO, Cangas – Organic

The tradition of grape growing and wine making in Asturias dates to the 9th century. Unfortunately, the current century has not been kind to this tradition. Odium, extreme weather, phylloxera, and an unresponsive marketplace have all contributed to the decline of the region. But recently there is a new spark in Asturias. The region around Cangas del Narcea is currently classified as Vinos de Calidad de Cangas and there is a petition working to elevate it to official D.O. status. Although Dominio del Urogallo currently does not use the Calidad de Cangas label, they are, in fact, within the region and a driving force in raising the overall quality. Fran Asencio is the man behind Dominio del Urogallo, fascinated to work with old vines, steep slopes, complex soils and cooler climate. He now has about 14 hectares of vines, which he restored to health through organic and biodynamic farming and restored structurally by back-breaking manual labour. He is striving to create a forum for the voice of Cangas to speak. This means using the local varieties, fermenting with indigenous yeast and making the wine with as little manipulation and intervention as possible. Mencía, Albarín Tinto, Albarín Blanco, Carrasquín, Verdejo Tinto (Trousseau) and a host of autochthonous varieties are planted on slate, quartz and anthracite.

The wines speak for themselves, carrying a balance between coolness and texture. La Fanfarria Tinto is charming and fruity, whilst the Pesico has fine tannins and rich perfumed red fruit. The whites – aged on the lees – have aromas of apples and white flesh pears and nice buttery quality.

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| 2021 | AB-AL BLANCO – Albarin, Albillo | W |
| 2020 | 100 AB 100 BLANCO – Albarin | W |
| 2021 | AT-VV-MN TINTO – Albarin Tinto, Mencia | R |
| 2020 | FIELD BLEND TINTO – Verdejo Tinto, Albarin Tinto, Mencia, Carrasquin | R |

BODEGAS AMEZTOI, Txakoli de Getaria

From Bilbao to San Sebastian Basque Txakoli (or Chacoli) made from the native Hondarrabi Zuri, is served in the pinxtos bars poured with great panache from a great height into small tumblers. The green-tinted liquid turns chalky-white, foams and eventually settles, retaining a lively spritz. The best wines are produced around the fishing village of

Getaria where the vineyards are cut into incredibly steep terraced slopes overlooking the Bay of Biscay. Here you have a polyculture: apples, pears and tomatoes are planted, the vineyards are not weeded, and no chemical sprays are used. The taste of Txakoli, well, to quote Dick Swiveller in the Old Curiosity Shop, it can't be tasted in a sip. It should be a back of the throat job, waiting for that jolting appley sourness to kick in. Gird your loins with some Cantabrian anchovies, stuffed pimientos or smoked fish and let the Txak attack! Recommended by one writer as the perfect accompaniment to wild rabbit because it is the only wine wherein the acidity can dissolve lead shot. Now Txak comes fetchingly in rose-tinted pink, fragrantly floral (violets and irises) and typically effervescent, vivacious and aerial.

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| 2023 | TXAKOLI DE GETARIA | W |
| 2023 | TXAKOLI DE GETARIA RUBENTIS ROSADO | Ro |

BASQUET CASE – A Tale of One Txakoli

Verde que te quiero verde,
Verde viento. Verde ramas

Green I love you green. Green wind. Green branches.

Federico García Lorca

People ask why Txakoli is so expensive and difficult to obtain outside the Basque country. After all it is *the* greenest of green wines, surely mere water off a Biscayan duck's back. However, consider the tiny size of the average farm-holding; there are only a handful of producers who can lay claim to more than one hectare of vines and those vines teetering and straggling every which way on slopes, in dells and hollows, cheek-by-tendril with orchard trees and flower nurseries. The climate doesn't help either being somewhat on the moist side. Then the elusiveness of the producers: the fabled siesta is rigorously observed, and the notion of a winery office is faintly risible. It took us three expeditions to find our particular Txakoli and that's a lot of sloshing and sluicing of crab-apple juice stomach-lined with piles of pinxtos. During the first exploratory trip we fetched up in San Sebastian where every request in every bar (and there were many) for white wine invariably brought out a plastic beaker and concomitant theatrics with the foaming apple-scented drizzle. The characteristic over-the-shoulder-pour hosed the fluid into the glass; it was dismissed rather than left the bottle as if the wine was saying "I don't care, I'm out of here". The chalky-hued Txakoli was tart, yet salty and curiously addictive – especially when you're clenching a fistful of anchovies – a refreshing, cidery sea breeze. I loved it; here truly was a democratic wine; a non-vinous liquid that thumbed its nose at anything as pretentious as a wine glass.

Enchanted by its spritzzy esprit we attempted to replicate the effervescent Txakoli experience wherever we went and with whatever white wine we drank. First stop Akelare, a two-star Michelin joint perched on some cliffs, a few kilometres out of San Sebastian. The cuisine matched the soulless décor; it had been El Bullied in a sanitised way; there were splits and splots on spoons, bits of foam and other general flummery, but the overall effect was somewhat anaemic and in desperate need of enlivening. In the absence of Txakoli we ordered a bottle of Albariño, shook it vigorously underneath the table till the latent carbon dioxide erupted merrily over the dreary grey shagpile, and craved something as substantial as an anchovy.

The Txakoli bug had bit, however, and when we returned to the region the following month it was inevitable that we would make the additional detour and drive up the coast along serpentine roads hugging the craggy cliffs pounded by the Biscayan waves in search of the green wine. We stopped in the small town of Getaria with its hump-backed foreland, the heart of largest of the Txakoli Dos, and commenced our research by finding the best restaurant in town. We sauntered through an alleyway hemmed in by dark shuttered houses past a table of twenty or so locals enjoying a feast. A big banner was tied between two balconies and massive bubbling tureens of stew sat on the table. One half-expected to meet a snorting bull a-strolling up the corrida, as one serendipitously traipsed through these anfractuous cobbled streets. As we reached the harbour the alley unfolded revealing an eating area of numerous tables, families, peripatetic cats and a general flavour of human sunshine. The menu was written in five languages; the English being the most difficult to interpret. Eschewing the inevitable "fish balls" we slavered and slobbered as we watched waiters periodically appearing in order to toss a sizzling slab of bloody red beef or a huge winking turbot onto one of the arrays of thick ribbed griddles set into the brickwork of the inner harbour wall. Meanwhile gaily coloured fishing boats drew up to the quay-side to offload their cargo of gleaming silvery-scaled denizens. It was a day to relax and toast the concept of mañana. With a glass or ten of Txakoli.

We sat and daintily munched fat white asparagus accompanied by puddles of aioli and ordered five bottles of Txakoli from different local producers. It was effectively a blind tasting since the artery-hardening "Xpealladocious" producer names meant nothing to us. Most of the wines were pleasant but as insubstantial as the Atlantic-spumed air, but the Amezttoi had fruit and structural bite and that was the bottle we finished.

After lunch we drove through deserted lanes; nothing was signposted. We found one vineyard seemingly abandoned other than a pair of grubby jeans drying on the wires. Eventually we happened on an old man making his way slowly up the hill and Eric got out of the car to ask directions. The old man was jabbering away animatedly, pointing first in one direction then another, evidently giving exhaustive instructions. Eric was nodding furiously, smiling and thanking him all at the same time.

“What did he say?” I asked.

“I have no idea. I couldn’t understand a single word.”

We drove away leaving the old man waving at us on the brow of the hill and delved through tiny little hedgerow-squeezed roads until we came back on ourselves on the outskirts of Getaria. Eric reversed the car and drove back up the hill, whereupon we came upon the old man again, looking puzzled, but still waving...

After numerous dead ends and multiple re-encounters with our old man whose omnipresence quite unnerved us we finally found the bodega, walked round, called out, but all was quiet except a one-eyed collie dog. This was evidently one extended siesta.

The next day we revisited the estate, successfully avoiding the old man of the sea on our peregrinations and met Ignacio Ameztot, a vast bear of a man, who showed us around his cellar, accompanied by five bouncing dogs of all shapes and sizes. We tasted the wine again, all spritz and pume, in a wine glass of all things. It was Txakoli after all.

Chirpy Chappiness / Punditry / Rosé-tinted Speculation – The Panglossian view of the Wine Trade espoused by those incessantly promulgating the virtues of supermarket wines. Whilst one applauds enthusiasm and a proselytising zeal, everything in the garden of wine is not always blooming. For every Oddbins quip “No Spain No Gain”, one might counter with “Much Spain, Very Plain”.

- The Alternative Wine Glossary

FINCA CASA BALAGUER, ANDRES CARRUL, Alicante – Organic

Finca Casa Balaguer are a small family run winery based in Alicante. Their wines are made in the most natural way possible, practicing organic agriculture. The focus is on local grape varieties such as Monastrell, Alicante Bouschet and Malvasia, and only natural yeasts and absolutely no chemical additives are used in their wines. In their own words, ‘we believe our grapes should express themselves naturally, so it is our job as wines makers to provide them with the best possible environment in which to grow. The less intervention from us in the winery the better, so our wines can truly reflect the character of our wonderful land.’

Tragolargo Blanco is a blend of Moscatel & Malvasia fermented with their own yeasts (on skins for a month) in stainless steel tanks. Golden in colour with aromas of orange blossom and fennel with some delicate floral notes. This medium body wine has a delicious acidity and freshness, as well as the array of aromas and flavours of white and citrus fruits, rich honey and mineral tones with a long and elegant finish, The El Carro is pure Moscatel with one month skin-contact, fermented and aged in clay amphora.

The organically farmed little Monastrell comes from sandy soils and is fermented (part whole bunch) in stainless vats with native yeasts. Deep cherry red with intense dark ripe fruit nose. A subtle blend of liquorice and dark fruit on the palate infused with aromatic wild herbs (thyme and rosemary).

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| 2023 | TRAGOLARGO BLANCO ~ Moscatel, Merseguera | W |
| 2023 | SALICORNIO MOSCATEL | W |
| 2022 | SALICORNIO MALVASIA | W |
| 2022 | EL CARRO DE LA MATA ~ Moscatel | W |
| 2021 | BENIMAQUIA TINAJAS ~ Moscatel | Or |
| 2021 | TRAGLOLARGO TINTO ~ Monastrell | R |
| 2020 | RAMBLA DEL PELIGRES ~ Garnacha | R |
| 2021 | TOMATIERRA ~ Cabernet Franc | R |
| 2023 | EL ROSADO DE PADILLA ~ Monastrell | Ro |

BODEGAS VINESSENS, ANDRES CARRUL, Alicante – Organic

In every sense a garage winery based in the industrial town of Villena, inland Alicante. For the last 10 years this young dynamic team lead by winemakers Andres Carrul and Marta Ribera have been championing local varieties with the focus on maximum expression and minimum intervention. Building from the ground up the winery has gone from strength to strength and is today one of the most highly regarded producers in D.O. Alicante. The organically farmed little Monastrell comes from sandy soils and is fermented (part whole bunch) in stainless vats with native yeasts.

Deep cherry red with intense dark ripe fruit nose. A subtle blend of liquorice and dark fruit on the palate infused with aromatic wild herbs (thyme and rosemary).

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| 2022 | PRIMEROS PASOS ~ Monastrell | R |
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When someone asks me whether we list a cava it is usually a not so coded demand for something light, effervescent and cheap. Especially cheap. The idea that cava could come from organically farmed vineyards and be crafted with the same care as champagne might surprise many people, even those defenders of Spanish wines who write cava off a mediocre aberration. This is the story of Recaredo, one of the few wines to buck the cava bargain bucket trend. It ain't cheap, but then it ain't your normal cava.

Andrew Jefford has some positive news. From *World of Fine Wine*. "At its best, it is a sparkling wine which is emphatically not structured by acidity – and hence doesn't need dosage (though many great Cavas do have some dosage). Its informing beauties are those of fragrance and aroma. It glides and floats rather than slices and incises. It is flowery and languid, yet at the same time complex and mouthfilling. It is an archetypal Mediterranean white, lifted and amplified by bubbles. Not only is acidity relatively unimportant in its architecture, but fruit flavours, too, may be recessive by cool-climate standards: a hallmark of Mediterranean whites. Far from 'gaining nothing' by time spent on yeast or in post-disgorgement ageing, ambitious Cava gains almost everything from these processes, precisely because its intrinsic fruit notes – in contrast to its primary aromatics – are so muted. Time spent on yeast is what amplifies, layers and refracts its primary aromatic profile, and this complex aromatic weave laid gently on the downy, quiescent Catalan fruits is what lends the best Cava its magnificence and its grandeur. (After that eloquent panegyric, even I might give cava a whirl.)

In 1878, Recaredo Mata Figueres was born in the town of Sant Sadurn d'Anoia. In 1924, his son, Josep Mata Capellades, began to work in the world of cava and produce a few bottles for himself. Josep built cellars in his house, in the historic centre of Sant Sadurn d'Anoia. Some parts of the cellars are over 80 years old and have been conserved retaining their original form. He forged Recaredo's identity, based on know-how, professionalism and hard work. He marked the way forward in his own style, pioneering totally dry cavas, the Cava Brut Nature, and working with oak barrels and longer aged cavas. Recaredo is currently managed by Josep and Antoni (Ton) Mata Casanovas, the sons of its founder. The special work begins in the vineyard. Recaredo seek to ensure the natural balance of the vine, aiming to achieve the best expression of every individual vintage. Therefore, the viticulture is based on dry farming with grapes harvested by hand. They prioritise respect for biodiversity and the environment: cultivating vines without using herbicides or insecticides and only employing natural organic fertilisers. When ripening begins, the grapes are analysed vine by vine, plot by plot, the goal being to harvest the grapes at their optimum point of ripening, to obtain the most balanced musts and the very finest wines. The entire harvesting process is carried out by hand, since it is only in this way that proper care for the grape until pressing can be guaranteed and premature oxidation (a characteristic of so many cheap cavas) can be avoided. All these vines are close to the cellars and transportation of the grapes is carried out using small trailers. The grape must is obtained by gently pressing the grapes, thereby obtaining the highest-quality part of the must. Debouillage follows and then the first fermentation where the yeasts transform the sugars to produce the base wine. Over the winter, the wine remains in contact with its finest lees, giving it volume and body and becomes naturally clarified. The grape juice from the oldest Xarel-lo vines ferment in oak barrels yielding structure and greater complexity for longer aged cava. Some of the base wine is aged in oak barrels for some months. This wine will be used to add greater finesse and structure to the final blending.

The secondary fermentation occurs in the bottle, with the yeasts transforming the sugar to produce the cava's bubbles and foam. The subsequent interaction of the yeasts or the lees and the wine during the in-bottle ageing will give more complex flavours and aromas. The riddling process, a gentle, precise daily movement, always carried out by hand in the classic, traditional racks, allows the lees to descend to the bottle's cork and prepares the bottle for the expulsion of the lees: the disgorging which consists in the expulsion of the lees accumulated during the ageing process. At Recaredo, this is carried out on an exclusively manual basis, at the cellars' natural temperature, without freezing the necks of the bottles.

Terres Nature comes from dry-farmed organic vineyards in the Alt Penedès zone and is made from a blend of Xarel-lo (46%), Macabeu (36%) and Parellada (18%). The wine is a Brut Nature, completely dry. It has wonderful chalky minerality with notes of nutmeg and ginger. There is a wonderful fleshy texture redolent of poached pears.

"Brut de Brut" Brut Nature is made with grapes from the old vineyards on moderately deep loamy and loamy-clay calcareous soils, with the presence of some gravel, located around the villages of Sant Sadurn d'Anoia, Torrelavit and Subirats, in the Alt Penedès region. These vineyards yield high quality grapes giving wines of elegant expression and fine concentration. The blend is 36% Xarel-lo and 64% Macabeu and the wine is aged for a minimum of 67 months in the bottles. All the "Xarel-lo" grapes are fermented in oak barrels for added complexity.

Well-upholstered wine with green plum and apple aromas. The palate is deep, pure, structured, vinous, long and rich with resonant acidity. In 1962, Josep Mata Capellades created the Reserva Particular de Recaredo Cava with the idea of being able to convey the delicateness and subtle complexity that a cava that has undergone a very long ageing can achieve. Faithful to this idea, it is a cava that represents the Mediterranean in its purest form, interprets the calcareous lands of the Alt Penedès and shows the character of the oldest vines. Reserva Particular de Recaredo is 60% Macabeu and 40% Xarel-lo. The Xarel-lo was fermented in small "oak casks" to imbue the final cava with more structure and elegance. It stays at least nine years and six months in contact with its own "lees" until the final removal of the sediment, carried out manually without freezing the bottle neck. It is a completely dry Brut Nature, with no added sugar. An extraordinary wine with aromas and flavours of the Mediterranean. Think hawthorn, almond-blossom, sweet hay, fennel, warm earth and green herbs. Amazing length.

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| 2019 | CORPINNAT BRUT NATURE "TERRERS" | Sp |
| 2018 | "SERRA DEL VEL » BRUT NATURE | Sp |
| 2012 | RESERVA PARTICULAR DE RECAREDO | Sp |
| 2010 | TURO D'EN MOTA – very limited availability | Sp |
| 2020 | CORPINNAT INTENS ROSAT BRUT NATUR | Sp/Ro |
| 2018/19 | CORPINNNAT SUBTIL BRUT NATURE | Sp |

CELLER CREDO, Penedes – Biodynamic

Xarel-lists: a term coined to describe those who interpret and explore the properties and virtues of the Xarel-lo grape variety. The Mediterranean variety Xarel-lo is the leitmotif of Celler Credo's wine project and the thematic thread that gives rise to their wines. Aged on the lees, macerated with the grape skin or stems, with no sulphites added – made today using techniques they learned from their grandparents ... "In short, a thousand and one ways of interpreting Xarel-lo. In other words, Xarel-lo is our credo. At Celler Credo we see ourselves as defenders of bio (life) and dynamics (movement). We're guided by values that bring us closer to the land, territories and landscapes of which we form part. Is this, perhaps, the path to reconciling man and nature? Maybe."

They are also committed to making terroir white wines – without chemical fertilisers, pesticides or herbicides – wines that speak plainly, recounting a sensory history that's free of artifice, authentic. This is a dialogue between man, the variety and the land; a conversation in which there's much to say and nothing to hide. Xarel-lo wines that chatter; vines that give up their claim to the starring role in a vineyard inhabited by fennel, wild radish, yellow fleabane ... by insects and animals that each contribute in their own small way to an ecosystem which, to express its true nature, needs something as easy to say as it is difficult to achieve: balance.

Aloers' was the name given to farmers in the Middle Ages who owned the land that they cultivated. They were free of any duty to pay rent or render service. Aloers is made by allowing the must to macerate for a few hours with the stems and then leaving the wine on the lees for approximately two months. This wine offers the freshest, most genuine expression of the Mediterranean Xarel-lo grown on calcareous soils.

Miranius, named after a clever fox who ventures into the vineyards and is delighted by the sweet aromas of the grapes, is a young wine that is very vibrant and ages well in the bottle. It is made mainly from the Mediterranean variety Xarel-lo, with subtle notes of Macabeu. Miranius has strong varietal character with crisp acidity and a good palate.

The grapes from Celler Credo come from the county of Alt Penedès (Barcelona). All of the vineyards have been cultivated in accordance with the principles of organic and biodynamic agriculture. Plant cover grow spontaneously between the vines. This cover plays a crucial role, loosening the soil, regulating water retention and drainage (essential in the dry farming system we practise), and helping to foster biodiversity and maintain a balance in the vineyard ecosystem.

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|------|----------|---|
| 2020 | ALOERS | W |
| 2022 | MIRANIUS | W |
| 2023 | V-D-RE | W |

LOXAREL, MITJAN, Penedes – Biodynamic

Can Mayol, which bottles under the trademarked name "Loxarel," is a winery that has been farming organically for more than a decade. The Mitjan family, owners of Can Mayol, also employ some biodynamic treatments. Half of the vines are situated around the cellars and main house, which dates from the 14th century, not far from Vilafranca. The other half lie about half an hour away up an incredibly steep track at 800 metres in what feels like another world, halfway to heaven! The winery is basic and all the better for it – they don't waste energy or money on modern technology or fancy architecture. Intriguingly, however, there are a few amphorae in the small barrel cellar, part of the Mitjan's commitment to experimenting and producing a range of natural wines. They keep animals, including chickens, a horse and a donkey named Garnatxa. While the focus is on "Brut Nature" (no dosage added) Cava production, they also produce some very interesting still wines from their chalky, high altitude vineyards above 2,400 feet for their highest vines, among the highest in the Penedès D.O.), Xarel-lo, Macabeo, Parellada, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir thrive and pick up an incredible minerality, which makes these wines wonderfully distinctive and very exciting to drink. Featuring some of the property's oldest, most prized parcels of Xarel-lo grapes, the Gran Reserva sees 109 months on its lees. It is a stunning original Cava, cloudy, fervid with wild yeasty aromas and flavours, terrifically dry with chalky minerality in spades

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|------|------------------------------------|-------|
| 2022 | A PEL ANCESTRAL ~ Xarel.lo | Sp/W |
| 2023 | A PEL BARBA ROJA PET NAT | Sp/Ro |
| 2023 | CORA ~ Muscat, Sauvignon, Xarel.lo | W |
| 2022 | OPS GARNACHA | R |

JANE VENTURA, Penedès – Organic

The cellars, located in the region of Baix Penedès (Tarragona), have been dedicated to the world of wine since 1914 when their great-grandfather Josep first began selling wine to the local market. Grandfather Albert founded the first cellar in 1930 and his son, Benjamín, made the definitive step towards high quality winemaking in 1985, when he began bottling the first white and rosé wines, followed by the first cava in 1990 and red wines in 1991. Two of his five sons, Albert and Gerard, have joined him in steering the cellar towards ever-increasing standards of quality.

The Blanc Seleccio comes from fifteen different vineyards, either owned by the property (Mas Vilella and Finca Els Camps) or by quality growers of the Baix Penedès area. All the Xarel.lo comes from old vines.

The blend is Xarel.lo (65%), Muscat de Frontignac (18%), Garnacha (15%) and Malvasia de Sitges (5%).

Cold-temperature skin maceration of the must achieves greater aromatic expression and more structure on the palate. Then the must is pressed, drawn off, allowed to settle for 24 hours and then fermented at low temperature (17° C) in inox vats.

The wine is elegant and complex, showing citrus (grapefruit) and exotic fruit notes, along with white flower, fresh almond, fennel, and anise nuances. Rich, powerful, neat, and unctuous on the palate, it somehow repeats the complex aromatic pattern it has on the nose, with great balance and structure. The Rosat is a blend of old vines Sumoll, Ull de Lebre (Tempranillo), Merlot and Syrah. Brilliant rose cherry intense colour. Fresh, fragrant nose with primary notes of cherry, strawberry, raspberry, red flowers and aniseed nuances. On the attack it reveals a pleasant character, round and rich in fruit notes, with a balanced, refreshing acidity and a long aftertaste. A wine that invites conviviality.

The red is the same blend as the rosé, the Syrah and Tempranillo from the richer inland soils, whilst the Sumoll and Cabernet come from the sandy terrain next to the sea. Deep cherry colour of a brilliant intensity and abundant tears and richness. On the nose it shows red and blackberry notes, and some fine spicy, liquorice, violets and undergrowth nuances. The palate is rich, round, full of expression, with good structure, some ripe, grainy tannins, and a fresh, long aftertaste. The Sumoll grape provides both freshness and a lovely 'rough' character, while the Syrah affords a more modern, juicy fruit touch.

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| 2023 | VINYES BLANQUES | W |
| 2017 | VINYES NEGRES | R |

CELLER BATLLIU DE SORT, JOSEP RABASA, RAMON AYTES, Costers del Segre – Organic

Biu de Sort Negre is a high-altitude, single varietal red wine produced from vines grown at an altitude of 850 metres above sea level in the province of Lleida, located in northern Catalonia. Celler Batlliu de Sort produce very pure Pinot Noirs. The vines benefit from an exceptional calcareous soil and from a benign climate. Produced in the Pallars Sobirà region, the wine bears the label of the Costers del Segre Designation of Origin. Fermented in stainless steel tanks with frequent punch-downs and pump-overs, the wine subsequently completed malolactic fermentation. Finally, Biu de Sort Negre was aged in stainless steel containers for over a period of 10 months.

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|------|--|----|
| 2023 | AULESA PET NAT | Sp |
| 2019 | BIU DE SORT BLANC FINCA DE LA BORDA ~ Riesling, Viognier | W |
| 2022 | NERO DE SORT PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2022 | BIU DE SORT NEGRE FINCA BARRERO ~ Pinot Noir | R |



PARTIDA CREUS, MASSIMO MARCHIORI & ANTONELLA GERONA, Tarragona – Organic

Partida Creus is a small traditional winery that produces a limited quantity of high-end very original wines made with organically grown grapes. The initiative was started in 2007 by a couple of Italian architects from the Piedmont region, Antonella Gerosa and Massimo Marchiori, who, seeking a complete reversal in their lives, relocated to the quiet village of Bonastre. There they refurbished an old agricultural building, converting it into a cellar, a project conducted with recycled materials and solid structures.

Members and producers of Slow Food, since 2004 they have been engaged in the recovery and preservation of Bonastre's viniculture heritage in the Baix Penedès region. Tasks in the vineyard are shared with Orazio and Vincenza, a donkey and a mare that help them practice a traditional environmentally friendly philosophy.

The name is a reference to the crosses used to separate holdings back in the day. Massimo Marchiori and Antonella Gerona are an Italian couple from Piedmont. Both are architects who initially moved to Barcelona for that reason. Around the year 2000, they had had enough of the big city, and they moved out to the country in search of a "slower" lifestyle. They settled in the Massís de Bonastre in the Baix Penedés. There they started farming all kinds of local foodstuffs but had trouble finding wines made in the same style, so they started making their own, recovering old vines of local grape varieties. In most cases, the vineyards were close to abandoned. Whenever they find a new vineyard, they will go to the nearby town, find out who the owner is and approach them to buy or at least farm the vineyard, organically of course. People think they are crazy for doing this as they are very old, low yielding vineyards and in most cases, obsolete grape varieties. Some have been disqualified from D.O. for lack of colour, as was the case with Sumoll, others were never even accepted. Now they are known as the crazy Italians making incredible natural wines with the grapes that all of the locals had written off in exchange for the more "international" varieties.

The Vinel·lo is a field blend of seven grape varieties: Trepát, Sumoll, Garrut, Queixal de Llop, Ull de Perdiu, Garnacha, and Samsó. This is one of their younger vineyards as it was planted back in 1995 and the soil is predominantly calcareous clay. Separate whole cluster macerations in stainless steel tanks, shortest extraction for the Garrut, which has the most colour, for about 20 hours. The longest is the Trepát, lightest in colour, for about three days. All the others in between about 48 hours. Once finished they are all blended and racked into the same stainless-steel tanks where the wine ages on its fine lees and naturally decants, slowly through the cold of the winter meaning unfiltered, unfined, and no addition of sulphur at any part of the winemaking process. I think a common denominator in all their wines is freshness and precision. All of them are very direct with low alcohol and high acidity which keeps them intact. The white (VN Blanco) is light and salty-fresh – think super-charged Muscadet and reassuringly turbid. It features a dirty half dozen (plus one) of local yokels: Vinyate, Moscatel, Garnacha Blanca, Panset, Macabeo, Xarel·lo and Parellada. Massimo and Antonella farm organically with their donkey and make crazy wines from ancient, abandoned varieties which are ridiculously fresh and drinkable.

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| 2021 | XLA XAREL·LO ANCESTRAL | Sp |
| 2021 | VN VINELLO BLANCO | W |
| 2021 | BN BLANCO | W |
| 2020 | SK MOSCATEL | W |
| 2021 | GB GARNAXTA BLANCO | W |
| 2021 | SP BLANCO ~ SUBIRATT PARENT | W |
| 2019 | MC MACABEU FILIBERT BLANCO | W |
| 2019 | MP MACABEU PARELLADA BLANCO | W |
| 2021 | CX CARTOIXA VERMEL | Ro |
| 2021 | VN VINELLO TINTO | R |
| 2021 | TN TINTO | R |
| 2018 | SM SUMOLL TINTO | R |
| 2021 | BB BOBAL TINTO | R |
| 2021 | TP TREPAT TINTO | R |
| 2019 | UL ULLDEBRE TINTO | R |
| NV | MUZ VERMUT NATURAL APERO X PARTIDA CREUS | Ver |

COMUNICA, PEP AGUILAR & PATRI MORILLO, Montsant – Organic

Celler Comunica is in the town of Falset, 370 metres above sea level in a dry, Mediterranean climate. The vineyard age ranges from 25 – 75 years. Patri Morillo and Pep Aguilar—the winemaking team known as “Ya Le Llamaremos” (“we’ll call you”) — were not born into the world of wine. They did find it though, and with great passion over the past six years, they have been helping small families around the Mediterranean with their winemaking aspirations. “Comunica” (“speak to me”) is their own project. The common wine style in Montsant has been chasing Priorats’; the moniker which refers to Montsant as ‘the poor man’s Priorat’ is a misnomer that Pep & Patri have handily dispensed with. By leaving the wine unoaked, they have left us with the salient details in a wine: the soil, the fruit, and the vintage. The Pua Blanco is a brisk homage to Garnacha with the Blanco, Peluda and Grey versions combining to produce a white with clean crisp fruit, notes of flowers, and shell-flecked citrus. Vi dal Mas is a blend of 60% Garnacha Tinta, 15% Garnacha Peluda, 5% Grey Garnacha and 20% Syrah from organically grown vines on limestone clay and granitic sand. Sixty percent of the grapes are destemmed and the wine ferments with native yeasts in tank for 5-6 days.

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| 2021 | LA PUA BLANCO | W |
| 2023 | VI DAL MAS | R |
| 2021 | COMUNICA SUC DE SAULO | R |

PETER’S PLOT, LUCA HODGKINSON, Priorat – Organic

The Las Panzudas is the baby cuvée. Made exclusively for Les Caves. Fermented and aged in special ‘tubby’ tinajas (‘Panzuda’ means ‘paunchy’). Shorter maceration, modest addition of sulphur. 100% Garnacha. Certainly a Priorat in terms of ripeness, minerality and structure, but it has an earthy, rustic quality from the tinaja. Mas del Habanero is the main estate Wine, named after the Finca. Garnacha/Cariñena. Fermented in all manner of different vessels – barrel, cement, tinaja and then aged in 500l barrels, mixture of ages. More classic in style, but without the over extraction/ripeness that many Priorats suffer from.

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|------|---|---|
| 2022 | PRIORAT LAS PANZUDAS ~ Garnacha Negra | R |
| 2018 | PRIORAT MAS DEL HABANERO ~ Garnacha, Cariñena | R |
| 2019 | PRIORAT GARNACHA PELUDA | R |
| 2019 | PRIORAT CARINENA | R |

PAGO DE THARSYS, Requena

Requena is a municipality in eastern Spain, in the province of Valencia, located on the left bank of the river Magro. The town was formerly a Moorish fortress, occupying a strong position in the mountainous region of Las Cabrillas. The terroir is limey and sandy, poor in organic material and with good permeability. The vineyards are on the high plateau, at 650 metres altitude with a north-south orientation on a light slope. The blend of the Cava is 75% Macabeo and 25% Parellada, selected from 20 years old vines. The initial fermentation is in stainless steel tank at 14°C. After one year ageing the wine is disgorged without adding any expedition liquor. The wine is fresh with fine bubbles, clean floral notes, and nice grassy aromas. Further notes of banana and citrus fruits are revealed, and the finish is crunchy with balanced acidity.

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|------|--|-------|
| N.V. | DOMINIO DE THARSYS CAVA BRUT NATURE | Sp |
| N.V. | DOMINIO DE THARSYS CAVA BRUT NATURE ROSADO | Sp/Ro |
| 2023 | BOBAL TINTO | R |

MIRABRAS BY BARBADILLO, Sanlucar

This wine is inspired by the age-old methods of 201eolian201tion of the Sherry district. The grapes come from Barbadillo’s ‘Cerro de Leyes’ vineyard in the Santa Lucía estate from Palomino vines planted in 1972. Before being pressed, the grapes are prepared in a very traditional way known as ‘Soleo’ where the picked grape bunches are left in the sun to increase the sugar concentration. Manzanilla butts are then used for a traditional cask fermentation using the natural yeasts from the vineyard. The young wine is then transferred to stainless steel and cement tanks for 18 months, under a veil of ‘flor’ before bottling with minimal fining. The result is something unique and represents a journey back in time in terms of aromas and flavours; ones that might have been more familiar in the 19th century. The wine has remarkable character for a Palomino white; pale golden colour, dry with good acidity, toasted maize, and honeyed nose with an unctuous sensation on the palate, revealing flavours of yeast, bread crust and a hint of old oak.

| | | |
|------|---------------------------|----|
| 2021 | AS DE MIRABRAS ~ Palomino | W |
| 2021 | TOTO BARBADILLO BRUT | Sp |

BODEGA EMILIO HIDALGO, Jerez

This bodega was founded in the mid nineteenth century by Emilio Hidalgo so good they named him twice. The company is owned and operated by the fifth generation of his descendants. The winery has been located, since its inception, in the old part of the city of Jerez de la Frontera; the buildings being of classical Andalusian construction with thick walls, enormous windows, and high, open beamed ceilings are ideal for the ageing and blending of wine. By the beginning of the 20th century, Don Emilio Hidalgo e Hidalgo had a thriving business with an office in London and a presence in many countries. The company was incorporated in 1970 and began to expand its export business in the English, Dutch, German and Austrian markets, as well as expanding into the United States, Japan, Denmark, Italy, France, and Belgium.

Currently the winery houses casks of the original wine used to found the company, which is carefully renewed and enriched by the fifth generation of the founding family dedicated to the wine industry. We are listing six wines which demonstrate the wonderful complexity that comes with the ageing process. Even if you don't know your soleras from your criaderas you will appreciate the amazing richness yet subtle balance of these great sherries.

Fino Panesa is a generous dry wine, pale yellow in colour with a distinctive and sharp bouquet, acquired during its development in oak casks under the 'flor.' Full-flavoured with a satisfying aftertaste, it should be served chilled with an array of tapas such as shrimp, white fish, cured ham, smoked ham, cheese... Gobernador Oloroso is an aromatic full-bodied sherry. It is mahogany in colour with a tawny hue (like a deep burnished brown) and has a fresh and elegant bouquet, as a result of its long maturation in oak casks and the harmonious passage of time. The elegance of this wine is due partly to the fact that it developed under flor before its oxidative development. Excellent with red meats, game birds, cured cheeses, stews, roast pork... Marques de Rodil is very special Palo Cortado, the fruit of a long and extraordinary process of selection and a skilled combination of mixing in the traditional system of criaderas and soleras. Bright mahogany, with an almond aroma, dry on the palate, balanced, elegant and very persistent it is also soft, delicate and sharp and at the same time with tremendous body. This wine is perfect served should be served at room temperature with pork dishes, chicken, cheese, salted meats... Truly, the Beast from the Yeast.

The Pedro Ximenez is a sweet wine that takes its name from the variety of grape. After the grapes are picked, they are dried in the sun for several days to concentrate their level of sugar. This wine has a very dark, almost opaque colour; the aroma is of toasted nuts from old solera and hints of raisins and flavours reminiscent of dates, sweet figs, and molasses. Long and complex and very pure.

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|----|---------------------------------|----|
| NV | LA PANESA FINO | Sh |
| NV | GOBERNADOR OLOROSO | Sh |
| NV | VILLAPANES OLOROSO SECCO | Sh |
| NV | MARQUES DE RODIL PALO CORTADO | Sh |
| NV | EL TRESILLO AMONTILLADO FINO | Sh |
| NV | TRESILLO 1874 AMONTILLADO VIEJO | Sh |
| NV | PEDRO XIMENEZ – 50 cl | Sh |

BODEGAS BARRERO, Sanlúcar

The coastal town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, sitting at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River in South-West Spain. Sanlúcar forms one of the points of the Sherry triangle. The finos aged in this town are known as Manzanillas, which has its own Denomination of Origin Sanchez Ayala (now known as Bodegas Barrero) was founded in 1789 which makes it one of the oldest bodegas in the region. The bodega hit tough times in the 1980s and was purchased by a Seville businessman, José Luis Barrera, to ensure its survival. José has invested in the vineyards and winery to produce top quality wines. Historically the bodega sold their wines in bulk to other producers and to local restaurants. It is only recently they started bottling the wines for restaurants in Seville and we are proud to say that Les Caves de Pyrene is their first customer outside of Spain. The family own 120 hectares of vineyards. The Las Cañas vineyard is 50-hectares located in the Bilbaina district, one of the best vineyard areas in all of Jerez. It is rare in Jerez for a producer to control all areas of production from the vineyards to making the base wine, to ageing and then bottling the wines. Many of the larger sherry "houses" buy already aged wine from "almacenistas" and blend them into their branded wine. Gabriela is a "growers' sherry" in every sense of the word. Wines are aged for longer than your typical Manzanillas, always under the flor yeast. The entry level wine undergoes a noticeably light filtration in order to preserve their authenticity. (Most commercial Manzanillas are charcoal filtered, fined, and cold stabilised in order to give the impression of being "fresh" but this just strips the wine of its character.)

The average age of the straight Gabriela is around six years. The wine is lightly fined and filtered and has pale colour with lovely yeasty/freshly baked bread aromas and is soft and fruity with lots of saline complexity and power but is incredibly easy to drink. Oro is a family selection of their best and oldest barrels and bottled directly with no fining or filtration. The average age here is between 9-10yrs. Bright golden colour, less pungent and fresh than the younger Manzanilla but deeper, richer, rounder and more complex. Stunning wine and now designated as en rama.

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|----|-------------------------------------|----|
| NV | MANZANILLA GABRIELA | Sh |
| NV | MANZANILLA GABRIELA – ½ bottles | Sh |
| NV | MANZANILLA GABRIELA "ORO" ~ en rama | Sh |

BODEGAS CESAR FLORIDO, Chipiona

Bodegas César Florido was founded in 1887 and is currently maintained by César Florido, a descendant of the founder. The winery is the oldest bodega in the town of Chipiona, located near Sanlúcar within the Jerez denomination of origin. Bodegas César Florido is one of only two bodegas in Chipiona that are still operating outside of the cooperative.

A fifth-generation descendant of his bodegas' founder, César Florido is one of the world's few remaining Almacenistas who happens to reside in Chipiona, a village that was once considered outside of the 'official' Sherry triangle. And though Bodegas César Florido is located directly on the Atlantic, and therefore within the D.O. Jerez-Xérès-Sherry, it is not within the delimited zone, or "zone of maturation", which was established by the Consejo Regulador. Limited to Manzanilla de Sanlúcar, Jerez de la Frontera and El Puerto de Santa María, the 203eoli of the zona de 203pprox. Bear the official stamp of "Sherry-Jerez-Xeres Manzanilla" on their back labels, a privilege that is extended to César's three Moscatel wines but not to his Fino, Cruz del Mar Oloroso and Peña del Aguila Palo Cortado.

As one of the oldest bodegas in Chipiona, a town that was once home to eighty-three wineries, César Florido is one of two bodegas that is producing and bottling its own sherries. With three wineries in Chipiona, one of which is just 40m from the Atlantic Ocean, César Florido also buys grapes directly from vineyards, as opposed to buying must, like a majority of the region's other bodegas.

Chipiona is an area dedicated to growing Moscatel but most of the wine produced here is sold in bulk to the sherry houses of Jerez, El Puerto de Santa María and Sanlúcar. Bodegas César Florido is one of the few bodegas that is estate bottling. Flor grows year-round in Chipiona making the finos here very unique. Even more unique is the fact that this Fino is made from estate-grown Palomino from the Balbáina and Miraflores vineyards. The Fino is from 20-year-old vines on albariza soils with solera ageing of three years. The wine itself is light and soft with a pleasing saline quality that is due to the winery's proximity to the Atlantic Ocean.

And while the Moscatel grapes for his sweet wines come directly from Chipiona—because Moscatel thrives in sandy soils—the vineyards that are planted to Pedro Ximenez (Sherry's other sweet sister) are in Montilla-Morales, which is one of the six D.O.s in Andalusia that is approximately 225km from Jerez. And though Chipiona is dedicated to growing Moscatel, most of its wines are sold in bulk to the region's sherry houses. As one of the only producers of Moscatel to bottle his own wines, César lobbied the Consejo Regulador to no avail, to allow all six of his wines to be labelled "sherry." With three Moscatel cuvées that include Moscatel Dorado, Especial and Pasas, César Florido has single-handedly rescued the latter from extinction. Fermented with indigenous yeasts, the Moscatel Dorado is made from grapes that are not air-dried, but crushed and fermented to approximately 15% abv, before spending one year in the solera. Moscatel Pasas is made from grapes that are hand-selected on the vine and then dried on fields of sand for two to three weeks to better concentrate the effects of the sun. Once the fermentation is halted by the addition of neutral grape spirits, the wine is then aged in the solera for five to nine years before bottling

Cream Cruz el Mar is a traditional style wine made by blending 75% dry Oloroso with 25% sweet Moscatel (Muscat) from Chipiona followed by oxidative ageing in oak barrels using the traditional solera system of the region. The resultant wine is full bodied, dark, slightly sweet with notes of dried fruits and toffee. Great with blue cheese, foie gras and most desserts. For the Family Reserve Palo Cortado they use only top quality, hand-harvested grapes from the Miraflores vineyard, Hacienda "Viña Armijo". At first the wine is aged for around 5 years under "flor", a veil of yeast that gives the wines a unique fresh, salty character, accentuated by proximity to the Atlantic – around 50 metres – closer than any other Jerez bodega. Once the flor dies, the wine is then aged oxidatively for a minimum of 25 years in oak barrels using the traditional solera system of the region. Each year only 600-1000 bottles are drawn directly from the oldest barrels without clarification, fining or filtration.

Incredibly complex nose of dried fruits, roasted nuts, vanilla, caramel and spice from decades of ageing in old oak barrels.

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| NV | FINO CESAR | Sh |
| NV | FINO CESAR – ½ bottle | Sh |
| NV | FINO EN RAMA PENA DEL AGUILA | Sh |
| NV | AMONTILLADO | Sh |
| NV | MOSCATEL DORADO | Sh |
| NV | MOSCATEL DORADO - ½ bottle | Sh |
| NV | MOSCATEL PASAS | Sh |
| NV | MOSCATEL PASAS - ½ bottle | Sh |
| NV | PENA DEL AGUILA PALO CORTADO – ½ bottle | Sh |
| NV | CREAM CRUZ DEL MAR | Sh |
| NV | CREAM CRUZ DEL MAR – ½ bottle | Sh |

The Pyrennies went en masse to Andalucia
 And drank copious quantities of Manzanilla
 The bodegas did pour
 Wines from under the flor
 “Sherry amour!” said Lupo, then “grazie mille!”

Sherry? Oh dear, no, no, no. I’d be sucked into his trap. One of us has got to stay on guard. He’s so mauve. We don’t know what he’s planning (Uncle Monty, Withnail & I)

BODEGAS RAMIRO IBANEZ, Sanlúcar
UBE won knobe – the flor-ce is with these proto-sherries.

These are still white wines made under flor from several old Palomino clones, rediscovering styles of Manzanilla that were made in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Ramiro Ibáñez Espinar is a restless and talented winemaker who, with experience in Bordeaux and Australia as well as his native Sanlúcar, runs a winemaking consultancy under the name GL Cero used by various bodegas in the Marco de Jerez. He is hugely enthusiastic about the potential of albariza soil and the recovery of traditional local grape varieties, many of which are all but lost, and which are no longer permitted in the Consejo regulations. He makes all sorts of interesting wines to demonstrate the terroir and personality of each vineyard and grape variety without letting too much flor obscure it. Ramiro was a founder member of Manifiesto 119, a group of like-minded local wine producers who want to experiment with the old varieties and winemaking techniques, make unfortified sherry and give more importance to the grapes and the vineyard, not to mention restoring casas de viña. They chose this name after the 119 grape varieties (40 of them in Cádiz) catalogued in Andalucía in 1807 by the first Spanish ampelographer, Simón de Rojas Clemente. Like Ramiro the group makes table wines as well as Sherry, and while few of them carry the DO, they are still sought-after and hard to obtain, due to the small quantities made. One of the projects is called UBE and focuses on old vine Palomino from different clones fermented in an old Manzanilla butt without flor.

UBE Miraflores uses old clones of Palomino and is mix of three different albarizas (chalky soil with high fossil content): lentejuelas (grainy); tosca cerrada (lower chalk content, harder) and lustrillo (chalky with iron) The grapes derive from five different vineyards of the Pago Miraflores area in Sanlúcar – the largest and most heterogeneous vineyard area of Sanlúcar. This blend of different albariza soils and vineyard gives the equivalent of a “village” Sanlúcar wine. Carrascal is from the Las Vegas vineyard, the highest in the Pago de Carrascal, and the closest area to the Atlantic. The vines are original rootstock Palomino and the terroir is lentejuelas, a grainy type of Albariza soil. The wine is fermented in 500-litre sherry butts with indigenous yeasts, aged in very old barrels and bottled after a light filtration and minimal sulphites added. What is also delightful is the uplift of beautiful chalky acidity and the wines weigh in at an eminently drinkable 12-12.5% abv. Los Angeles (thirst)slakers!

Encrucijado is young Palo Cortado made the old way, using the old grapes: 40% Rey, 40% Perruno and 20% Palomino, all grown in albariza in the Pago Miraflores. After manual harvesting, they undergo 24 hours of sunning giving a natural strength of 14.5% and are foot trodden. It is not fortified. Two reasons why it cannot have a DO, but that doesn’t matter. The barrel-fermented mosto supports a layer of flor for four months before dying off naturally and the wine is aged statically for two years on its lees, long enough for it to decide its future. It is bottled en rama. In the old days when there was much less Fino, the wines were classified as Palmas, Cortados and Rayas and this is how a Cortado would have been. Encrucijada is Spanish for crossroads, meaning the wine has just decided its direction. Pure and attractive, slightly sweet, ripe dried fruit aromas; semi raisined grapes, quince and apricot and a faint dry, almost bitter balancing flor note. There is a very slight oxidative apple note which, with that hint of flor, gives it more of a sherry character.

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|---------|--------------------------------|----|
| 2023 | UBE MIRAFLORES | W |
| 2023 | UBE PAGANILLA | W |
| 2023 | UBE REVENTON | W |
| 2023 | UBE CASERIO DE MIRAFLORES ALTA | W |
| 2020 | UBE CARRASCAL | W |
| 2018/19 | UBE MAINA | W |
| 2020 | AGOSTADO PALO CORTADO | W |
| 2020 | PANDORGA PEDRO XIMENEZ – 50cl | Sw |

TRES MIRADAS BY ALVEAR, MONTILLA, Andalusia ~ Organic methods

Founded in 1729, Alvear is not only the oldest winery in Montilla, but in all Andalusia. The family-owned company has been around for almost three centuries, making it the second oldest winery in Spain and its brand C.B. the fifth oldest in the country. The Montilla based company has maintained its artisanal and familial character over time, staying true to its principles and philosophy as it grew.

Today the stewardship of the winery's acquired knowledge and values lies with the eighth generation of the family. The winery also looks to the future, as it has done throughout its history.

Tres Miradas is a series of vintage white wines made by Bodegas Alvear, first launched in 2017 as a collaboration between maverick winemakers Envinate and Alvear. In 2019, after two vintages, Ramiro Ibanez took over as the winemaking consultant for the series.

Since then the project is even more focused on terroir, leaving out the skin maceration experiment of the early years.

The range of wines offers an interesting insight in the different terroirs of the Montilla region. Each wine is an expression of Pedro Ximénez from different plots. Pedro Ximénez is the noble variety of the Montilla-Moriles Denomination of Origin, as well as the Alvear vineyards and wines. Originally from the Rhine region, it is said that it was brought to Andalusia by a soldier from the Flanders tercios who gives it its name.

The vineyards are located on very calcareous soils. Two types are which are distinguished in the area: "albarizas" or "alberos", composed of limestone and permeable soil with little organic matter content and low productivity, where the longest and most balanced ripening grapes are obtained; and the "ruedos", reddish soils due to the presence of iron salts. Albariza soil is really the key driver in the wines, but also the marked differences in composition, altitude, and the use of tinajas in the élevage of the wines, adds to their uniqueness.

We begin with the village wine, so to speak. In Montilla this is often simply called a Vino de Pueblo. The Pedro Ximénez here comes from a combination of plots between the Riofrío Alto and Cerro Macho estates located in the Sierra de Montilla, considered the Grand Cru of Montilla-Moriles. The vines are over 50-years-old, bush trained, and farmed sustainably, growing upon albariza. Albariza is poor in organic matter, of a simple mineral composition, and a crumbly consistency. This is a material that is capable of retaining water in an area which experiences less than 600L of rainfall per year, and for its drainage, which prevents them from accumulating water and salts. Once the fruit is harvested, it is directly pressed without maceration and fermented in tinajas, a traditional concrete amphora of 4800 litre. The wine ages under 'velo de flor' for eight months before bottling, giving it a sherry-esque flavour and texture.

Ladera Benavente originates from two parcels on the northern-facing bank of the Benavente arroyo from vineyards planted in 1950.

Old head-trained vines are farmed completely sustainably without organic certification, but eschewing fungicides, pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and irrigation. Bunches are destemmed and pressed in a horizontal pneumatic press. The must ferments spontaneously in tinajas, traditional concrete amphora (4,800L). After fermentation in tinaja, the wine rests under the velo de flor for eight months before bottling. Ladera de Benavente expresses the most vertical and freshest single vineyard wine in the 3 Miradas line-up.

Paraje de Riofrío, a blend of old bush-vine parcels located in the highest part Paraje de Riofrío Alto in the Sierra de Montilla de Calidad Superior. After fermentation, the wine stays in tinajas for eight months before being racked to old fino casks, where the wine rests for twelve months under velo de flor. Lemon yellow with golden reflection in appearance, this is intense and complex, with aromas of baked apple, fennel, and dried chamomile. Full-bodied and silky with well-integrated acidity on the palate.

Cerro Macho and Cerro Franco are the two highest plots in the Sierra de Montilla, near the edge of Riofrío Alto, both at an altitude of around 600 metres above sea level. While Cerro Macho is oriented to the east, Cerro Franco faces south east. Soils are again limestone-based albariza. Grapes are harvested from old vines, picked early to retain more freshness. Fermentation in both wines took place in old botas that used to belong to the solera of the Fino CB. After the malolactic fermentation the wine stayed in the same casks, under a light layer of flor, for a further 22 months.

These are two brilliant complex wines that reward sipping, pondering and matching to food! Cerro Franco has aromas of yellow apple, juicy pear and yeasty sourdough up front. Also stone fruits. Then dried herbs and traces of oxidation are coming out, as well as hints of fino. Almond and walnut. Some of the chamomile notes of Manzanilla too, in a slightly floral way. Even though this is a dry wine, the roundness and implied sweetness of Pedro Ximénez is noticeable. Quinces and ripe apple. Nice acidity and lemon zest to balance this character. In the background there is a mineral hint of gravel, hay and chalk. Hints of youngish fino wine. Some leafy notes and saline elements in the end.

Cerro Macho has an earthier profile. Sandy notes greet you then crusty bread. The aromas of yellow and green apples are clearly present, almonds and wild fennel too. In the mouth, a hint of quince and pear before the nuttier side of the wine appears. Throughout there is a good whack of citrus in the background – the acidity seems a tad higher than Cerro Franco. A lightly salty touch to the finish completes the wine.

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|------|-------------------------------|---|
| 2021 | VINO DE PUEBLO | W |
| 2021 | LADERA DE BENAVENTE | W |
| 2019 | PARAJE DE RIO FRIO ALTO | W |
| 2020 | MONTILLA CLASICO CERRO FRANCO | W |
| 2020 | MONTILLA CLASICO CERRO MACHO | W |
| 2020 | VINA DE ANTONIN | W |

HACIENDA LA PARILLA, ANDALUCIA ~ Organic methods

El Pinto is a collaboration between Les Caves de Pyrene and Hacienda La Parrilla. The idea behind this project is to create excellent value wines, from sustainably grown grapes, as naturally as possible, wines that will be identified with the characteristic of the area. The vineyards are part of a 500-ha estate in the San Jose del Valle, inland, 35 km south-east of Jerez, in beautiful countryside close to the Sierra de Cadiz. The estate is made up of old olive trees, vineyards (17ha), pasture (where Iberico pigs roam free) and other crops. Owned by the Rebuelta González brothers, who built the winery in an old olive mill, within their charming ranch house which dates to 1881. The vineyard is situated on a steep slope on pure white albariza soils and is farmed organically (not certified). The white is, of course, from the Palomino grape, that provides the base of most of the dry sherries in the Jerez region. Grapes are manually harvested and whole-bunch pressed into stainless steel tanks, where they undergo a fermentation at cool temperatures with indigenous yeasts. The wine also undergoes a natural malolactic conversion. After a brief period on the lees, El Pinto Palomino is bottled without filtration or fining, just some sulphur. The wine is bright golden yellow, aromatically suggestive of dried apples and yellow cherries, has bonny acidity, chalky minerality and the requisite saline lick on the finish. Tintilla de Rota, which is red as its name implies, is native to the province of Cádiz and is included in the list of approved varieties for Vinos de la Tierra de Cádiz. Its bunches and berries are comparatively small, it ripens late, is not particularly robust and is sensitive to drought. Its acidity is good; however, its yield is low and it was at serious risk of disappearing until its production was stepped up in the mid-20th century, an almost unimaginable fate for a wine which achieved such distinction in the two previous centuries. In Andalucía, Tintilla has been present for at least 500 years. The terroir of Rota revolves around poor sandy soils called “arenas”, these soils causing the vines root very deeply, until they reach the clay underneath the sand. The grapes for this wine were destemmed and crushed into stainless steel vats, where spontaneous fermentation started with indigenous yeasts accompanied by gentle daily punch-downs of the cap for 10 days, and some brief pump-overs. After ten days the grapes were pressed and then the wine stayed on the lees until bottling. This Tintilla de Rota is verging on the full-bodied with ripe red fruits aromas and cherries, and notes of herbs macerated in kirsch. Mine’s a Pinto!

2023 EL PINTO PALOMINO W

2023 EL PINTO TINTILLA DEL ROTA R

R

BODEGA TAJINASTE, GARCIA FARRAIS, Tenerife

Tajinaste is a small family-owned winery located in the Valle de la Orotava. It is on the north side of Tenerife and therefore heavily influenced by the vientos alisios, or trade winds, which help moderate the climate of the islands. Agustín García and his family farm a total of six hectares (15 acres). Tajinaste’s vineyards are situated between 300 and 500 metres above sea level. The oldest stocks of the varieties Listán Negro and Listán Blanco were planted around 1914. The Tradicion is 100% listan negra: Vivid ruby-red. Spicy redcurrant and cherry scents segue into dried rose and blood orange. Juicy and penetrating, offering lively red fruit flavours and a hint of black pepper. Finishes brisk and appealingly sweet, with gentle tannins and lingering red fruit notes.

2023 LISTAN BLANCO W

2023 TRADICION LISTAN NEGRO R

JUGO VINS, CHARLIE PRYMAKA, Mallorca ~ organic practising

This part of Mallorca is composed of clay and calcareous mix, varying from lime rich to iron rich. Some vineyards are more pebbly/rocky, some more clay based. Jugo Vins, the project of one Charlie Prymaka – ex-Les Caves de Pyrène - is based in the east of the island in a region known as Pla y Llevant and a mere ten minutes from the beach. The winery itself is set in the vineyard (Cati Ribot). Farming has been organic (since forever - Cati is a 3rd generation grape grower) and some biodynamic preparations are used with the help of Catis best friend Joan Rubió - an ex Recerado legend. No additives at all in the cellar – even SO2. We have shipped two wines from Charlie. In the Poc de Tot varieties are Sirah, Escursac, Callet, Callet Negrella, one plant of Chardonnay, a few boxes of Merlot, Fogoneu, Prensall Blanc, Espero de Gall (and a couple not so legal ones ;). All from the home vineyard. This 300 bottles blend of champions is a collaboration with Cati Ribot (winemaker from whom Charlie buys his fruit). They will make un Poc de tot (Mallorquin for a bit of everything - poco de todo) every year with whatever’s left and aim to make a white too next vintage. Jugosa weighs in at a slimline 10.69%. This wine was inspired by Evan Lewandowski’s Feints - using different varieties but the same method – the objective to make a wine for whenever that just “disappears”.

2023 JUGOSA NEGRE ~ Sirah, Moscatell R

GALMES I RIBOT, CATI RIBOT, Mallorca ~ organic practising

Cati Ribot started making natural wines in 2019. Her project was born out of the family bodega, Galmés i Ribot, where they had been making more conventional wines in the past. She is a third-generation viñador. They have 13ha, organic certified since 2010, they also use Biodynamic methods. A few years ago, Cati realised that the way forward was to focus on local varieties and not go down the inter/national route. In 2006 she started a joint project with the IRFAP (Balearic gov't department set up to study local forgotten varieties). They planted an experimental vineyard with Escursac, Argamussa, Giró Negre, Vinater Blanc & Callet Negrella. Once the results of the studies came though, they decided to graft many of their vineyards to these varieties - in particular, Escursac & Callet Negrella - plus other varieties since authorised (and some not). They grubbed up the Chardonnay and regrafted Cab and Merlot and now focus solely on Giró Ros, Prensai Blanc, Escursac, Callet, Fogoneu, Callet Negrella, Esperó de Gall, Giró Negre & Malvasia.

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|------|-------------------------|----|
| 2022 | BOSQUETA BLANCO PET NAT | Sp |
| 2022 | SON LLEBRE BLANCO | W |
| 2022 | MALVASIA | W |
| 2022 | CAMBUIX ROSAT ~ 1 litre | Ro |
| 2021 | SON LLEBRE NEGRE | R |
| 2022 | ESCURAC NEGRE | R |

Ode to Wine

Day-coloured wine,
night-coloured wine,
wine with purple feet
or wine with topaz blood,
wine,
starry child
of earth,
wine, smooth
as a golden sword,
soft
as lascivious velvet,
wine, spiral-seashelled
and full of wonder,
amorous,
marine;
never has one goblet contained you,
one song, one man,
you are choral, gregarious,
at the least, you must be shared.
At times
you feed on mortal
memories;
your wave carries us
from tomb to tomb,
stonecutter of icy sepulchres,
and we weep
transitory tears;
your
glorious
spring dress
is different,
blood rises through the shoots,
wind incites the day,
nothing is left
of your immutable soul.
Wine
stirs the spring, happiness
bursts through the earth like a plant,
walls crumble,
and rocky cliffs,
chasms close,
as song is born.
A jug of wine, and thou beside me
in the wilderness.

sang the ancient poet.
Let the wine pitcher
add to the kiss of love its own.

My darling, suddenly
the line of your hip
becomes the brimming curve
of the wine goblet,
your breast is the grape cluster,
your nipples are the grapes,
the gleam of spirits lights your hair,
and your navel is a chaste seal
stamped on the vessel of your belly,
your love an inexhaustible
cascade of wine,
light that illuminates my senses,
the earthly splendour of life.

But you are more than love,
the fiery kiss,
the heat of fire,
more than the wine of life;
you are
the community of man,
translucency,
chorus of discipline,
abundance of flowers.
I like on the table,
when we're speaking,
the light of a bottle
of intelligent wine.
Drink it,
and remember in every
drop of gold,
in every topaz glass,
in every purple ladle,
that autumn laboured
to fill the vessel with wine;
and in the ritual of his office,
let the simple man remember
to think of the soil and of his duty,
to propagate the canticle of the wine.

Pablo Neruda

PORTUGAL

VALE DA CAPUCHA, PEDRO MARQUES, Lisboa – Organic certified

Pedro Marques' Vale da Capucha wines are from organically farmed vines situated in the Lisbon region around eight km from the Atlantic Ocean in limestone soils rich with fossils. The precept is simple: maximum human work in the vineyard and minimum intervention in the winery. The resulting terroir-driven wines come from a medley of Portuguese varieties: Arinto; Fernão Pires; Alvarinho; Antão Vaz; Gouveio; Viosinho; Touriga Nacional and Tinta Roriz.

The Alvarinho is hand harvested with low yields. The grapes are whole bunch pressed. The juice ferments slowly on the lees for three weeks before being racked off and spending a further 20 months on the fine lees and the wine is then bottled without filtration or fining and with a wee bit of SO2.

The Gouveio (Portugal's version of Godello) is an addition to our portfolio. This white has a brilliant line of acidity allied to some crunchy seashell minerality.

Arinto is a versatile grape, grown in most of Portugal's wine regions. In Vinho Verde country, it goes by the name of Pedernã. It makes vibrant wines with lively, refreshing acidity, often with a mineral quality, along with gentle flavours reminiscent of apple, lime and lemon. Pedro's version tickles the tongue with maximum prejudice.

Pedro subscribes to the less-is-more approach. And leaving the wines to come into focus in their own good time.

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|------|---|---|
| 2018 | VALE DA CAPUCHA VINHO BRANCO ~ Fernao Pires, Arinto | W |
| 2018 | VALE DA CAPUCHA ALVARINHO CEDRO ALVARAO | W |
| 2019 | VALE DA CAPUCHA ARINTO | W |
| 2019 | VALE DA CAPUCHA PALHETE | R |

CASA DE CELLO, Entre-Douro e Minho and Dão

For most of the 20th Century, the Dão region in northern Portugal never quite lived up to its potential. Due to government regulation, private firms were forced to buy finished wine from ten co-operatives scattered throughout the region. This system was finally changed in 1989 with Portugal's entry into the EU. Since then, a winemaking revolution has occurred in Dão and throughout Portugal, as young winemakers and new property owners have been bringing top winemaking techniques to the native Portuguese varieties. Owner João Pedro Araujo of Casa de Cello has teamed up with Pedro Anselmo, star winemaker of Quinta do Ameal and others, to make Quinta da Vegia. Located in the Dão region near Penalva de Castelo, Quinta da Vegia has 20 ha of vineyard planted to Touriga Nacional, Aragonês (the local clone of Tempranillo) and Trincadeira Preta. Solo Franco is their unoaked cuvee, bursting with crunchy red berry fruit, plus food-friendly earthy and spicy notes. Deep, bright red. Spicy, almost saline aromas of fresh red berries, plums, and cherry skin. Lively and sweet, the red fruit qualities showing striking purity and focus. Really delicious wine with impressive lift and energy to the finish, which leaves a strong impression of pure, fresh strawberry and raspberry fruit. Already drinking well. – Tanzer The Vinho Verde, in the words of two famous adverts, does what it says on the label whilst staying sharp to the bottom of the glass. A blend of Avesso and Loureira it conveys the customary pear and apple fruit aromas, with a touch of floral and green notes. Lovely succulent fruit on the palate, with lots of lemon and dry, appley qualities and very dry, pithy lemon finish.

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| 2022 | VINHO VERDE BRANCO QUINTA DE SANJOANNE | W |
| 2020 | DAO TINTO QUINTA DA VEGIA SOLO FRANCO | R |

APHROS, VASCO CROFT, Vinho Verde – Biodynamic (certified Biodyvin)

With exceptional conditions of soil and solar exposition, the vineyards lie on softly inclined hills looking over the Lima River. More than 20 hectares of an ecologically sound territory, rich in biodiversity, in which we find, besides the vines, forests with species of acacia, oak, beech, pine and eucalyptus, chestnuts orchards and a park of century old monumental trees. The vines of Casal do Paço are situated in a south facing amphitheatre, on gentle slopes, 1km north of the Lima River. Sheltered by hills and forests from the north and west winds, they receive welcome breezes from the south bringing the Atlantic influence that characterizes the freshness of the wines. We begin with a Loureiro which displays a variety of pleasant citrus fruits on the palate such as lemon and tangerine. Fruits, flowers and minerality are the key notes within a delicate balance between sweetness and acidity.

Vinho Verde is the product of its micro-climate; the result of the richness and purity of the land which is the legacy of centuries of agriculture; a sandy, granitic soil that endows the wines with a special acidity and minerality: these are the key features of the terroir. A classic Teinturier grape (see Alicante Bouschet and Saperavi) Vinhão is one of the oddities in which the juice from the flesh is crimson not clear. The red grapes, after being destalked go directly into fermentation vats or the “lagares” together with their skins, where they go through a process of maceration to maximize the extraction of colour and polyphenolic elements.

Dark as the inside of a coal mine at midnight the Aphros Vinho Verde has impenetrable opacity, presents a slightly prickly sensation in the mouth, and then bursts out smilingly with thick gobs of bramble jam and exotic black cherries and black raspberries. The tannins are chewy, agreeably abrasive, and, twinned with the angular acidity, create a pucker-sour-sizzle combination which confronts the palate with plenty of difficult textural adjustments. You can almost smell the colour of this distilled purple juice; it's as if the skins had been freshly ripped off the flesh and just finished fermenting in the glass. The texture is part stalky and part bitter chocolate, but it is the kinetic acidity that simultaneously drives the tannins over the gums and helps to alleviate their astringency. This is a prime example where cultural context might provide the narrative necessary to appreciate the spirit of the wine. Served chilled with some slow cooked shoulder of pork or one of those artery-coating Asturian bean stews this wine's snappy vitality would not only cut through, but dissolve, fat. I can think of few better drinks to be supped al fresco, preferably in a carafe, where the thrilling, almost unreal intensity of the colour and the joyfully rasping rusticity would seem to laugh in the face of wine convention.

The Palhete harks back to a traditional Portuguese style, a co-ferment of white and red grapes. Its colour and texture remind one of Jura grapes, with the sour flavours provided by the Vinhão—despite it being only 20 percent of the blend.

Vasco write: “It is hard to credit what a natural and effortless endeavour it was to make this conversion. The amphorae (which are very difficult to find) that found their way to me were from Alentejo, all six from the same supplier, lined with beeswax by a marvellous potter (who is also a healer and is conversant with plant medicine). In the cellar, all I had to do was to remove a lot of electric cables, build a 20 cm step for the amphorae, and change the lighting. As for equipment I bought a perfectly functioning manual pump for 180,00 euros, had a manual de-stemmer made by a carpenter, and recycled a crusher and a press from my great grandmother's time.

We're taking two different wines: a 100% Loureiro, which is now fermenting in three amphorae, each with a different proportion of stems/whole grapes/must; and a « Palhete », a blend of 80% Loureiro and 20% Vinhão.

The Palhete is in line with the tradition of ancient Portuguese wines. Most red wines in Iberia were in fact blends of white and red grapes before the XVIII century. That is why they were called « Tinto », meaning « tinted. ” In medieval times the symbolic image that monks had in mind, when making red wine, was the blood of Christ. A wine that to contain light and transparency within itself. In Alentejo, the Portuguese region where the amphora tradition has been established for 2000 years, white wines (from amphora) are the most typical and appreciated.”

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|------|------------------------------------|-------|
| 2022 | APHROS PHAUNUS PET NAT ROSE | Sp/Ro |
| 2023 | APHROS LOUREIRO VINHO VERDE BRANCO | W |
| 2022 | APHROS PHAUNUS LOUREIRO AMPHORA | W |
| 2022 | AFROS VINHAO VINHO VERDE TINTO | R |
| 2022 | APHROS PHAUNUS PALHETE AMPHORA | Ro |

ITALY — STATE OF THE MANY NATIONS REPORT

During the last few years, we have enjoyed several sensuous epiphanies in Italy. Imagine wallowing in a heated spa swimming pool toasting a snow-capped Mont Blanc with a glass of sparkling Blanc de Morgex, or tasting 1961 Barolo in the Borgogno winery, or eating almonds under the pergola vines in Sankt Magdalener...

Much hithering and thithering has allowed us to probe the hidden corners of this amazing country. Friuli, abutting Slovenia, has provided perhaps the most varied and recondite taste sensations: the biodynamic wines of Benjamin Zidarich, for example, (consider salty-mineral Vitovska and sapid, cherry-bright Terrano), the more constructed amber efforts of Princic nodding and winking to Gravner. The wines are organic and delicious, drinkable now and endlessly ageworthy. Another estate that prides itself on using no chemicals is Principiano in Barbaresco. The single vineyard Barolos are worthy of cellaring and the baby version is a wonderful introduction to the noble Nebbiolo. Two superb Brunellos from Pian dell' Orino and Il Paradiso di Manfredi. Uncompromising pure wines at the former; no kowtowing to the palates of certain American wine critics at this establishment, whilst the authentic Brunellos from Manfredi magically capture the essential purity of the Sangiovese grape.

When you're choosing Italian wine, you don't have to sacrifice yourself on the altar of orthodoxy. PG has for too long stood not for Parental Guidance but for vapid Pinot Grigio or Pappy Gruel. Ditch the dishwater! How does unfiltered Prosecco, made in the ancestral fashion from pre-phyloxera vines, sound instead? Or Sicilian Cerasuolo – fermented in amphorae? Or perhaps, you have an irrational hankering for a Verdicchio with umpteen years on the lees? Or a dry Lacrima di Morro d'Alba? And wouldn't you like to open a bottle of Vecchio Samperi (a dry, unfortified traditional-style Marsala) from Marco de Bartoli and know that it would be still in perfect condition in several weeks' time? From the communes of Valle d'Aosta, nestling on the Swiss border, to the baking volcanic plug of Pantelleria swept by hot winds off the Sahara, every corner of Italy throws up a grape variety, a quirky tradition, or some delicious vinous oddity that keeps the most jaded palate on taste-bud tenterhooks.

In The Vineyard – The Biodynamic Clock

We don't set out deliberately to buy wines that are organic and biodynamic – these labels are practically irrelevant as many wine growers adapt elements of natural philosophy or vineyard practice in order to make better wines from healthier vines, but, it so happens that about half of our Italian wineries are working to a consistent and rigorous programme of sustainable viticulture and minimal intervention. The link between organic/biodynamic farming and terroir (or typicity) is surely undeniable, and, if it cannot be proven by lab technicians in the sterile conditions of a laboratory, it can certainly be tasted time and again in the wines. Of course, good winemaking exalts the expression of terroir, but it doesn't have to be overtly interventionist. This year, at our "Real Wine Tasting" we brought together growers from various regions of Italy – the link being that they all worked without chemicals in the vineyard (encouraging biodiversity) and without adjustments in the winery. With no make-up and no pretension, the wines simply tasted of themselves; the strong, distinctive flavours announced proudly that the wines could *only* come where they came from, a bonus and a relief in the face of global pressure to create styles to please the "common denominator palate (whatever that might be). Thank goodness for diversity; *vive la difference*, as they don't say in Rome.



Enotria Tellus

For whereso'er I turn my ravished eyes/ Gay gilded scenes and shining prospects rise; /Poetic fields encompass me around/And still I seem to tread on classic ground.

~ Joseph Addison – Letter From Italy

In the last couple of years, we have assembled an agency portfolio of “Italian terroiristes”, a group of growers dedicated to producing wines of purity, typicity and individuality, who are not only perfectionists and passionate about their own wines but also fine ambassadors for their respective regions. Our idea was to represent growers from both Italy’s classic and lesser-seen regions. From the Alpine valleys of Valle d’Aosta to its baking southern Mediterranean coast Italy is many countries with a fascinating diversity of cultures, climates and wine styles. It is our intention to demonstrate the Italian wines can match the French for regional diversity and sensitivity to terroir. We have examples of relatively rare traditional indigenous varieties such as Slarina, Barratuciat, Aleatico, Monica, Minnella, Grecanico, and also the best expression of better-known grapes such as Sangiovese, Nebbiolo and Montepulciano.

Californian Chianti

Perceived convention is the curse of interesting wine. Take Chianti – once upon a time in this country, it was viewed as low-grade quaff-juice, a fiasco in a fiasco, no more than rough-and-unready red wine. Then Tuscany was given the kiss of money and the DOCG pulled itself by its bootstraps (or rootstocks) and multidimensional, complex, relatively extractive and increasingly expensive wines were produced. Modernity, in the guise of expert oenologists, cleansed the wines; lashings of new oak transformed them into the safe international style that we recognise and – ahem – applaud today. All to the good, of course, but... reconfiguring and overcomplicating wine in the winery suppresses any whiff of individualism or sniff of unorthodoxy and has had a knock-on effect. Now when we taste rustic Chianti, we think it somehow “incomplete”. Unfortunately, notions of correctness condition our palates & colour our critical judgement, and we succumb to the great intentionalist fallacy of wine criticism by assuming that we know the grower’s purpose better than they do, and that it must be inevitably to manufacture perfectly balanced, fruitfully fruity, clean-as-a-whistle, commercial wines. In this respect, as Voltaire observed: “The best is the enemy of the good.”

False or True

Imperfection can be a kind of truth and variability is an intrinsic quality of so many interesting wines. Mascarello’s Nebbiolos, for example, are full of challenging contrasts: tough yet delicate; full yet soft; fruity yet mineral. Their colour, an orange-tile red, and earthy-truffly aromas, deter drinkers who are searching for “melonosity” in their wines. That Valentini’s wines from Abruzzo excite even more debate (amongst the privileged few who have sampled them) is a rare quality in itself: to some the wines are a testament to passion, obsession, individuality and purity, a reconnection to terroir, to others they are “quasi-defective”. One journalist told me that the Trebbiano gave her “goosebumps”. (Good goosebumps!) The great thing about Valentini’s wines is that they are constantly changing in the glass, shyly revealing then retreating into the shell, always suggestive, never obvious, inevitably very mineral, certainly very strange – and, because they are released with bottle age, they exhibit intriguing and offbeat secondary and reductive aromas. We are inculcated to respect transparent cleanness, and to accept the notion that a wine that is not clean must, ipso facto, be faulty. This view is an immaculate misconception. The greatest wines may be borderline mad and downright impertinent. The genius of the wine that does not surrender its secrets in the first aromatic puff is also often missed; I suppose if people want absolute consistency they won’t venture beyond the tried and trusted; if they want to be touched by greatness they will risk drinking something that defies easy categorisation. We tend to search for exactitude in wine that does not exist in nature and evaluate it by a pernicky sniff and a suspicious sip. Wines, however, can evolve, or change in context; you can no more sip a wine and know its total character than look at one brushstroke of a painting or hear a single musical note in a symphony and understand the whole. In other words, with certain wines, we have to drink the bottle, to see if our initial judgement was correct. And the truth can be hard to drink.

People are still fixated by labels and reputations and ignore what lies within the bottle. It is not so difficult, for example, to sell sherry anymore – the brand recognition facilitates this – but try to suggest a solera-style Vernaccia di Oristano from Attilio Contini or Vecchio Samperi from Marco de Bartoli and you will startle a veritable herd of bewilderbeest. No wonder Marco said “Marsala is dead. No one drinks it”. These wines don’t transcend the genre – they *are* the genre. On the one hand, critics claim to be utterly objective, but objectivity per se can be utterly conformist and lead to what Keats called a “pale contented sort of discontent”. Sometimes we need a leap of faith (or understanding) to appreciate recondite or reserved wine styles. The fault is occasionally not in the wine, but in the taster and contemporary arbiters of taste. Dedicated followers of fashion – journalists – often write for their audience and a common denominator of taste; they are primarily interested in what is widely available and consequently what can be sold commercially. It is patronising to assume that a wine that has been made for centuries in a particular old-fashioned style is an irrelevant frivolity.

Better red than... dead boring

No one ever said that tasting Italian red wines was a doddle. Obduracy is a caricature of Italian reds and although we shouldn’t brush all reds with the same tar, so to speak, their very identity nevertheless rests on a familiar sour bite, that peculiar astringency that makes perfect sense with food. Flattering wines rarely possess the edge and drive to challenge hearty food, therefore what’s tough for the palate – in this case – is definitely sauce for the goose. Even the grape names romantically suggest the style of the wine: Sangiovese (the blood of Jove) or Negroamaro (bitter-black). A bloody-bitter wine with edges is a wine that challenges the palate; there are enough denatured beauties and vacant models in the world of wine. Italy’s contrasts are manifold: the classic and the modern; the north and the south; the raw and the cooked; the bitter and the sweet. There’s a charm in contrariness, in being *capatosta*.

VALLE D'AOSTA

There was an Old Man of Aosta
Who possessed a large Cow, but he lost her;
But they said, 'Don't you see,
she has rushed up a tree?
You invidious Old Man of Aosta!'

LA CAVE DU VIN BLANC DE MORGEX ET DE LA SALLE, MORGEX, Valle d'Aosta

Vin de Morgex, also called Bianco dei ghiacciai (glacier wine), is cultivated at an altitude of 1300 metres, at the foot of Monte Bianco (or, as the French call it, Mont Blanc – a mountain named after a fancy biro) in the heart of Valle d'Aosta. This is the highest region from which wine is produced in all of Europe something which I may mention repeatedly in this discourse. Blanc de Morgex is an extremely old grape species. Legend states that it was imported to Italy by Vallese sharecroppers who arrived in the Aosta Valley half way through the seventeenth century to repopulate the area after an epidemic. Even today, it is cultivated under the characteristic stone pergolas that are a legacy from Roman viticulture. Low and supported by wooden poles, the pergolas scale the sides of the mountains just a few kilometres from Aosta, between the areas of Morgex and La Salle. The vine owes its strength and extraordinary qualities to its resistance to cold temperatures and snow. Indeed, it is not unusual for the typically bright green grapes to be covered in snow and ice at harvesting time. Furthermore, this capacity to adapt itself to the harshest of climates has protected it from the phylloxera epidemic.

The tiny town of Morgex is only a few kilometres from the trendy alpine resort area of Courmayeur. Its vineyards produce the self-styled "highest white wine in Europe" (there – told you I'd mention it again). The Dora Baltea river is the region's only sliver of non-mountainous terrain and is the lifeblood of Valle d'Aosta's viticulture. Its flow keeps the air moving and the clouds away; the gorge traps summer heat enabling the grapes to ripen. They call it "heroic viticulture," a justifiable epithet given the vines precariously perched on steep terraces.

This wine has all the unexpected charm of an upturned apple-cheeked Heidi figure being pursued across a fragrant alpine meadow by a malevolent Renault Mégane.

Straw-yellow in colour, with pale green nuances, its bouquet evokes mountain herbs with notes of fresh hay. Hawthorn, broom, lemon, almond, apple, pear and peach jostle delicately on the nose. The palate tracks the aromas; a crisp attack is, however, nicely balanced with intense and agreeable flavours. The finish is persistent with lingering flavours of apple, pear and citrus. The grape variety is called Blanc de Morgex, although is more technically known as Prié Blanc (and in Switzerland's Valais region as Bernarde). Chalk another one up to the grape detective!

The sheer beauty of these soaring mountain vineyards is made even more arresting by a time-honoured system called pergola bassa, or low pergola, where the vines are trained near the ground in trellised arbours with stone columns surrounded by stone walls. According to La Cave's winemaker Gianluca Telloli, "The low pergola has been used for centuries here because it protects the vines from wind and heavy snowfall, while allowing them to benefit from heat accumulated in the ground during the daytime." Yet the low pergola presents many difficulties, too. Harvesters must pick the grapes on their knees and, in some cases, while lying flat on their backs.

Telloli explains that the stone walls surrounding individual plots and the enormous piles of rocks heaped in a seemingly haphazard manner among the terraces have a function beyond aesthetics. "Centuries ago, the peasants realized how important the heat conducting capabilities of the stones were. We've kept the ancient stone walls and rocks because they really help retain heat during the cool nights, which is crucial for the grapes' maturation."

An ice wine from Valle d'Aosta? From the Prié Blanc grape harvested in December when the vineyards are swathed in snow. Unusually, it is the wine that is the vehicle for the wood rather than the other way round, and, in this case, cherry, juniper and chestnut amongst others lend their subtle tones to the finished product. It has a delicious burnished apple flavour, not dissimilar to a Tokaji. Throw a servant on the roaring log fire and sip this elixir with some hot roasted chestnuts whilst humming a few bars of "Edelweiss".

Each year, in August, Morgex and La Salle are united in celebration: the venue of the festivities alternates from year to year between first one town, then the other. What better occasion for tasting the "highest wine in Europe" as well as savouring other specialities typical of the valley, among which the most famous is the fontina fonduta... Try also with raclette and Arnad lard, or drink it with a delicate first course dish, accompanied by white vegetable sauces with radicchio or artichokes.

2022 VALLE D'AOSTA BLANC DE MORGEX ET DE LA SALLE
NV "CHADELUNE" VIN DE GLACE – 50cl

W
Sw

3-Mercaptohexanol: An Aroma Impact Compound of Petite Arvine Wine (*could this be the most boring and unromantic piece of trivial research ever?*)

“The characteristic aroma of Petite Arvine, a local white wine specialty prepared from the autochthone grape variety Petite Arvine in Valais, Switzerland, is described as intense in grapefruit and rhubarb flavours. In sensory evaluation by a triangle-test, the impact of thiol compounds on the wine aroma was demonstrated. In gas chromatography-olfactometry and gas chromatography-mass spectrometry analyses, 3-mercaptohexanol was identified as one of the key aroma compounds for the wine aroma. The concentration of 3-mercaptohexanol in 11 Petite Arvine wines was in the range between 210 and 6100 ng/L; all values being above the odour threshold value in aqueous ethanol solutions for this compound.”

A MORNING WITH THE DI BARROS

What you really want to wake up to is a refreshed blue sky and dazzling mountain vistas. This is the classic shortbread tin box scenery that you could just crunch forever.

Valle d’Aosta, to pinpoint the pinprick on the map, is a tiny autonomous region bordered by France to the west, Switzerland to the north and Piedmont to the south and east. It is divided into 74 communes. The population measuring around 120,000 is swelled in the winter by ski-folk who flock to the resorts and in the summer by hikers and other tourists.

First stop was Andrea and Elvira di Barrò’s tiny winery. We stood on the south facing hill of Torrette from which the cru of Torrette is named. The vineyards are between 500m-900m (the Mayolet grape grows at the highest altitude). As usual when you are in Italy or France you receive a short historical lesson about the region. Understanding wine, it seems, is not about simply tasting the product (reductive word!) in the bottle. It starts with the geography, the geology, the peculiarities of the micro-climate, the soil, the sub-soil, the health of the soil, the plant diversity, the insect life, the way the vineyards are laid out, the training and trellising. The people who live in the region and have given their lives to viticulture are an essential part of the dynamic and it is not beyond fancy, when you taste the wines, to experience something of the personality of the growers. Scientists would scoff at these whimsical notions, because all wine flavours to them are about bottled molecular exchange and transformation.

The valley was originally inhabited by Celts and Ligurians before being conquered by the Romans who founded Augusta Praetoria (from which derives the name Aosta) to secure the mountain passes and to fortify the region. After the fall of Rome, it was loosely held by a succession of Goths, Lombards, then the Burgundian kings, but was essentially a series of independent fiefs. In the late 12th century Thomas of Savoy granted a charter of liberties that preserved the autonomy, and though this was revoked centuries later that energy towards independence was never far from the surface. It was during the Middle Ages, however, that the wines of the Aosta Valley established a widespread reputation. And they acquired something of a “sacral” character as well because, according to numerous reports, they were used in the rite of exorcism.

Back to the di Barròs. Andrea told us the appellation of Torrette was effectively founded on this hill in 1837 and the wine made always comprised the indigenous grape varieties of Petite Rouge, Gros Rouge, Mayolet and Fumin. Originally, the grapes used to be harvested and left in small boxes for a few days to increase flavour concentration. He explained that this was an area of very little rainfall; add to this the sandy soils and great heat and you have vines which are extremely stressed and resultant natural low yields (30-35hl/ha). No chemicals are used in the vineyard.

Once again, the vineyard was composed of numerous minuscule plots. Some plunged straight into the valley towards the Dora Baltea River, others clung to the mountain precariously further up the slopes held in check by stone walls and rock faces. The sun beat down bouncing off the white rocks. According to Andrea the local almond harvest takes place here at the same time as in Sicily; this is essentially a Mediterranean climate with bells on.

For all that people discuss airily extreme viticulture it really reaches its literal and metaphorical peak in Valle d’Aosta. Extreme in the disposition of the vines, a row here a row there, on steep gradients, virtually impossible to tackle with machinery, extreme in the temperature variations and lack of rainfall, extreme(ly) small in the size of the operations and extreme in the cherishing of traditions and local varieties.



Back a bit... back a bit... back a bit... Oops, sorry, too far.

We descended to the winery which was surrounded by lilac, cherry-blossom and almond trees. Andrea glanced at the row of tanks. “We don’t do much in here”, he said, “no filtration, a little bit of bentonite for fining and a touch of sulphur at bottling”. We could make about 25,000 bottles, but we would rather accept the low yields and stick around 18,000. A quick calculation suggested he would be earning all of £8,000 per year for his wine (before tax!)

That winery tours could all be so mercifully brief. A tank is a tank is a tank for a’ that.

The wines, like the di Barròs themselves, are natural, generous and true to the locality. I am reminded that complexity is a false god to admire and that purity or typicity of flavour is achieved with less intervention and less conscious extraction. The greatest wines will; inevitably appeal both to our intellect and emotion; otherwise I will always favour the wines that appeal to my emotion, that I feel “on the pulses” over the glitteringly insincere, meretriciously vacuous, carefully constructed, highly wrought wines designed to win competitions and appeal to critics. The wines that attract me most have the quality of *gratia placendia*, a mouth-watering drinkability that slakes thirst and gets the gastric juices bubbling.

Poets, like painters, thus unskilled to trace
The naked nature and the living grace,
With gold and jewels cover every part,
And hide with ornaments their want of art

Piedmontese and Tuscan Cuisine...

Anna del Conte, in her excellent book “The Gastronomy of Italy” describes the cuisine of Piedmont as “both elegant and tied to the land”, a kind of *cucina orghese*.

Generally speaking, the diet is healthy. Garlic is an important seasoning, rice and vegetables are eaten in abundance: the asparagus of Santena, the onions of Ivrea, the cardoons of Chieri and the bell peppers of Asti. These vegetables, and others, come into their own in the best-known Piedmontese antipasti, *bagna caoda* (served warm, hence its name, meaning hot bath) a fondue-style garlic-anchovy dip. The best wines to cope with oily, salty, bitter nature of this dish are the native Freisa, and, at a pinch, a youthful Barbera, otherwise a Favorita, with its evocation of things Mediterranean, would suffice admirably.

The white truffles of Alba are legendary. As well as being grated over risotto and incorporated into pasta dishes, local classics include ovuli fungi and white truffle salad and bruschetta of truffle cream and anchovy fillets layered with truffle. Piedmont is also one of the most important rice growing areas in Italy (apparently, Thomas Jefferson smuggled a couple of bags out so that he could plant it in his estate in Virginia) and recipes for risotto abound: with cardoons, artichokes, with Barolo and the rustic Paniscia (risotto with sausage beans and various vegetables).

Pasta dishes are not prominent in this part of Italy, although original dishes may include agnolotti (a kind of meat ravioli whose delicate stuffing contains spinach), dressed in butter and truffles in season, and tajarin (thin tagliatelle). A lightly chilled Dolcetto (sometimes regarded – unfairly – as the Beaujolais of Piedmont) is the perfect partner to pasta and risotto dishes.

Meat and game dishes abound. Bollito misto is the classic boiled meat dish, which should contain at least five different cuts of meat (tongue, beef brisket, veal shoulder, chicken, cotechino) served with boiled potatoes, carrots, onions and seasonal roots, and bowls of salsa verde and/or bagnet rosso and mostarda di Cremona. Fruity Barbera with its delicate, cherry-bright aroma, cherrybomb palate and tangy finish, has the necessary rusticity to weave and bob amongst the myriad textures and flavours. Sanato is the most prized Italian veal; it is also used raw, thinly cut, in carne all’ albese. As Anna Conte enthuses: “a sprinkling, or even a shower of truffles, can make this one of the great gastronomic experiences.” Barolo combines a dry austere character with a wonderfully fragrant nose and a velvety softness. It goes wonderfully with game such as Fagiano (pheasant) alla Milanese, Stinco al Forno con Patate and Brasato (beef) alla Lombarda (braised with vegetables and spices). As with Tuscany the big reds come into play with the denser red meats such as roast kid, wild boar and hare, and, especially in Piedmont, venison.

Cheeses are excellent and are still produced artisanally. These include the tangy-flavoured bra (yes, really), a cow’s milk cheese to which ewe’s milk is sometimes added, and castelmagno, a powerful tasting cow’s milk cheese, which was the favourite of many kings from Charlemagne to Vittorio Emanuele II, and the soft, ubiquitous, yet astounding toma.

Tuscan cuisine deserves a book to itself. It is often described as “cucina povera”, povera in this context meaning lacking elaboration and based on the quality of the ingredients. As well as the commonality of the primary ingredients certain herbs are widely used, added to soups, meat and fish, whilst spices are also common, with fennel seeds and chilli (called zenzero in Tuscany) being particularly popular. The Tuscan olive oil is the ultimate signature of Tuscan cuisine. Rather than a dressing, it is the main character in the gastronomic scenario of the Tuscan table. Food is sautéed and fried in it, soups are *benedette* by it, and every vegetable is made tastier with a couple of teaspoons of it.

Traditional Tuscan meals often start with a soup. Full of vegetables, beans, herbs and olive oil it will be ladled over the local pan sciocco (unsalted bread). The ribollita of Sienna and Florence rival in variety and quality the acquacotta of the Maremma, all made with local vegetables. The former will contain a mixture of cannellini beans, onions, chillies, tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, leeks, cavolo nero, garlic, thyme and pepper. A youthful Chianti, Morellino, or Rosso di Montepulciano would be the appropriate guzzle-partner. Pasta dishes are not a Tuscan forte, but pappardelle con 215eoli (thick ribbon noodles with a hare sauce) is a regional signature dish. Again, a Sangiovese wine with a certain rasp would help this digest.

Meat, chicken and pig are all superb – roasted on the spit or grilled – they are eaten as they are, no sauces, no trimmings. Various kinds of game are popular from boars to thrushes and skylarks and various kinds of deer. Pork is cured to make the soppressata of Siena, sausages with chilli, fennel-flavoured finocchiona and all the prosciutti. Salami, from wild boar, is also common. Charcuterie is best accompanied by a fruity young red. The other major component of earthy Tuscan cooking is the bean (indeed Tuscans have been nicknamed mangia fagioli – bean eaters). These beans are stewed in a cone-shaped earthenware pot and served as an accompaniment to pork (Arista alla Fiorentina), or with grilled chops and fegetelli (grilled liver wrapped in caul fat). For grilled steak (especially bistecca alla Fiorentina) try a Chianti Classico/Classico Riserva; for boar, pork or pigeon a medium-weight Vino Nobile; and for game stews and oxtail, Brunello di Montalcino has the requisite strength and structure.

Along the Tuscan coast the most traditional dishes are based on fish. Cacciucco, originally from Livorno, is a fish soup or rather a stew, thick, rich and black, which traditionally contains chilli and should be made with at least five kinds of fish – one for each of the c’s in cacciucco. Triglie alla Livornese (red mullet) is also popular on the northern stretch of coast, while further south the catch is grey mullet, which is usually simply grilled, as well as cuttlefish, squid and octopus. Another speciality of Tuscany are the cieche or ce’e (tiny baby eels) caught at the mouth of the Arno near Pisa. They are thrown alive into hot olive oil flavoured with sage and garlic. Tuscany is not renowned for its white wine. Vermentino or Trebbiano are options with seafood, and many of the top estates dabble in Chardonnay.

Tuscany offers splendid pecorino, made with ewe’s milk, of which the ones from the Crete Senesi and from Pienza are the most highly prized. Also famous is the marzolino del Chianti which Caterina de’ Medici loved so much she had it sent regularly to France.

PIEMONTE

EUGENIO BOCCHINO, CUNEO, Piemonte – Organic

Cinzia inherited her father's estate in 1996 and along with husband, Eugenio, begun making wine. The first vintage was a mere 225 litres, but the promise it showed cemented a love in winemaking and a desire to expand their operation. Now, making considerably more wine, Azienda Agricola Bocchino consist of a modest 5.5 hectares. From the start the Bocchinos adopted a holistic approach with livestock, vines, and other crops all sharing the land. Biodynamic practices make up their prevailing agricultural philosophy. In the winery no new oak is used, the wines are neither filtered nor fined, and are always made with indigenous yeasts. Classic Nebbiolo reflecting the farmer's tradition, marked by fresh and fruity flavours and violet. Persistent yet delicate tannins; a whole meal wine, pleasant and rich on character.

2020/21 NEBBIOLO – 20 litre key keg

R

AA EZIO TRINCHERO, AGLIANO TERME, Piemonte – Organic

This old winery in Agliano Terme is situated in Vianoce, an ancient hamlet including a peasant house and a church. It was built during the first half of the 19th century by the Visconti Barons of Ornavasso, then, at the beginning of the 1920s it was bought by the brothers Secondo and Serafino Trinchero. Today it belongs to Ezio. Most of the vines are over fifty years (some were planted in the 1920s) with resultant smaller yields giving structure and quality to the wines. Historical note: in 1952 the first bottles of Barbera d'Asti were produced and Trinchero was given position number one in the wine-producer registry of Asti. The vineyards are organically farmed. The baby Barbera is from 20-year-old vines with the grapes fermented in cement vats and matured in old wooden barrels for another twelve months before bottling. This is a fresh and fruity Barbera, sour, savoury and tasty. Vigna del Noce, the flagship wine of the estate from an eighty-year-old plot of vines, undergoes 45-day maceration on the skins, enjoys a leisurely fermentation in 50-hl Slavonian oak barrels and is aged for a further minimum of 2-3 years in large botte. Red with violet tints, this Barbera announces itself in the glass with deep, very intense, complex and heady perfumes and a palate of pungent vitality and, ahem, soulful rusticity. These Barberians are at your gates clamouring for entry.

2020 BARBERA D'ASTI SUPERIORE "TERRA DEL NOCE"

R

2012 BARBERA "VIGNA DEL NOCE"

R

TENUTA GRILLO, GUIDO & IGIEA ZAMPAGLIONE, MONFERRATO, Piemonte – Organic

Owned by the Zampaglione clan Tenuta Grillo estate spreads over 32 hectares of which 17 are dedicated to the vineyard. The production is based on low yields, scrupulous selection of the grapes, respect for nature and traditions. The wines reflect the naturalness and the characteristics of the land, the vines and the year. Pratoasciutto is Dolcetto which undergoes a long maceration of 30/40 days, ferment on native yeasts, extremely limited use of sulphur and ageing in big barrels in order to provide stability and complexity to the wine before being bottled without filtration. I have always wanted to like Dolcetto – maybe it's the name – but, unhappily, found most examples to be clumpy, fruitless and tannic. The nose here is instantly appealing, oozing violets, black fruits, liquorice, and parma ham. The fruit is great, the tannins velvety and there is a bitter black cherry rasp to the finish that taps your taste buds on the shoulder and reminds them that absence of food is not a serious option. I am a convert – to this wine at least. Dolcetto et decorum est. Baccabianca is crazy Cortese, 30 plus days of skin contact giving the amber colour and grippiness adding texture and complexity to a wine which is all about nuance – gentle orchards, herbs, dried spice and minerals.

2016 BACCABIANCA ~ Cortese

W

2005 PECORANERA ~ Barbera, Dolcetto, Freisa

R

CA' D' GAL, SANDRO BOIDO, Piemonte – Organic

Hidden in the hills just outside the sleepy town of Neive near Santo Stefano Belbo is Ca' d' Gal, home to Sandro Boido and some of Piemonte's most sublime Moscato d'Asti. The vines are located on steep slopes on variable soils of limestone-clay and sand. Capturing laughter in every delicate bubble, Moscato d'Asti is an effervescent elixir that lifts you up and slows time to a delicious crawl (and contains only 5% alcohol.) In contrast to so many other mass-produced Moscato wines, Ca' d' Gal Moscato d'Asti is truly an artisanal nectar, harvested by hand and vinified naturally in closed vat with extended lees contact. This added attention is what gives these delightful wines their unique personality—and surprising ability to age. "Lumine," the estate's regular bottling from 30–35-year-old vines, captures sunny notes of elderflower cordial, mandarin oranges and rose petals, illuminated by a lovely silver-gold effervescence on the tongue. Flavours of white peaches and pears melt on the tongue like cotton candy, perfectly light and balanced. Just a touch of fragrant bubbles cleanses the palate. Drink joyously as an aperitif, as a sorbet-like palate-cleanser, with strawberries, fruit pastries, torta di nocciole (hazelnut cake) and zabaione.

2023 MOSCATO D'ASTI "LUMINE"

Sp

GIANLUIGI & ALESSANDRA BERA, CANELLI, Piemonte – Organic – certified Suolo e Salute

The little town of Canelli is situated at the entrance of Langhe hills, along the left bank of the Belbo stream. The territory is covered in vineyards and a centre of production of the Asti Spumante, the slightly sweet, bubbly white wine, which is a symbol of Canelli and also of the whole province of Asti. The wine production industry is strictly connected to the local economy and history. Canelli is divided in two areas: the lower part in the valley, called “Borgo” and the upper part, called “Villanuova”. Azienda Agricola Bera Vittorio was the first family vineyard to start bottling and marketing its own Moscato d’Asti in Canelli. In 1785 Giovanni Battista Bera bought land from the Community of the Sovereign Order of the Knights of Malta. Later purchases of land brought the total farm area to 10 hectares of vineyards, which are still farmed in the traditional family way. Bottling started in 1964, initially in small quantities, then with an increase in technology reaching today’s rates.

Azienda Bera produces wine from grapes ripened in the family vineyards situated in Sant’Antonio di Canelli, Regione Serra Masio, the heart of the most qualified, the most prestigious, and the most ancient area of production. The vineyards are facing towards the south-east on slopes of from 50 to 70%. The ground is marmoreal and strongly calcareous, originating from ancient seabeds which surfaced five million years ago.

Climatic conditions are particularly favourable to the growing of Moscato: not too wet, with rain falling only in winter and in the spring months. The temperatures are never too extreme, there are never late frosts and although summer storms with hail are frequent, they are never violent enough to damage. It is windy until summer.

The vineyards are cultivated using organic production methods: only humus and compost are used; chemical fertilisers, herbicides, insecticides and pesticides banned. Parasites are successfully discouraged using copper sulphate and powdered sulphur. In the Azienda Bera vineyards the ecosystem is alive: an abundance of snails is proof of a harmonious environmental balance. The Moscato is the best we’ve tasted and offers more in terms of flesh and softness than effervescence, combining melon, orange peel and sage on the nose. In the mouth, it is moderately sweet and superbly vinous and would complement richer desserts as well as being the dream partner for strawberries. Easy to distinguish this Asti from your Elbling. The unfiltered Barbera “Le Verrane”, fermented in cement tank, is true to type with varietal notes of mulberry, cherry-soda, balsam and mint and faint traces of liquorice on a palate that drives all the way. The wine undergoes its malolactic in the bottle; do not be surprised to get a Lambrusco-style tongue-prickling epiphany. This unpredictable red is a party in glass, vinous space dust. It is frivolously serious with a charming bitter-sour contrariness guaranteed to offend the techno-squeakers, nit-pickers and fault-fetishists. The vivid Ronco Malo is classic Barbera cherry-amour; it brilliantly grips tongue, throat and attention. More vinosity and layers here. The “Arcese” is a pleasant fusion, but not confusion, of three Piemontese indigenous white grape varieties: Favorita, Arneis and Cortese, a blend that works to balance aroma, texture and acidity to excellent effect.

Extraordinary wild wine, a churn of yeast, peach skin, almond blossom and smoky minerals. The palate is alive, prickly, cidery and tangy – drinking it is like attaching electrodes to your taste buds.

Bianchduset is Moscato under an extended period of flor.

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|------|---------------------------------------|----|
| 2022 | VINO BIANCO DA TAVOLA “ARCESE” VIVACE | W |
| 2007 | BIANCHDuset ~ Moscato under flor | W |
| 2023 | MOSCATO CANELLI | Sp |
| 2021 | BARBERA “LE VERRANE” VIVACE | R |
| 2019 | SARVANET ROSSO ~ Dolcetto | R |
| 2023 | NINET ROSSO ~ Nebbiolo | R |

AGRICOLA GAIA DI CHIARI AZZETTI GAIA, MONFERRATO, Piemonte – Organic methods

A collaboration between Fabrizio Iuli and Les Caves de Pyrene (Eric Narioo) in hilly Monferrato region of Piedmont. The grapes for this Barbera come from the lieu-dit “La Tina”, belonging to Fabrizio’s family for a long time, formerly part of their old winery. The vines are 30 years old plus and had been abandoned for 15 years before Fabrizio took them back. The idea is to make a fresh, fairly natural Barbera, light on the extraction. Farming is organic, soils are calcareous, harvest is by hand, and 70% destemmed into concrete vats where the wine undergoes a natural ambient fermentation and ages in same for around nine months, before being racked to tanks and then bottling without filtration or fining and just a small amount of sulphur.

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|------|------------------|---|
| 2022 | BRICH BARBERA | R |
| 2022 | BRICH GRIGNOLINO | R |

AGRICOLA SUMMER WOLFF, MONFERRATO, Piemonte – Organic methods

| | | |
|------|---------------|---|
| 2022 | GIOGIO FREISA | R |
|------|---------------|---|

CASCINA IULI, CERRINO MONFERRATO, Piemonte – Organic methods

Iuli is located in a small little town called Montaldo in the somewhat undiscovered region of Monferrato in Piedmont. The population of Montaldo is 110 people and counting... very slowly. In addition to the mixed and poor soil type in the vineyards (which helps the strength and vigour of the vines), there is, importantly, a vein of limestone that runs directly through the property – giving an amazing acidity and special character to the wines.

Fabrizio is certified organic in his vineyards, and the land surrounding the town has always been cultivated without chemicals for as long as his father can remember. He is technically organic as well in the cellars – although has decided not to go through the paperwork and extensive “red-tape” bureaucracy to be certified in the cellar. “I know how I make my wines and want them to be as natural as possible – reflecting the territory and nature of the grape, and do not need this piece of paper to prove that.”

Interfering as little as possible with the natural process of fermentation and ageing. Fabrizio i uses natural yeasts, and does not fine or filter the wines. With an average of three years ageing (some wines see less, some more), he believes the wine prepares itself in its own time to go into the bottle and his only job is to communicate (taste) with it along the way to find out where in its lifeline it is. Fabrizio says about his wines, “While each is different and has a unique personality – they all share the common characteristic of being ‘loyal and honest’”.

Born from Burgundy clones that Fabrizio selected and planted in 1999, “Nino” is a completely unique expression of Pinot Nero from the white calcareous-clay soils of the Monferrato vineyards. These vines are still babies for Pinot Nero, but the wine is starting to show a real complexity and elegance. A simple everyday Pinot Noir that has the depth of a Burgundy, but also the playfulness of a wine made with young vines. The wine is fermented in stainless steel at 30C with indigenous yeasts. There is a ten-to-twelve-day maceration, malo occurs in barrel, and the wine is aged in a mixture of new and second year French oak for sixteen months before being bottled without fining or filtration.

Fabrizio is still playing with the ageing period as he is looking to capture and develop the evolution of the aromas he personally experiences in the cellar while the wine ages in barriques, from the delicate red floral tones to the richer spicy notes. The Nino has bright cherrystone character, a moderate rasp to the red fruit, a hint of briar and tar and well-integrated wood. One for food. File under “it looks like Pinot, it smells like Pinot and by jiminy jillickers it tastes like Pinot.”

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| 2021 | MONFERRATO ROSSO “NINO” (PINOT NERO) | R |
| 2021 | LA RINA -- Slarina | R |
| 2022 | UMBERTA VINO ROSSO BARBERA | R |
| 2021 | “ROSSORE” BARBERA | R |
| 2020 | MONFERRATO ROSSO MALIDEA ~ Nebbiolo | R |
| 2022 | “TA-DA!” ~ field blend | R |

COOPERATIVA VALLI UNITE, MONTALE CELLI, Piemonte – Organic certified- ICEA – Biodynamic methods

The co-operative was born over thirty years ago. At a time in which increasing numbers of people had moved to the cities and to factory work, three young men from local farming families got together to discuss the future of farming in this area. They were deeply attached to the work and to their own land, but they wanted to find new ways of using traditional methods. To begin with they merged their vineyards and built stalls for farm animals so they could use organic manure to fertilise their fields and vines. The old ways were combined with a very modern belief in organic farming as the way of the future, as part of the wider project known as ‘contraction’, involving reducing the human impact on the natural environment. Viticulture is non-invasive. Old-fashioned sickles are used to hoe the weeds, the vines are fertilised with manures from their cattle as well as green fertilisers composed of clover and weeds. Cement vats are used to ferment the wines which are then transferred to old barrels to soften and mature.

In the glass, the wine is an intense ruby red, with a vinous aroma, a dry, pleasantly bitter taste in which there are recurrent hints of dog roses and in which the fruitiness is successfully wedded to the tang of tannin. Like other Dolcetto of other Piedmont regions, this is a wine that goes with all sorts of food and can hold its own even with strong-tasting dishes. The Ottavio Rube Rosso is a blend of Dolcetto (80%) and Croatina (20%). It has that classic Piemontese bitter cherry-meets-chocolate-with-some-tannic-grip-for-food character.

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| 2022 | OTTAVIO RUBE BIANCO ~ Cortese, Timorasso | W |
| 2022 | OTTAVIO RUBE ROSSO ~ Dolcetto, Croatina | R |
| 2022 | ALESSANDRINO ROSSO ~ Barbera, Croatina, Freisa, Dolcetto | R |
| 2021 | MARMOTE ~ Croatina | R |



They do what it says on the label

An Evening in Asti With The Beras

The drive through the Langhe hills reveals a rolling landscape of orchards and almond trees and green fields and copse-clustered slopes. The Bera farm wears its organic credentials proudly. The vineyards are beautiful: ten hectares in total with five on steep south-facing slopes (these are the Moscato vines). They are verdant with grass and weeds in abundance, fava beans (beanz meanz wines) are sown between the rows as they absorb oxygen and pass it into the soil. Plus, they can be consumed with a ham actor and a bottle of good Barolo (not Chianti as the film had it). The soils are limestone-clay and deep and not compact. Alessandra pointed towards her neighbour's vineyards which looked like a dustbowl in comparison.

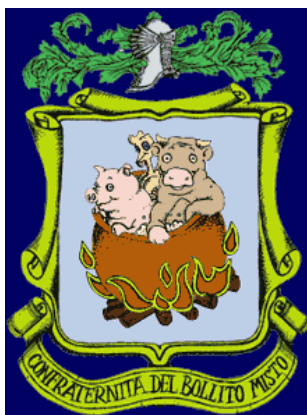
You can smell the air here. It is breezy in the hills with refreshing wafts of wild mint from the fields (it grows freely amongst the vines). Alessandra says you can taste it in the wine, and I do remember thinking that the Moscato and Barbera had this delicious fresh herbal inflection.

Everything is done painstakingly by hand; the excess foliage is plucked, the fruit selected and placed in small cagettes. Viticulture can be high maintenance.

We had dinner in the winery on a massive oak refectory table. The quality of the produce was exceptional: highlights included thick rounds of squidgy sausage and herbal goat's cheese, followed by pasta and bean broth of wondrous refined rusticity and an apple pie to go to bed in. This is what I dreamed Italian food would be like – made with enormous care and love for the ingredients.

With the dinner we had the full range of wines from Bera. We have always admired them for their naturalness and authenticity; these are unfiltered wines with native yeasts. The reds, especially the Barberas, seem alive, being rasping, prickly and darting across the tongue. They don't always taste the same from day to day, but that is part of the charm of being a natural product. I have experienced variance in so many of our best growers' wines. I can imagine that for some people this might constitute a fault: supermarkets, for example, demand rigorous consistency. To me that is a sterile philosophy. If wine is truly a living thing we must allow for occasional variability. Nevertheless, when you taste, you need to adjust your expectations and try to understand where the wine is coming from. Submitting a wine to analysis is like looking at a human being through a microscope; yes, you can see every flaw in the skin, but such flaws make up who and what we are. We live in a pseudo-scientific culture wherein we dissect so precisely and demand so much that we lose sight of the essential truth: enjoyment! As Ralph Waldo Emerson says: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

A neat summary of the difference between *real wines* and branded products.



Nebbiolo and Bollito Misto anyone?

CAVALLOTTO FRATELLI, MONFORTE, BRICCO BOSCHIS, BAROLO, Piemonte – Organic conversion

The Cavallotto family claims sole ownership of the beautiful Bricco Boschis cru in the Castiglione Falletto district (also home to Azelia), where they have been growing Nebbiolo since 1929 and bottling their own wine since 1948. These richly structured wines place emphasis on elegance and longevity, attributable to excellent vineyards in the Bricco Boschis and Vignolo crus and traditional long maturation periods in large Slovenian-oak casks.

Steadfast devotion to tradition combined with a high regard and respect for modern viticultural and winemaking techniques result in complex and elegant Baroli that are released for sale only when they have acquired perfect maturity. The estate produces three Baroli: two riservas and their anything but “regular” Bricco Boschis. The Vignolo cru, sloping 60-80 metres lower in altitude than the adjacent Bricco Boschis holding, shows a “creamy” flesh.

The property consists of 65 hectares of which 60 are planted with vines. Alfio said that they have a high number of vines per acre with a corresponding low number of buds per plant, sacrificing quantity for quality. Since 1970 they control the grass covering between the rows of vines to help maintain the natural organic substances in the soil. They have re-introduced natural insect predators allowing for the elimination of pesticides and other toxic chemicals.

The estate’s selection of the finest vineyard within the Bricco Boschis cru is San Giuseppe (also 92-95 from Advocate for the 2004 Riserva), the epitome of Castiglione Falletto: a powerful, majestic wine of absolute authority whose sweetness comes with time.

Their Barolo Bricco Boschis is a cru in and of itself. Ruby red at the core with slight garnet reflections, this intense Barolo has an ethereal nose, with powerful aromas of dried fruit, jam, liquorice, and violet. A rich, full-bodied wine, it is warm and quite soft, with evident but ripe and sweet tannins.

The Riserva is also fermented in steel vats, with maceration on the skins for 20 days; it is then aged in Slavonian-oak casks of various capacity for 3 years and 6 months. Ruby red in colour, with intense garnet reflections, the nose on this San Giuseppe is intense, packed with ample aromas of dried fruit, dried flowers and more ethereal notes of tobacco and liquorice. Full-bodied and harmonious on the palate, the wine is warm, rich, and soft in the mouth, smoothing the tannin with a pleasant long finish.

This wine would pair wonderfully with spicy red meat dishes as well as aged cheeses.

The Dolcetto d’Alba parcel “Vigna Scot” (Dolcetto 100%) comes from vineyards on the hillside between Bricco Boschis and Monprivato/Codana). The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and macerated with submerged cap for 3-4 days. The wine is aged in large Slavonian oak botti of 50 hl for 6 months, then in cement tanks for a further 6 months. This Dolcetto is medium-bodied yet soft with typical aromas such as cherries and red plums with a complex, forest floor bouquet. Although it is a wine made to be drunk relatively young, it still has aging potential for up to 5 years. It matches prosciutto, salami, Alba beef tartare and vitello tonnato. The wine is excellent with pizza and pasta, with second courses of red meat in general, but also with aged cheeses.

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| 2022 | DOLCETTO D’ALBA “VIGNA SCOT” | R |
| 2019 | BAROLO CRU BRICCO BOSCHIS | R |
| 2019 | BAROLO CRU BRICCO BOSCHIS ~ magnum | R |
| 2017 | BAROLO RISERVA BRICCO BOSCHIS VIGNA SAN GIUSEPPE | R |

FERDINANDO PRINCIPIANO, MONFORTE D'ALBA, Piemonte – Organic

Being located on the southern fringe of the Barolo zone the Principiano estate benefits from the biodiversity of the Alta Langhe; the wilderness that lies beyond the dense planting of Nebbiolo vineyards. This helps in maintaining a biodiverse balance in the vineyard. In 2003 Ferdinando made the decision to move away from the world of consultants and their prescriptions, both in the vineyard and cantina and since then he's been rewarded by the purity and drinkability of his wines.

Dosset ("Dolcetto" in the local dialect) is symbolic of this approach. At 10.5% alcohol, it is very light, fragrant and fruity. A graceful wine (produced with the grapes from the vineyards of St. Anna and San Martino of Monforte d'Alba), for the table, for the jug and for hilarious company – and with no added sulphites. The Nebbiolo also dials up the delightfulness. Located mainly in Le Coste di Monforte d'Alba with a small percentage of grapes from Boscareto in Serralunga, this delicate Neb comes from a hectare of forty-year-old vines exposed grown at 350 metres a.s.l. on sandy calcareous soils. Fermentation and maceration last from two to three weeks with native yeasts and without added sulphur. Ageing takes place for ten months in stainless steel tank. Bright with raspberries the nose is ethereal, leafy-fresh. There's loads of crunchy punchy fruit, plenty of rose petal fragrance too. Barolo Serralunga is a remarkably gratifying Barolo. Nebbiolo grapes ripen on 3.5 hectares of land from young vines planted in the valley of Boscareto in Serralunga d'Alba. The focus on the balance of the plant and achieving the ideal ripeness of the grapes allow Ferdinando to harvest in early October. The crushed grapes ferment naturally with their yeasts and without added sulphur for about a month and the ageing takes place for 24 months in 20 and 40-hectolitre barrels. This vibrant Barolo weaves together sensations of violets, bright red berries, forest floor, leather, sweet spices, and balsamic notes. The finesse and purity of fruit are supported by silky tannins.

The wine of kings and the king of wines. That's how Barolo is defined.

Ferdinando's oldest Nebbiolo grapes ripen on two acres where great care is taken in the vineyards. The vines are on the south-west slope of Boscareto (400 m above sea level), in Serralunga d'Alba.

Ferdinando used to thin out the canopy to increase the concentration; now he prefers to let it grow. He has also changed his approach in the winery where he now practices whole bunch maceration rather than the traditional destemming. The grapes are pressed underfoot, and a relatively short maceration by Langhe standards (15 days), completes malolactic. Fermentation takes place in 10 hl wooden tanks without inoculated yeasts and without sulphur addition and ranges from 40 to 90 days depending on the year. The wine is then transferred to 30 hectolitres oak barrels and matured for three to four years.

An intense bouquet of liquorice and eucalyptus jumps out of the glass; on the palate, the wine is both juicy and zippy and green. It's very lively and vital, continuously evolving in the glass and making a second and third taste compelling and rewarding.

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| 2022 | LANGHE TIMORASSO | W |
| 2023 | DOSSET VINO ROSSO ~ Dolcetto | R |
| 2022 | LANGHE NEBBIOLO | R |
| 2020 | BAROLO SERRALUNGA DOCG | R |
| 2020 | BAROLO SERRALUNGA DOCG ~ magnum | R |
| 2020 | BAROLO RAVERA DOCG | R |
| 2019 | BAROLO BOSCARETO CRU DOCG | R |

SCARZELLO GIORGIO & FIGLI, Piemonte – Organic methods

Federico Scarzello is the third generation to make wine at his family's estate in Barolo, taking over in 2001. Since then, he has gone from strength to strength, and has been tipped as one of Barolo's rising stars for his respect for traditional winemaking combined with an utter dedication to quality. Winemaking at Scarzello is very much in the traditional style. Fermentations are long – in some vintages over 50 days on the skins – and the wines are given extended ageing in large old oak casks and bottle. In practice, this means that Scarzello wines are released a year or so later than others. The wines display texture and finesse, and a subtle power that demands attention.

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| 2022 | LANGHE NEBBIOLO | R |
| 2019 | BAROLO COMUNE DI BAROLO | R |
| 2019 | BAROLO SARMASSA VIGNA MERENDA | R |

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|------|-----------------------------|---|
| NV | MESDI VINO ROSSO (NEBBIOLO) | R |
| 2017 | BAROLO CASCINA BRIC | R |
| 2014 | BAROLO DEL COMUNE DI BAROLO | R |

LE MARNE, AZIENDA VITIVINICOLA BIOLOGICO DI CARRARO FEDERICA, PARODI LIGURE, Piemonte – *Organic certified*

Le Marne started in 2002 as a family project of vigneroni Federica Carraro & Luigi Grosso. The name comes from the typical white calcareous limestone marnes typical of "Oltregiogo Ligure" area (the deep end of Piedmont towards Liguria).

The winery is located at 330 metres above sea level. The estate is still completely family run and managed according to organic procedures seeking the harmonious balance between human activity and expression of the territory. A naturally non-intensive production, respectful of the eco-system and the biodiversity, aiming to grant authentic, genuine, fresh products.

The Cortese vines are grown on calcareous limestone marls with sensitive organic farming. Grapes are manually harvested and then destemmed prior to controlled fermentation in stainless vat for maceration (temperature controlled) followed by ageing in cement. Very gentle filtration. No fining and total SO₂ of around 50 parts per million.

This Gavi captures the freshness of the soils and has a cool Chablis-esque crunch to the fruit with lime and shell notes.

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| 2022 | GAVI "LE MARNE" | W |
| 2019 | GAVI "ORO" | W |

CASCINA ROCCALINI, PAOLO VEGLIO, Piemonte – *Organic methods*

Young and humble Paolo Veglio tends the vines at his micro-estate in Barbaresco. Paolo's family has owned the estate since 1920, but he is the first of the family to be a winemaker and bottle his own wines. Before this, his family was selling the grapes of the estate to his neighbour Giacosa from 1990-2005. His approach to winemaking is to start in the vineyard and produce healthy grapes. He loves to be on his tractor and tend the land. He only works organically and takes care of many things by hand. The resulting wines are rich in flavour, complex in the terroir of the land, joyful and balanced. Fermented in stainless steel the Roccalini Barbaresco spends 12 months in Slovenian grandi botti. Red and purple flowers in the nose, kissed with cinnamon and nutmeg, leading you into a smoldering embrace of red currant, black raspberry, baking spice, sweet basil, white pepper, Tabasco-infused chocolates and black cherries. There are violets and minerals in there as well and the ensemble is rich, yet elegant with a very long finish.

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| 2022 | LANGHE NEBBIOLO | R |
| 2020 | BARBARESCO "ROCCALINI" | R |

AZIENDA AGRICOLA CINZIA BERGAGLIO, TASSAROLO, Piemonte

Located in Tassarolo (Alessandria) Bergaglio's vineyard comprises five hectares of which only one is currently in production. Cortese, the native grape variety of Alessandria in Piedmont, tends to perform best in the hills between Novi and Tortona in Piedmont. The grape has been so successful in Gavi (which is in the south of Piedmont close to Liguria) that it is known locally as Cortese di Gavi. The wine is fresh and floral, clean with a pleasant aftertaste of toasted almond and hints of apple and sage. Gavi is drunk with a variety of Ligurian sea food dishes: stuffed squid, salad of baby octopus, seafood caponata or pagello in cartoccio (sea bream steamed in parchment).

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| 2023 | GAVI DI TASSAROLO "LA FORNACE" | W |
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CASCINA DEGLI ULIVI, ILARRIA BELLOTTI, NOVI LIGURE, Piemonte – Biodynamic certified

In addition to grape growing, the estate has a diversified production of fruits, vegetables, and cereals, and keeps a variety of farm animals. This biodiversity is an essential factor in biodynamic farming, which treats farms as self-contained, self-sufficient entities requiring little or no inputs from the outside. Stefano Bellotti began as an eighteen-year-old in 1977, reclaiming the family farm where there was less than 1 hectare of vineyard in existing use. He worked organically from the beginning and introduced biodynamic methods in 1984. The wines of Degli Ulivi are pure and natural, made without manipulations. Their belief is that the art of winemaking is to accompany the wine through its natural transformation process. Bellotti Bianco (pure Cortese), for example, tastes like a Jura wine that has gone to Italy and been naturalized. Medium yellow in colour, the nose initially suggests a rich butter pound cake, with nut and citrus oils. Later, with air, the wine has an amazing floral component, almost like lilies, with dry spice, quince, walnuts, and interesting Jura-like notes. The wine has a very good finish with an interesting bitter walnut and churned butter aftertaste.

A Demua means “go and have fun” in the Genovese dialect. A remarkable field blend of five local grape varieties from a hundred year old vines: Timorasso, Verdea, Bosco, Moscatella (an old type of Chasselas) and Riesling. The grapes are from a single vineyard located in the foothills of the Apennines between Piedmont and Liguria. The pressed grapes are macerated and co-fermented under a submerged cap in large oak casks for one month. The skins are removed, and the wine is returned to cask for one year before bottling. This is a true orange wine; golden in colour with a touch of tannin from the grape skins, almost nut-skin-like in appearance and flavour. Remarkable aromas of dried apricot, dried-flowers, pine, and almond.

The Bellotti Rosso is a “vino da tavola” blend of mostly Barbera and Dolcetto, hand harvested and fermented in large oak “botti” and bottles with minimal sulphur. The wine is fresh and lively bursting with dark berry flavours. Very deep youthful purple/garnet colour. Big nose of prunes, river stones, blackberries, dark chocolate, and a touch of brown spices. In the mouth, the wine is smooth, round, and fruity with a nicely balanced acid/tannin structure, and a crunchy, pulpy texture with vivid flavours of red plums and faded roses. Beautiful ripe strawberry fruit on the tart finish. A solid and honest wine and if it doesn’t actually beg for food, it certainly puts in a polite request for it. Made with Dolcetto a Grasso Rosso variety (with red stems) which in the local dialect is called Nibiò. This variety has been grown here for more than 1000 years and it is even mentioned in the annals of the Republic of Genoa. The vineyards are planted on gravelly-lime clay soils that give the wine a marked elegance and complexity. Vinification is done in oak vats as well as a 12-month ageing. Indigenous yeasts, unfiltered and unfined. Zero sulphur added. A natural red with irrepressible verve.

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| 2023 | DEGLI ULIVI BELLOTTI BIANCO – Cortese | W |
| 2023 | DEGLI ULIVI BELLOTTI ROSSO ~ Barbera, Dolcetto | R |
| 2023 | DEGLI ULIVI BELLOTTI ROSA | Ro |
| 2022 | IVAG | W |
| 2020 | FILAGNOTTI ~ Cortese | W |
| 2021 | MONTEMARINO | W |
| 2022 | LE MAT DU RAISIN ROSSO | R |
| 2016 | DOLCETTO NIBIO | R |
| 2014 | MOUNBE | R |

TRENTINO-ALTO-ADIGE

Trentino cuisine maintains its traditional ingredients: sausages and salamis, pork, the cheeses, polenta, sauerkraut, the ‘canederli’ in all its variations, and the “salada” (salted) beef, an ancient dish known from the time of the Council of Trent, that important historical period that saw the city of Trent as an important capital. It wasn’t until the 20th century, when this area became part of the kingdom of Italy, that Trentino cuisine actually started adding to its diet dishes typical to the rest of Italy; for example, the ‘pastasciutta’ (pasta dishes). Trentino has its roots in ‘canederli’ and ‘gnocchi’, rather than in homemade pasta. The “smacafam”, is a savoury torte filled with garlic and covered with fresh luganega pork sausage. This is a typical festival dish during the MardiGras Carnival. The “gröstl” is another traditional peasant dish, useful for recycling leftover meat, made simply with coarsely cut up pieces of up meat sautéed in butter with chunks of boiled potatoes covered with finely chopped chives. Boiled potatoes sautéed in butter, mashed, and then covered with chopped parsley are also a typical Trentino style fare. Among the richer dishes let’s not forget Lepre –Trentino style, a sweet and sour ‘salmì’ recipe found only in this area. The hare meat is marinated in wine and vinegar for at least twenty-four hours with all sorts of spices, plenty of onions, pine nuts and sultanas, then broiled. Stuffed chicken is another favourite speciality of the area. The stuffing is prepared with walnuts, pine nuts, bread doused in milk, liver, eggs, and boiled meat. It can be served with various sauces, but especially with the tasty fruit ‘mustard’ of mandarin oranges. There are only a few types of fish: salmon trout from the streams which is smoked and cooked in various fashions. Eel Trentino style is cut up and sautéed in butter with onions and spices. Baked dried cod made with potatoes, butter, oil, garlic, onions, celery, milk, salt, and pepper is another favourite dish served with polenta. Wild mushrooms (ceps, chanterelles, chiodini and russole) are stewed and eaten with polenta. The Trentino desserts are very similar to those in Alto-Adige, with one exception – the strudel is made with apples only. Trentino ‘krapfen’ can be baked instead of deep fried, giving the doughnuts a lighter touch. Bread pudding pie is a typical Trentino dessert, made with stale bread soaked in milk, then mixed with fruit, flour, sugar, and walnuts. The ‘Fregoletti’ pie is made with white flour, butter, sugar and almonds. ‘Zelten’, the Christmas speciality is made with rye flour in Alto-Adige, whereas in Trentino it is made with white flour, eggs, yeast, candied fruit, and plenty of dried fruit, all covered with split almonds. The cuisine from the Trentino is strongly characterized by its geographical position, its climate, and its history. Despite tourism, it has remained deeply rooted to its origins, like the tradition of eating meat accompanied with fruit mustard (to take one of the most obvious examples).

Smoked meat reigns supreme in Alto-Adige, typical of cold climates, from cattle used to spending long nights outdoes and grazing on fragrant grass in the fields at high altitude. There’s nothing tastier than the local “speck”, boneless pork meat cut in small square pieces and placed in saltpetre with garlic, laurel, juniper, pepper, and other herbs that vary according to secret family traditions handed down from one generation to another. The “speck” is then hung in the smokehouse which must be well aerated. The smoke grazes the meat only a few hours a day and the temperature must be low. Each farmer has his secrets: the wood must be sweet and enriched with branches of fresh juniper. The best “speck” is homemade and is ready in the autumn because the slaughter usually takes place in February. In Alto Adige “speck” is eaten for breakfast, at noon as an antipasto, and as an afternoon snack.

The cuisine of Alto-Adige has an Austrian influence and it’s hard to find the typical Italian flavours. Ingredients, spices, and combinations unknown to the other regions are used here. There are few greens and soups, but dishes such as canederli, large balls made with stale bread, flour, milk, and eggs with liver, bacon, salame and even greens. Depending on the ingredients, the name of the dish changes: Canederli di Fegato, Tirolesi, Neri, etc. Canederli are served as a soup, boiled in water or broth, and placed in a tureen with boiling broth, or boiled and then served with goulash. They can also be prepared with dried prunes where the pitted prune is inserted in the canederli, dipped in crumbs, and boiled. Yum – or maybe not...

- I'm getting oak with plummy overtones
- I'm getting screwed on alimony

Frasier

WEINGUT NIKLAS, JOSEF SOFRA, KALTERN, Alto-Adige

The Niklaserhof winery is located in the St Nikolaus region 570m above sea level at the foot of the Mendel mountain range. The location is tranquil surrounded by vineyards with a wonderful view of the Dolomites, the upper Etsch river valley and Lake Kaltern. The Lagrein is vivid ruby red with intense aromas of red berries, grass and sweet violets. A light wine worth serving on the fresh side.

2023 SUDTIROLER LAGREIN

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Up and Down In the Adige – Blauburgunder Himmel

First stop was Georg Ramoser's Untermosenhof winery. A huge unkempt hound met us; his intentions were friendly despite a notice on the door of the winery which announced that he was hungry and likely to devour unwary strangers. Georg led us up the hill towards the Sankt Magdalener church which gives its name to the wine made from the Schiava grape. The vineyards (mostly organic) were spectacular, carpeted with poppies, lush with grass with the vines trained in the old pergola fashion. From our vantage point we had the most amazing views, but not as amazing as the cable car that traversed from one side of the mountains to the other. At our feet was Bolzano, behind us a massive ridge covered in forest and vines, to the north the snow-capped Dolomites and all around us a sea of wild green foliage. We discovered more almond trees which had shed their bounty on the path and whilst Georg was talking some of us were cracking nuts with rocks. Yes, we were really that hard up for a mid-morning snack.



Pergolas 'n' poppies

The generous pergola vines seem so much more real than the stunted twigs that are trained up wires. Most of the growers in the region have abandoned them in favour of more modern trellising systems, but their extensive canopies offer shade and respite from the battering sun. The baking stones and the drip-drip of the irrigation hose were testament to the heat and sun of the climate. As Andrew Marvell wrote: "Annihilating all that's made/To green thoughts/In a green shade."

Back at the winery we sat down at two large refectory tables and tasted the small range of wines that Ramoser makes. By this time, we had been joined by the winemaker from Tenuta Falkenstein (or Frankenstein as we predictably called the winery). Falkenstein means falcon's rock by the way.



Looking down the hill from Santa Maddalena

TRENTINO-ALTO-ADIGE

Continued...

Untermosenhof Sankt Magdalener Klassisch (or Santa Maddalena) 2005 (97% Schiava, 3% Lagrein)

Schiava or Trollinger originated in the South Tyrol. It probably reached the southern regions of Germany during Roman times. The variety is first mentioned under that name in fourteenth century documents, for example, Martin Luther drank it according to a report of the papal legate Alexander around 1520. Not sure whether any Meistersingers have written deathless folk songs about it. During Mussolini's time, a commission was appointed to judge the country's best wines and, in 1941, they placed Santa Maddalena in the front rank alongside Barolo and Barbaresco. Considering the high esteem that the latter two wines generally enjoy, and the relative obscurity of Santa Maddalena today, this represents a jarring change in taste. Schiava is a relatively pale-skinned and its high acidity gives the Sankt Magdalener a biting bitter cherry freshness. This would be fun served chilled with a plate of chunky blood sausage.

Lagrein is an altogether bigger beast although it can be produced in a lighter style and make aromatic rosés.

"Thanks to artisanal producers like Hofstätter and Georg Ramoser, I'm even becoming masochistically fond of Lagrein, the idiosyncratic indigenous red grape that looks as dark as Petite Sirah in the glass and tastes kind of like bitter zinfandel. Ask for it if you want to impress your wine store owner or your sommelier".

Jay McInerney

Untermosenhof Lagrein 2005

Leather and tobacco on the nose, plum-cake, dark red cherries and bitter chocolate on the finish.

Untermosenhof Lagrein Riserva 2004

This style is known as Lagrein Dunkel or Scuro (i.e. dark Lagrein). Dark red, extractive bitter flavours of coffee, plumskin and toasty oak, lashings of pepper and dried spice, abundance of tannin. Needs food, preferably a grilled steak.

After lunch it was off to Mazzon on the other side of the valley to meet Bruno Gottardi who carted us up the narrow, winding mountain road in relays to his winery. We were captivated by his palatial residence perched above the vineyards like an eyrie and surrounded by exotic, scent-laden blossom trees (some of which were planted during Napoleon's era). Pinot Nero, (Pinot Noir) locally known as Blauburgunder, is Gottardi's passion and the micro-climate in the part of the Adige valley assists the cultivation of that temperamental variety with cool dry air cascading off Lake Garda and funnelling through the mountains before rising. The breezes keep the moisture off the vines which also means that fewer treatments are needed in the vineyard. For these reasons this small zone has acquired the sobriquet "Blauburgunder-Himmel". Gottardi reminds us that we are on the same latitude as the Côte d'Or and one can certainly see where he draws his inspiration. The aim is to capture the delicacy, perfume and heady essence of Pinot and to this end Gottardi looks for minimal extraction in the 226eolian226tion. The beautifully designed winery works on gravity-fed principles. Pressing is pneumatic, gentle, and even, so as not to acquire any bitterness or derive colour for the sake of colour.



Unsuspecting tourists about to be gravity fed into vats to give the Blauburgunder a meatier flavour

As usual only thimblefuls of wine are made, and everything is on allocation. The straight Blauburgunder is exhilarating, bursting with wild strawberry and rhubarb fruit rounded off with a savoury mint-and-liquorice finish. This is limpid primary Pinot, gratification aplenty, lively, balanced and extremely tasty. How often does Pinot Noir let us down (he asks rhetorically)? As often as not. It enchants us, it infuriates us; its evanescent musky charms seduce us, its stewed or weedy fruit let us down. The Gottardi Riserva wines with their extra maturity and secondary aromatics were beginning to ease towards notes of leather, truffle, and raspberry leaf, but in their lightness of style (and colour) and gentle expressiveness they reminded me of a good Chambolle-Musigny.

The huge dolomitic rock seems hewn out of the texture of time itself. Compared to other mountains they seem brighter, more shimmeringly colourful, more monumental, and almost architecturally inspired. Formed 200 million years ago out of the primeval ocean, today they reach 3,000 metres into the sky. Déodat de Dolomieu (1750-1801) discovered and defined the unique composition of the stone, giving the mountains their name.

I found this rather sweet flight of poesy on a web-site

Imagine mountains which have the shape of gothic cathedrals, castles in ruins, belfries, immense walls, high towers, steeples, and pinnacles, petrified (sic) thunderbolts...

Mountains made of rocks which change their colour as the day goes on: sunrise, morning, noon, sunset, evening, night... they could be white like the snow, yellow like the sun, grey like the clouds, pink like a rose, black like a burnt wood, red like the blood... Which is the colour of the Dolomites? Is it white? Yellow? Grey? Pearly? Is it the colour of the ash? Is it the reflex of silver? Is it the paleness of the dead? Is it the shade of the roses? Are they rocks or clouds? Are they real or are they a dream?



VENETO

Cuisine of Veneto...

In Lower Veronese near the border of Lombardia towards Mantova, there are vast plains where rice is cultivated. The centre of this industry is the small town of Isola della Scala. The quality of the 'vialone nano 229rborio229' rice produced is very high and the product is even certified as DOP or IGP by the Consorzio per la Tutela del Riso Vialone Nano Veronese. Its cultivation is made possible thanks to the many water springs in the area and, according to the experts, the rice owes its distinctiveness to the calcium rocks and the natural way of cultivation with only the minimum amount of chemicals used. Of course, the 229rborio variety of the crop is highly prized for risottos. Although it was first grown in Lombardia it was the Venetians with their voyages to the Middle East who first saw its potential, and, ever since, have paired it with fish and vegetables. It would be impossible for the cuisine of Venice not be affected by the great maritime tradition and the links the Republic had with the East hence the presence of spices in a range of dishes from the area. Not only salt and pepper but cinnamon 'canella', carnation 'chiodi di garofano' and others. In fact, one of the more unusual risottos is the rice of cavroman, a near Eastern dish in which the rice is cooked in a meat sauce flavoured with the above spices.

Polenta also originated in the Veneto and migrated throughout Italy, and maize flour, grilled or fried is the staple accompaniment to meat, fish, or game dishes.

There are two types of *radicchio* from Veneto: the 'rosso di Treviso' and the 'variegato' from Castelfranco Veneto. The former comes in the form of spear-shaped red leaves with a white crunchy stem while the latter is similar to a large flower sometimes known as the 'fiore che si mangia'. They are surprisingly versatile as a vegetable and can be cooked in a number of ways. Some restaurants have even created whole menus based on the radicchio. Only in Italy!

The Gallina Padovana. The 'Gallina Padovana' or Padovan Chicken has a legendary history all of its own. It starts with the Marchese Giovanni Dondi who brought a strange looking bird back to Italy following a trip to Poland in the 1300's. Left to roam free on his estate, the bird soon produced a series of cross breeds never seen before. Such was their fame they attracted the interest of Venetian merchants who were soon exporting them to other European countries such as Holland, Belgium and northern France. It was Ulisse Aldrovandi (a Bolognese monk, doctor, and naturalist) who eventually recorded the chicken formally in his *Historia Animalium* published between 1599 and 1613. The first sentence dedicated to the bird leaves no doubt as to the effect the chicken had on the popular imagination of the time: Gallina Padovana: 'una razza tra mito e realta'. In other words, 'a race caught between myth and reality'.

A meal in Veneto might kick off with *kumo risotto* (rice cooked with kumo herb, meat stock, butter, onion and finished with Grana Padano cheese and parsley) or fried mountain cheese from *Monte Veronese*. The beautiful white asparagus from *Bassana del Grappa* is boiled and eaten with a sauce made of eggs, extra virgin olive oil and vinegar. *Gnocchi Sbatut* is made with flour, cottage cheese, egg, cheese, mountain butter, Grana Padano cheese. More substantial main course dishes include *Fegato alla Veneziana*, roast duck and celery with fresh rosemary and sage, saddle of rabbit 'al Bardolino' and the aforementioned Padovana chicken with asparagus, hop tops and Asiago cheese. For something less evolved the Venetian version of *pasta e fagioli* (pasta and beans) is a particular speciality due to the excellent quality of the local beans. The other basic food of Venice and the lagoon is fish, particularly shellfish. *Filetto di S. Pietro ai Carciofi* is John Dory with 'moretti' artichokes, parsley, and olive oil. Giant shrimps with white asparagus are an interesting combination. The best eel dishes are cooked in the south of Treviso province, either side of provincial capital. Away from the coast recipes using *stoccafisso* (salt cod) abound such as *Baccala alla Vincentino* and *Polenta e Baccala Mantecato*.

“At times we ought to drink even to intoxication, not so as to drown, but merely to dip ourselves in wine, for wine washes away troubles and dislodges them from the depths of the mind and acts as a remedy to sorrow as it does to some diseases. The inventor of wine is called Liber, not from the license which he gives to our tongues but because he liberates the mind from the bondage of cares and emancipates it, animates it and renders it more daring in all that it attempts.” ~ Seneca

CANTINA ROSA BIANCA, Veneto

Pinot Grigio Rosato – well might ye blush. It is a red berry slushie. Formula? Pinot Grigio + Merlot = Tick The Box.

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| 2023 | ROSA BIANCA PINOT GRIGIO IGT PESCARESI | W |
| 2023 | ROSA BIANCA PINOT GRIGIO ROSATO | Ro |

LA BIANCARA, ANGIOLINO & ALESSANDRO MAULE, GAMBELLARA, Veneto – Organic- certified Suolo e Salute

Angiolino Maule is one of the founding figures of natural farming and winemaking in Italy. He has been setting an example in both practices since the late 1980's and is now assisted by his two sons, Francesco, and Alessandro. Their estate is located in the hills of Gambellara between Verona and Vicenza where they have 9 hectares of vines on south-facing volcanic soil slopes. The health of the vineyard is maintained by mowing the grass between the vines, using only naturally produced plant compost (which they make on the property), controlling diseases using herbal teas and other natural products, and bringing back the natural balance to the soil by means of sowing cereals or legumes (oats, field beans, etc.) In the cellar the non-interventionist approach involves eliminating any artificial products such as selected yeasts, enzymes, etc. They use only natural yeasts, do not filter or fine the wine, and add only a very small amount of sulphur dioxide to the wines just before bottling. For some of the wines, sulphur dioxide has been eliminated completely. These wines are about as pure as they get. Not surprisingly, they taste just like delicious grape juice.

Masieri Bianco (a blend of Garganega and many other grapes) fermented in stainless steel with no skin contact and bottled with a minimal amount of sulphites. The red is a blend of varying amount of Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Tocai Rosso and Lagrein depending on the year. The two wines are brilliant, sapid, throbbing with energy,

Pico is pure Garganega which is heavily selected on harvest and ferments in open vats without additions or temperature control. It is then transferred to 1,500 litre barrels (none new) for 12 months and bottled without fining or filtration. An extraordinary wine – honeyed in colour with aromas and flavours of ripe nectarine and apricot and complex balsam and smoke notes denoting its volcanic origins.

Sassaia is a white wine made of 80% Garganega and 20% Trebbiano from vineyard sites which are richer in minerals. The fermentation in 30hl oak barrels without temperature control that normally peaks at 22-26 degrees F. It is bottled in April/May of the following year without fining or filtration. Often, part of the bottling is done without the addition of any sulphur.

A dessert wine made from dessicated Garganega grapes the Recioto is Angiolino's pride and joy. The fresh grapes are hung vertically on large moveable screens and exposed to the drying winds until the month of December. (In most cases, other winemakers use flat horizontal plastic caskets which do not allow for the grapes to be free of surface contact with the plastic. Angiolino does not agree with this technique.) The grapes normally reach a potential of 33 to 37 degrees and are fermented on their skins in open vats for around 20 days in a way that reinforces the natural microbial flora. (Angiolino has tried using buried amphorae in the past but has not been completely satisfied with the results.) At this time the natural yeasts on the skins of the grapes are less numerous and viable because of the winter cold. So Angiolino takes a small part of the must to a warmer place, the yeasts activate, and he then adds it back to the larger mass of must. After pressing, the wine goes into 1500ltr barrels for 8-9 months and the alcoholic fermentations stops between 14-16 degrees. Three years after the harvest, it is put in bottle.

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| 2023 | GARG 'N' GO SPARKLING | Sp |
| 2023 | MASIERI BIANCO | W |
| 2022 | MASIERI BIANCO ~ magnum | W |
| 2021 | PICO BIANCO | W |
| 2022 | SASSAIA ~ Garganega, Trebbiano | W |
| 2022 | MASIERI ROSSO ~ Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Tocai Rosso | R |
| 2017 | RECIOTO DI GAMBELLARA MONTE SORIO – 50 cl ~ Garganega | Sw |

Recioto di Soave is the first wine from Veneto to have obtained the D.O.C.G. appellation. Recioto is a very ancient wine. In a letter written in the 5th century, Cassiodorus, the learned minister of Theodoric, describes a sweet white wine from Verona that is very similar to Recioto Soave. According to his description, this wine had to be made from grapes grown on “domestic pergolas” and hung in sheltered rooms during the winter months, after which it was vinified into a “beautiful, clear white wine that looks as if it were obtained from lilies.” Recioto is a word in the dialect of Verona. It derives from “recia,” which is the upper part of the bunch of Garganega grapes – the part that is most exposed to the sun. A little before the harvest, the best grapes are selected for drying on racks. They are then dried for a period of four to six months, during which the grapes are carefully tended and cleaned, before being pressed. While drying, a characteristic mildew is formed on the grapes conveying a typical aroma to the wine. Recioto di Soave is yellow-gold in colour with a complex aroma reminiscent of acacia honey with a flowery scent and a well-balanced, full-bodied and velvety bouquet. It is best served with Pandoro from Verona and all sorts of biscuits and dry pastries. But it is also very good served with ripe cheese, like Monte Veronese. Recioto di Soave is a great wine for special occasions.

AA FILIPPO FILIPPI, SOAVE, Veneto – Organic

The volcanic nature of the basaltic rock along with the calcareous soils which gave origin to the terrain assures sapidity and particular salinity to these remarkable wines. The Filippi vineyards in Castelserino are 320-400 metres above sea level (the highest in the region) and the presence of the nearby forest creates an ideal micro-climate which is always ventilated and characterised with good temperature range between day and night. All this contributes to the persistence of perfumes and aromas in the wine. And these are superb wines with beautiful definition and minerality and a naturalness which is at odds with the convention of the region. The Soave Castelserino from hand-harvested vines with an average age of 60 years, is fermented in stainless steel with ambient yeast and ages on the lees in stainless steel for 4-6 months before bottling. This is a mineral-charged wine with tensile acidity, pronounced aromas of apple blossom and ginger, and is perfect. Vigne del Bra is a cru 70-year-old vineyard in effect at 400m and south west facing on rocky clay with limestone. Also fermented in stainless steel it is subsequently aged for 20 months on the lees. There is an extra dimension to the minerality here and a greater richness in the mouth. The Trebbiano Turbiana is a young vineyard planted in a clearing in the forest, planted using cuttings of old vine Trebbiano di Soave found among their Garganega in the Vigne della Bra. Vinified with natural yeast in stainless steel and then aged for six months on the lees. Vibrant golden colour with a yeasty nose of brioche and almond pastry. The wine unfolds to reveal expansive aromas of honeydew melon, peach and mango. The ensemble is completed by a sensation of concentration and finesse. Monteseroni is a very limited production white that is based on 100% Garganega that comes from Filippi's warmest site, his south-exposed Monteseroni vineyard at 350 metres. Consisting mostly of calcareous soils, this parcel is named after the dialect referring to wild roosters that used to inhabit the mountainous terrain. The resulting golden-hued wine is fermented and matured in stainless steel tanks, resting for a minimum of six months on the fine lees before bottling and release. Its aromatics are somewhat shy, requiring some coaxing, in contrast to the palate that shows immediacy and full disclosure in its round, rich, enveloping quince, apricot and spice notes.

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| 2023 | SOAVE CLASSICO “CASTELCERINO” | W |
| 2022 | SOAVE CLASSICO “CASTELCERINO” – magnum | W |
| 2022 | SOAVE CLASSICO “VIGNE DELLE BRA” | W |
| 2022 | SOAVE MONTESERONI | W |
| NV | DIECI BIANCO SOLERA | W |
| 2022 | TREBBIANO TURBIANA | W |

MONTE DALL' ORA, CARLO VENTURINI & ALESSANDRA ZANTEDESHI, SAN PIETRO IN CARIANO, Veneto
– Biodynamic

Just arrived in Venice. Streets full of water. Please advise. ~ Robert Benchley

When Alessandra and Carlo Venturini first discovered Monte dall'Ora it was love at first sight. As children of farmers, they were excited and challenged by the hard work it was going to take to restore these ancient vineyards. Located in Castellroto, in the hills outside of Verona, the vineyards of Monte dall'Ora are planted on a base of limestone soil and form a natural amphitheatre facing southeast towards the city. In fact, portions of their vineyards are planted on ancient drystone terraces called marogna, a design in which large stones form the exterior support structure and smaller stones form a spit of land in the interior. This brittle stone, in which fossils and petrified shells can be found, allows for excellent drainage and deep penetration of the vines.

The Venturinis are firm adherents to biodynamic principles. As such, they encourage the growth of biodiversity by planting herbs such as rosemary and lavender in the summer, whose fragrant blooms are attractive to bees; and sowing cereals in the winter, whose roots move and aerate the soil. In addition, the Alessandra and Carlo have emphasized traditional and native grape varieties wherever possible to give originality and typical wines.

"We try to preserve the knowledge and traditions of our grandparents, who gave value to each plant to recognize and know the qualities as a remedy for common ills. Also, for the vineyards, there are some helping herbs which we use to prepare tea with flowers and dried leaves (nettle, dandelion, yarrow, sage, peppermint) and that during the summer are sprayed on leaves and bunches. For us biodiversity is knowledge and tradition, it is expressed in love for small weeds and no domesticated plants, in the ways they were affectionately called, for the rituals and traditions that has been handed down from generation to generation".

The Venturinis approach biodynamic agriculture with becoming modesty and curiosity, their daily work governed by the nature's rhythms. They adopt measures in the vineyard to help preserve the fertility of the land and the developments of micro-organisms, which means that the roots of plants find useful materials in the soil to resist disease and parasitic attack. "Knowledge and respect for natural cycles help us to find the balance that give us a state of well-being and that will benefit our whole microcosm (soil-vine-wine-man)".

All the wines are blends of Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella, Molinara and Oseleta. Fermentation is spontaneous with indigenous yeasts and extraction is gentle giving wines of gentle, cherry-fruited elegance. The Valpol Saseti is fermented in stainless with natural yeasts and is unfiltered and unfinned. Ruby red colour with purplish reflections, and scents of red fruits such as cherries and juicy red plums with a hint of bitterness. On the palate, the fruit is vinous, with a suggestion of dew-covered grass. The minerality of the estate's limestone soil is evident in this wine and the finish tasty and fresh. Try with cotechino sausage, rabbit, mixed boiled meats and other staples of Veronese cuisine or even Baccala alla Vicentina (salt cod or stockfish cooked in milk and eaten with polenta). The Superiore Camporengo has four months in oak; there is a touch more weight with notes of hay and richer bitter fruit with supporting spice character and minerality.

Ripasso wine has been traditional in the Veneto for a long time. The best young Valpolicella is put into tanks or barrels that still contain the lees of the wine for which they were previously used. When mixed with the young wine, active yeast cells in this sediment precipitate a second fermentation increasing the alcoholic content and giving the wine a bitter-sweet character as well as a smooth chocolatey texture. The grapes that make this wine come from southerly exposed 30-yearold vines. Traditional vinification techniques and the use of 308-gallon cherry wood oak barrels, in which the wine ages for 24 months, confer intense ripe morello cherry flavours and plummy mouthfeel.

Jack the Ripasso for a momento and gear your gums for the slightly porty Amarone made from half-shrivelled grapes. A wine which falls firmly into the "impegnativo" category, this is beauty and the beast rolled into one: chewy plums, bitter cherries, mocha coffee and what Oz Clarke describes rather well as "bruised sourness". The grapes are sourced from various sites with an average altitude of 300 metres and dried in a south-facing breeze-cooled drying loft in small wooden crates, eventually pressed towards the end of February. The cold winter temperatures, the long period of fermentation on the skins (over a month) and the use of wood during the ageing process encourage the development of the wine's unique aromas. Braised beef in Amarone, Lepri in Salmi, or mature Monte Veronese cheese are your supping partners with this supernaculum.

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| 2023 | DISOBBEDIENTE – 1 litre | R |
| 2023 | VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO "SASETTI" | R |
| 2020 | VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO SUPERIORE "CAMPORENZO" | R |
| 2021 | VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO RIPASSO "SAUSTO" | R |
| 2019 | VALPOLICELLA SAN GIORGIO ALTO | R |
| 2015 | AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO "STROPA" | R |

AZIENDA AGRICOLA BELLENDI, SERGIO COSMO, CONEGLIANO, Veneto

On the hills surrounding Conegliano, about 50 miles north of Venice, lies the beautiful estate of Bellendi. In 1987, Sergio Cosmo started this winery located in the very heart of the Prosecco producing region while also completely replacing the vine varieties on land he already owned. The Cosmo family also re-designed the layout of the vineyard, planting 80% of the grapes now used for Prosecco and other sparkling wines with the rest used for still wines. Today, Umberto and Luigi Cosmo run the family business. They have a passion for making wine which marries tradition and innovation for the production of truly outstanding wines. The wine is vinified in stainless steel and then by charmat method for two months. Bellendi is clean, fresh, and elegant, with delicate, persistent bubbles that enhance its subtle almond fruit. "Definitive Prosecco, as chiselled as a piece of pink Verona marble, Bellendi's Brut doesn't make even a nod to Champagne. Its sharp, mineral-laden lemon flavours seem designed with shrimp scampi in mind," enthused Wine and Spirit magazine.

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| 2022 | PROSECCO DI CONEGLIANO-VALDOBBIADENE SPUMANTE "SAN FERMO" | Sp |
| 2022 | PROSECCO ROSE | Sp/Ro |

CANTINA BERNARDI, REFRONTOLO, Veneto

A delicious, easy drinking lightly sparkling style of Prosecco with a mischievous sapidity as an Italian might say. The nose suggests blanched almonds, white flowers and pearskin; the palate is soft and clean with poached apple and quince fruit flavours with a naturally off-dry finish.

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| NV | FIOR DE CASSIA FRIZZANTE TAPPO | Sp |
| NV | PROSECCO FRIZZANTE COLLI TREVIGIANI – crown cap | Sp |
| NV | PROSECCO AI CASALI FRIZZANTE – crown cap | Sp |
| NV | PROSECCO FRIZZANTE – 20-litre keg | Sp |
| NV | PROSECCO BIOLOGICO SPUMANTE – organic | Sp |
| NV | PROSECCO SPUMANTE ROSE | Sp/Ro |

CASA BELFI CON FONDO, ALBINO ARMANI, SAN POLO DI PIAVE, Veneto – Biodynamic (Demeter)

We like a bit of turbid poetry in our Colfondo Prosecco. Casa Belfi features Glera grown in the vineyards of San Polo di Piave. The estate works organically with natural manures and green fertilisers to achieve the healthiest possible grapes. They use biodynamic practices as well and now in full conversion. Vinification is also natural with the grapes crushed gently, and the must clarified by cold decantation. The juice is then fermented in stainless steel tanks with indigenous yeasts at a cool temperature. After fermentation, the wine remains in contact with the lees in tanks for approximately six months. When spring arrives the Prosecco is bottled according to the Maria Thun biodynamic calendar, after which, the wine completes its secondary fermentation as the residual sugars are transformed by the yeasts into alcohol and carbon dioxide. There is no added sulphur or filtering or fining, of course. The wine is light bodied, bone-dry and, without filtering or clarification, as hazy as a blizzard in a snow globe. Straw yellow with greenish hues, it has fine and persistent bubbles and flowery and fruity scents accompanied by notes of citrus, yeast and baked bread. The lees at the bottom of the bottle offer the wine softness, mouthfeel and longevity and can be shaken into the Prosecco to give a buttery-spicy flavours. The Rosso Frizzante is a simple, direct wine, which enchants the palate with its naturalness. It's born from a carbonic maceration, but then ferments thanks to its yeasts and is reborn as a phoenix. A rocky mouth, tense, brazen, but never crabbed. The saltiness is nice, lively effervescence in the background to give good rhythm. Light body, good persistence, spicy finish.

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| NV | BIANCO BIO FRIZZANTE– crown cap | Sp |
| NV | ROSSO BIO FRIZZANTE – crown cap | Sp/R |

CASA COSTE PIANE DI LORIS FOLLADOR, SANTA STEFANO, Veneto – Organic

Casa Coste Piane is a small estate (a piffing 5ha and only 30,000 bottles) in Santo Stefano, heart of the Valdobbiadene area. For generations, their wine had been sold in bulk but since 1983 they decided to bottle the production themselves. The vineyards lie on slopes close to the cellar. The vines are on average 60 years old (some are pre-phylloxera!!) and their roots can grow up to 30-40 metres long. This Prosecco is a gem, it is one of the few made in the champenoise method wherein the second fermentation takes place in the bottle. Harvest is usually between the last week of September and the first week of October. In April, the wine is bottled without the addition of yeast and sugar, subsequently the indigenous yeast contained in the wine starts a second spontaneous fermentation that lasts for approximately four weeks. After this the wine spends a further four weeks sur lie. The process of "disgorgement" is not practised; therefore, the yeasts are still present in the bottle... any haziness is entirely natural. This fine Prosecco is clean, pure, and elegant, mineral with crackling citrus notes, easy-drinking and at the same time complex.

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| NV | PROSECCO DI VALDOBBIADENE FRIZZANTE | Sp |
| NV | PROSECCO DI VALDOBBIADENE FRIZZANTE ~ magnum | Sp |

AA CA' DEI ZAGO, CHRISTIAN ZAGO, VALDOBBIADENE, Veneto – *Biodynamic practising*

Christian Zago, accompanied by Marika, represents the 5th generation of growers at Ca' dei Zago, a family farm in the heart of Valdobbiadene. The most important part of this family legacy is the vineyards—now totalling around 6.5 hectares—and the hands-on, hands-off way the Zagos treat them. Since the origin as a mixed farm in 1924, the family have never used chemical fertilisers, an approach that Christian has been taking to the next level, being an eloquent proponent and practitioner of biodynamics. He is a strong believer that you can't replace in the winery what nature didn't give you in the vineyard. The Col Fondo is from vines that are up to 90 years growing at 250 metres asl on soils comprising clay and sand with flints. The varieties are intriguing, with the Glera from very old clones supplemented by small amounts of local, but relatively unknown, Verdiso, Perera, and Bianchetta from massale selection. This unusual grape palette gives something truly distinctive to the final wine. The grapes are harvested by hand in small crates and are then selected and delicately destemmed on a sorting table. After being crushed, the must is transferred using gravity to cement tanks. Maceration with skins is carried out for 2 days with occasional punching down. Alcoholic and malolactic fermentation both occur spontaneously. The wine rests over the winter, racked only when necessary, during a waning third-quarter moon. Clarification, tartaric and protein stabilisation all occur naturally – no fining or filtration here. This is everything you hope for from Col Fondo - with that bit extra. The wine is light and refreshing, with pleasant notes of citrus, honeysuckle and wet stone. There is lively acidity, purity, precision and fine long-lasting bubbles. You can drink it the local way, decanted off the lees and then a final turbo-charged glass of turbidity, or half-and-half or shaken up to distribute the sediment through the wine, an action that imbues with a richer, creamier texture. A very refined mousse, subtle orchard fruit flavours, elegant minerality – what a classy Prosecco. The Metodo Classico is from the aforementioned parcel of 50 + year old terraced vines situated further up the slope (300-400 m above sea level) on clay-limestone soils. The Glera (90%), Verdiso (5%), Perera and Bianchetta (5%) hail from a single vineyard located in Bastia di Mondeserto, Frazione di Saccol in Valdobbiadene. The extra altitude and soil profile combine to give this wine its super-precise personality. The vinification is the same as for the Col Fondo until bottling when a liqueur de tirage is added to prompt the second fermentation. The wine is stored for 14-18 months in riddling racks with Marika Zago regularly turning them all by hand. The wine is then disgorged and topped-up, using zero dosage. This is a light-bodied sparkling wine, but with beautiful tension, lively acidity and pleasing chalky minerality. Although the traditional method of secondary fermentation in bottle is not typical for the Prosecco region, Christian liked the results from his initial experiment with this style about ten years ago and has since gone with it. As one might expect, the wine is more delicate and subtler than col fondo, with a truly lovely racy quality and finesse that captures the terroir perfectly.

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| 2023 | PROSECCO FRIZZANTE |
| 2019 | PROSECCO METODO CLASSICO |

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| Sp |
| Sp |

PROSECCO

Local fans of the wine like to say that Prosecco's ancestor was the Pucinum wine that was much praised by the chroniclers of ancient Rome and that was much discussed because it seemed to be the preferred beverage of the Empress Livia, who apparently drank large quantities of it. The historians do not accept that thesis, however, and regard Pucinum as the remote ancestor of Refosco, basing their argument on a description of Pliny the Elder in his *Naturalis Historia*, in which he referred to the ancient variety as "omnium nigerrima" (entirely black-or-red). Therefore, Prosecco as it is today cannot be regarded with all the best will in the world as resembling Pucinum. Conegliano's reputation as a land of excellent wines is cited in documents going back to the 10th century. And, in 1606, a report sent by the Podestà of Conegliano to the Senate mentions the first international demand for the wines with buyers hurrying in from as far away as Germany and Poland and not hesitating to offer exorbitant bids to assure themselves of the finest output. One of the elements that has guaranteed the Prosecco di Conegliano a constantly high level of quality throughout the present century has been the presence in its production area of the School of Viticulture and Enology of Conegliano, which was founded in 1876. Since its establishment, the school has served as a point of reference for scientific and technological research by the whole of modern Italian oenology.

LOMBARDIA

DOSSI RETICI, ELENA MEAGO & BRUNO CREDARO, VALTELLINA, Lombardia – *Organic*

The family of Elena Meago and Bruno Credaro have produced wines for five generations in Valtellina (northern Lombardy alpine district, on the Swiss border), having started in the late XIX century. Until the end of the '90s the whole production was entirely sold in Switzerland in bulk. With the Swiss market declining, the family created "Dossi Retici" winery and started bottling its own production. Located in Montagna in Valtellina, Lombardy, the estate owns several tiny plots for a total of 3 hectares of vineyards, grown on spectacular stony terraces built centuries ago between 450 – 550 mts ASL. Valtellina valley is a Mediterranean enclave (olive trees manage to ripen there) surrounded by colder areas marked by continental / alpine climate. The Alps behind Valtellina are dominated by the shape of Pizzo Bernina Mountain (4000 mts high) which protects from colder winds and makes summers milder than in the rest of the region. These peculiar climatic conditions allow grapes to follow the right maturation patters in the late summer, achieving high quality results. The Nessje is declassified Grumello. From 10-90 year organically-farmed vines grown on silty-sand soils it comprises 95% Nebbiolo 5% Rossola, Brugnola and other local grapes. Maceration and fermentation is with indigenous yeasts for around 17 days. Aged in botti and cement vats of 30-60 hl for a minimum period of four years. The wine is not filtered or fined.

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| 2018 | STABIA NEBBIOLO |
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PAOLO BALGERA, VALTELLINA, Lombardia – Organic (not certified)

Balgera is a boutique winery located in Chiuro, one of the winegrowing villages of Valtellina area, in the region of Lombardy. The winery has a wine history dating back to 1885. Today, Paolo Balgera is the 4th generation wine maker. The winery offers classic old world styled highly fragrant Valtellina wines. These wines are made from the Chiavennasca variety, also known as Nebbiolo in Piedmont region. Valtellina is a vast mountainous area including few sub-zones. Balgera offers wines from these sub-zones, namely: Sassella, Grumello, Inferno and Valgella. These Valtellina Superiore wines have achieved DOCG status. Interestingly, the only white wine of IGT status is also made from the same red grape and is a fruity and highly aromatic wine named Terrazze Retiche di Sondrio. A special wine called Sforzato is made from dried grapes. This is the region's acclaimed red wine of the highest quality. This wine is elevated to DOCG status in 2001. The vineyards are cultivated on terraces, which are south facing. While protected from cold winds, they allow a microclimate within the valley for perfect ripening of grapes. Chiavennasca (a synonym for Nebbiolo) display notes of tar, leather, dry herbs, with subtle minerals, dried fruits, cherry and strawberry characters. A fine bottle of Valtellina wine is elegant and well-structured and tends to improve through long bottle ageing. The Riserva wines spend a long time in barrels before bottling – these wines demonstrate vividly the exceptional ageing potential of the grape.

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| 2018 | ROSSO DI VALTELLINNA 450 | R |
| 2016 | VALTELLINNA SUPERIORE VALGELLA QUIGNA | R |
| 2015 | VALTELLINNA GRUMELLO RISERVA VALGELLA ~ Chiavennasca | R |

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Come, send round the wine, and leave points of belief
To simpleton sages and reasoning fools;
This moment's a flower too fair and brief
To be wither'd and stain'd by the dust of the schools.
Your glass may be purple, and mine may be blue,
But, while they are fill'd from the same bright bowl,
The fool who would quarrel for difference of hue,
Deserves not the comfort they shed o'er the soul.

Thomas Moore

1701 FRANCIACORTA, MARCO BENDINI & ADRIANO ZAGO. Franciacorta- Biodynamic (Demeter)

On the top of Santa Giulia hill, beside the 235orello church of the same name, the glorious eighteenth-century villa Palazzo Cazzago is home to the 1701 winery. The villa is part of ancient land belonging to the noble families of Bettoni and Cazzago. The land includes approximately 15 hectares of hillside in Cazzago San Martino, Franciacorta.

The name 1701 was chosen to recall the first 235eolian235tion of their "brolo", a 4-hectare vineyard framed by XI century walls.

1701 Franciacorta is a 10-ha organic certified winery now in conversion to Demeter. As members of Renaissance des Appellations they follow biodynamic farming methods – an approach which excludes any chemical intervention. It is ultimately a philosophy of life, about working closely with the vine, understanding and respecting its life cycle until the point when bottled it can fully express its vitality and character and above all the authenticity of its terroir. From Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vineyards, they produce Franciacorta Brut, Satèn and Rosé and a Vintage Dosaggio Zero in exceptional years. The range also includes Sullerba, a semi sparkling Chardonnay 'sur lie'.

Grapes are hand harvested and whole bunches are put into stainless vats except the Sullerba which is fermented 50% in amphora. Secondary fermentation takes place in the bottle – the Sullerba is on the lees for 18 months, the Satèn and the Brut spend 30 months before bottling. The Sullerba is unfiltered, whereas the other two undergo a very light filtration.

A Blanc de Blancs made exclusively from Chardonnay, Franciacorta Satèn displays the broad spectrum of flavours and elegance that are the preserve of this varietal. By virtue of a beautifully fine perlage, Satèn is soft, mature and well-rounded. With 30 months ageing, it expresses all the richness and intensity of which Chardonnay is capable. An intense lemon colour, on the nose there are fresh floral notes with an almond flavour in evidence. The palate boasts of soft peach aromas delicately paired with notes of balsamic.

The Franciacorta Brut is a blend of Chardonnay 85% and Pinot Nero 15%. Its full palate is balanced by marked acidity. Mineral hints softened by fresh fruits and a lingering flavour of red apple.

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| NV | 1701 FRANCIACORTA BRUT ~ Chardonnay, Pinot Nero | Sp |
| 2018 | 1701 FRANCIACORTA SATEN ~ Chardonnay | Sp |
| NV | 1701 SULLERBA FRIZZANTE ~ Chardonnay | Sp |
| 2018 | 1701 VINTAGE ROSE | Sp |

The sleep of reason, wrote Goya, brings forth fools. As far as much Pinot Grigio is concerned the seep of raisins brings forth gruel. Emasculated, marrowless, milquetoast wines. So, what have we here? Cool fermentation, a touch of skin contact, a little wine to play with, but not enough to get your teeth into. The Trefili is decent, fruity and does the job. The paradigm of good Pinot Grigio is the savoury, richly nutty style from Alto-Adige or Collio. And it'll cost you now.

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| 2023 | PINOT GRIGIO TREFILI | W |
| 2023 | ERA ORGANIC PINOT GRIGIO | W |

The Bearable Lightness of Drinking – Tipples at 12% and under

Txakoli, Ameztoi – *fermented sea spray*

Blanc de Morgex – *on the rocks, high altitude, low alcohol*

Terrano, Zidarich – *maximum minerals*

Poulsard, L'Enfant Terrible, Ganevat – *palely loitering, bridally blushing, naughtily nice*

Riesling, Marto Wines – *magisterial and ethereal*

INTERVIEW WITH A COLFONDO PROSECCO

Let's start from your name. Why are you called Colfondo?

Because at the bottom of the bottle there are my fermentation yeasts.

Why are they there? Did they fall?

Exactly that. Once they have finished fermenting, they fall and sink to the bottom. Everything revolves around my yeasts, they give me the bubbles, keep me young and make me sweet.

That's nice, so Colfondo is a name that says a lot about you. Your origins are from Treviso or did your ancestors come from other countries, perhaps from America?

My origins are Treviso DOC, my ancestors were born here as myself. I was created following family tradition.

And do you know, more or less, when?

I do not know exactly, but in my family we have always been like this. The second fermentation in the bottle is a very old method to produce sparkling wine and a lot of things distinguish me from my brother Charmat, which is all technique and technology. Charmat needs machines, autoclaves, filters, isobaric systems for bottling instead I am very simple and undemanding. I do most of things on my own, I just need a little 'sugar to make my bubbles and then in solitude, slowly, I rest in a cool and dark place.

Is it true that your grandparents were born during Easter?

Yes, the bottle fermentation takes place at Easter because spring arrives, the temperatures rise, the yeasts wake up and get to work. So you've got a family behind that has always set the births for Colfondo to be born at Easter. It's still like that or are your modern cousins born at other times of the year?

For those who respect tradition, like my family, the time of birth is only at Easter but there are many others who are born in all different months of the year, or in other ways. We are serious about respecting tradition and principles handed down. The only option I have is the modernity of analytical control, which was not there before. I was born at Easter and come simply from the grapes, I'm not filtered, I'm not clarified, and I do not undergo any processing. The grapes are treated on the vine only with the products allowed in organic and biodynamic farming.

You have enjoyed a healthy crop, the sun, do you remember what it was like when you were still bunches hanging on the vine?

Yes I remember. I was in the midst of chaos, the grass was high and an indefinable number of insects that tickled me. Maurizio calls it biodiversity. There are many of us, from the grass and wild plants to microorganisms. There is a nice environment, there are many interactions, exchanges, competitions and races.

Competitions? In what way? For water resources?

No, competition at the level of micro-organisms, diseases, yeast, bacteria from photosynthesis, as in every part of the world there are good and bad ... we have our beliefs, our Bible born from EM (effective microorganisms), it's the same all over the world, what do you think!

Did you get ill when you were a grape? Did you also catch downy mildew or powdery mildew?

You know, when there is high humidity like here in the Piave area, it is easy to get sick. This year, 2012 in particular, I had some minor ailments early in May and June but then nothing until September, it went well. I have my good and strong antibodies, my phytoalexins are always active.

Tell me about your journey from the vineyard to the cellar, how did you become the must?

I was macerated in part as a red wine and I was with the must and marc for quite a while, at least for a week.

Let me ask you a spicy question, but what did you do on the skins for a week?

Eh eh, I extracted everything, I gnawed away everything! I am a passionate wine. At the end of fermentation, I was pressed.

I hear a lot about 236elabel anhydride being added to the wine, do you know it?

No, the only one I have is the one I produce with my yeasts. I do not need any added. Of course, I have to be well dressed and equipped to make my way, a bit like a mountaineer going to climb in the high mountains. As he carries everything he needs to live, so do I. I do a little maceration in order to enrich the tannins, thus increasing the antioxidant fraction that comes from the lysis of yeast. I do not undress with clarifications, and I do not get filtered, in fact I am cloudy and ready for my climb, returning to the example of the climber.

The tannins you are talking about, how do I perceive them when I drink you? Usually when we talk about tannins we think of red wine.

Being a 237elabeli, saying tannin is a big word but there is some extraction from the grape seeds or the skins during the light pressing. You realize that there are tannins because that oxidative note is missing which you can sometimes find. The tannin in fact preserves my characteristics.

Sorry if I go on a tangent, I'd like to go back to the moment of passion with the marc. After you've had your fun and you have gnawed it completely, do you need to rest?

Yes, at the end of fermentation I am put into stainless steel tanks, and they continue to stir me every two or three days to keep me always dirty. It 'a clean dirty, however, because they are my good yeasts.

Easter is approaching, are you happy to be put in a bottle?

Before Easter I also take a nice hit of cold. Maurizio makes me stay all winter in a tank outside, so, taking advantage of the low winter temperatures, I begin to stabilize the tartaric acid naturally.

How do you feel in there? Do you feel comfortable or a little 'tight'?

I like staying in the bottle, I'm a little 'more pampered, then they touch me often, they turn me, I dress me up with my beautiful label and then I go into beautiful local restaurants and bars!

You must be an earth sign ... When you come out of your bottle, is there a special glass that you would like to find, where to dive into?

The glass itself is not important, it is irrelevant, I can go from a mug on the table without a tablecloth, to a crystal goblet, to an ISO glass. I express myself everywhere and I always have my say.

Your aromas do not change if I use one glass rather than another?

Actually, they really change more based on how I am.

Now I will make you mine! I smell scents of fresh yeast, those that hydrate to make bread and then a sweetness almost like linden honey that is not nauseating because it's fresh, it's something alive. I agree with you, they are wisteria flowers, a light scent in the wind, very delicate. What a strange thing, you're a product of Treviso, you were born here but you remind me of the light windy days in Tuscany, where the scent of wisteria and irises arrived at the front door. *Lime honey instead reminds me of the tree-lined street in Florence.* It is true that you never know where we're traveling with you.

Are you pleased that the people who drink you propose certain combinations, are you happy to meet some new dish, or not?

It can give me pleasure, but it is not what I want. Everyone has their tastes, drinking and eating habits, I cannot say how I have to be drunk, if for an aperitif or paired with something. Maurizio drinks me with fish, with meat, with vegetables, with sweets if he wants a dry wine. He knows me, he takes me for what I am.

Let's say your family is recognizable by these features of vivacity and freshness. You, also, do not disdain being left in the bottle to evolve as your yeast and this component of tannin extracted by maceration, allow you to keep for a long time. Can you place in a space-time an original Colfondo?

As a company, I would say my brother from Coste Piane winery belonging to Loris Follador, Costa di Là belonging to a friend, Ernesto, Gatti, and many others. My vine is called Glera, former 237elabeli, and it is the same for all the Prosecco DOC to DOCG. Colfondo is only a company name to identify a production method which is not yet official. We are working on that too.

Why are you in a clear bottle?

To be seen.

Are you an exhibitionist?

A little 'yes, I have to make myself known so that's why I need to show everything, even my colour.

And the problem of taste light? The problems of oxidation?

Well, if I can keep myself healthy and beautiful with the clear bottle, I'll become a myth! I have my yeasts that protect me everywhere. The sponge effect that will in time, once the lysis has finished, absorb the light effect. I have all the characteristics to be a long-lived wine, more than a great wine, and I hope I can prove it.

Do we have to keep you standing or lying?

Always lying. And sometimes I like to be turned, always a bit shaken, in a cool environment.

What are the comments you hear most often?

Who drinks me says I'm special, I'm not a wine for everyone.

So do you feel understood in your peculiarity?

Yes, I am a bit of a difficult wine, I know I have my personality but once my origins are clarified and my story told, everything is easier. I have no interest in being a wine for everyone, I just want to be myself. If they do not like me, I'm glad they choose a different 237elabeli, fortunately there are many. I have my own personality, I come from a careful, healthy, and conscious agriculture. I know my stuff.

You know that the more we go on, the more I seem to be like you? I can tell you that you are like those children who grow up in freedom and then, when they are grown up, they are able to express themselves free from constraints?

Of course that is what I want, that is what I am as well as Maurizio, my creator.

I like Colfondo, I will never leave. Thanks for reciprocating my love. I cannot go away until I have drank and toasted with Maurizio, who says something very interesting.

"Given that inside the wine, and on the bottom, there are yeasts, it is important that the grape comes from organic farming, without the use of chemicals. The yeast, once fermentation has finished, has a detoxifying effect. The cell membrane of yeast, which acts as a sponge, absorbs all the toxins that are located inside the wine and among these there may also be pesticides. When I go to drink a wine unfiltered and clarified by conventional agriculture, I can be almost certain to drink too much of the 'junk' put in the fields by the farmer, with all the consequences that synthetic products have, which are carcinogenic and toxic. I recommend paying special attention to the unfiltered and clarified wines, that they at least are certified as organic. Unfortunately, today we focus on the words "contains 237elabelin" and do not consider everything else that is rather important. I drink only organic Colfondo and would recommend to all lovers of wines re-fermented in the bottle to be informed and then choose the best".

I am very happy to hear this because I love Colfondo in its entirety, I like to move it, and drink it complete with its yeasts. It also likes to be drunk whole and not deprived of some part. Healthy and wholesome yeasts derived from agriculture without chemicals. This is also drinking consciously.

MORE USEFUL WINE SURVEYS

A revolutionary wine survey about wine surveys has once again exposed the vast chasm in our knowledge about the drinking habits of Joe and Joanna public and thereby pointed out the irrefutable need for more wine surveys. Incontrovertible research demonstrates that people living below the poverty line tended to spend less on a bottle of wine than plutocrats, Russian oligarchs and Andrew Lloyd Webber. It was further discovered that drinks advertising aimed at babies and people in a vegetative state tended to be less effective than that targeted at impressionable twenty somethings and alcoholics. Other extraordinary revelations include the fact that all women drink Pinot Grigio to a man, that Australian wine is physically louder than French wine and Château Latour would sell far more bottles off supermarket shelves if it were varietally labelled *Posh Frog Cabernet Merlot* and sported a day-glow back label explaining that the wine could be drunk with red meat or poultry or quaffed as an aperitif. Meanwhile another survey which proudly announced that consumers could be profiled into several fine discrete socio-economic segments (Calais hypermarket; £3.99ers, £4.99ers, £5.99ers and rich as Croesus) has been trumped by the new brilliant ground breaking and entirely inoffensive categorization by Wine Omniscience: **Old Fart* always goes to the Mouldy Cheese Wine Bar in Fleet Street, orders a bottle of house label crusty claret with his well-done steak and a glass of Ten Year Manky (port) with the Stilton; **Red Bull Bint* drinks a glass of Chardonnay, a Red Bull, a vodka, a Red Bull, a cocktail, a Red Bull, throws up in the men's toilet and passes out. She comes from Essex, her name is Sharon Tracy, she's a genuine bottle blonde and takes eight weeks hen night holiday in Ibiza every year. **Brandma* is aged 70 and upwards and spends all her time comparative shopping in supermarkets. She has accumulated so many reward points that she could fly to the moon and halfway back. She always drinks own label and the cheapest brands and, in her spare time, appears in Tesco adverts. **Wine Nerd* has not only tasted the wine but visited the vineyard and arranged for his ashes to be scattered there. He is a living compendium of Parker points and riveting trivia. **Ironist* – buys Californian blush wines and bog-standard labels because... like um... wine, is like... sort of pretentious (like) and it's "cool not to be interested in anything interesting"; **Trend Junkie* – One who rides the hobby horses of journalists off in all directions etc. Etc.

Meanwhile, one on-trade wine company is trialling **B.O.R.A.T** (Business Outlook Retail Audit Tracker). The value of this system was neatly summarised by account director, Viktor Hotelier, who remarked "Iz nice!" The system, operated by a management drone in head office, uploads all sales data, analyses it scrupulously and within a mere six months gives an authoritative breakdown of the information: "Already we've learned incredibly quickly, for example, that Italian trattorias and pizzerias sell Italian wine, that haughty French sommeliers tend to buy Bordeaux and Burgundy for their lists and that cheap Chinese restaurants are still under the impression that Piesporter Michelsberg is a wine. The huge advantage of this system is that we can instantaneously download the data into the microchips installed in the heads of our sales managers and scramble their brains".

They've also introduced a new loyalty card and launched an advertising campaign called "Chip, Pin & Chin-Chin". Every time a nominated gatekeeper (otherwise known as bar or restaurant manager) uses the card to order online, reward points will be given by the particular brands (who are sponsoring the card) as long as *only* the brands are ordered. This is known as "golden handcuffing" and is said to breed positive brand awareness. The system is totally secure, and information collated will only be shared with future employers, the intelligence services, credit rating companies and dating agencies.

A spokesperson for Global Brands Incorporated hailed the importance of the results: "If we didn't find this information out, we'd surely have to invent it. Ultimately, we can envisage a situation wherein there will be as many demographic categories as there are drinkers which will enable us to continue with our "twin track upside down business to business ground control to Major Tom" approach: demythologising wine whilst simultaneously proselytising the consumer to explore the wonderful wide world of our brands or, more simply, recalibrating the brands to fit the customers and recalibrating the customers to fit the brands. And the ultimate objective of all these endeavours? "Upsegmentation of all underindexed drinking categories". And what is that in real English? "More less choice." Pinot Grigio for all!

Cuisine of Friuli...

Friuli is a small region on the border of Slovenia where the influences of neighbouring countries have been assimilated into the local cooking. With principal raw materials including potatoes, turnips, barley, corn and pigs this might be described as cuisine of the poor. There are meals without much inspiration, but natural and free of sophistication. A typical Friuli meal would begin with a steaming bowl of soup. The soups are the most interesting part of the local cuisine being flavoursome, simple to reproduce and are often, to the Mediterranean palate, surprising. There are soups, minestrine (broth with small pasta), minestrone (vegetable soup), sweet soups, hearty soups, delicate soups such as *paparot*, soups for every taste and every occasion. The most distinctive is perhaps, “*jota*,” which lends itself to many variations. The basic recipe calls for beans and sauerkraut with the addition of cornmeal, all of which is dressed with the “*pestat*,” a mixture of chopped lard, onion, sage, parsley and garlic. “*Jota*” can be enriched with meat or pork rind (it then becomes a single, very substantial dish) or with vegetables and barley. Perhaps the height of heartiness is reached with “*minestra di fagioli*” (bean soup). The beans, small and speckled with red, are shaped like little cushions and flavoured with lard and various herbs.

As mentioned already, pig is king and the entire king is used. “*Marcundela*,” a typical sausage of Friuli, is comparable to the “*mazzafegati*” of the Marches and the Abruzzi and with other common salamis from other regions of Italy. The mixture is made with the kidneys, liver, heart, lungs, spleen, giblets and fat of the pig, encased in the natural, aged intestine of the pig. The sausage is cut into slices and fried in butter, then served with a plate of pasta or an omelette. Piglicious as Homer (Simpson) might droolingly say. The “*muset co le brovade*” is a classic local pork dish. “*Muset*” is a small sausage flavoured with spices, similar to *cotechino* (fresh pork sausage) and, like *cotechino*, it is boiled until the casing breaks and the meat comes out and starts to crumble. The “*brovade*,” a speciality of Friuli, require long, knowledgeable workmanship. They are white turnips harvested after the first frost of the year. When they are used they are shredded with the appropriate grater. Their decisive flavour combines wonderfully with pork. With regard to pork, ‘*prosciutto di San Daniele*’, with its characteristic violin shape, is of international renown. Rose-coloured and sweet, with very little fat, it has a delicate flesh and a mild flavour, which comes from the particular salting and the climatic and environmental conditions. Residues of salt are left on the surface of the *prosciutto*, which are then exposed to humid winds that come from the mountains and help the natural penetration of the salt into the meat.

In the area around Gorizia, the Easter period tradition of cooking *prosciutto* in bread, probably of Czech origin, has survived. It is baked in the oven of an artisan’s shop, preferably a wood-burning oven, and it is removed when the crust of the bread has reached a proper golden colour. It is served hot, or warm, cut into slices including the crust, with grated radish on top. In terms of meats other than pork, Friuli boasts traditional recipes for farmyard animals and game. One of these is “*piccione in scrigno*” (pigeon in a casket), which requires a long preparation using the following ingredients: a white potato large enough to hold a young pigeon, the liver and giblets of the pigeon, lard, of lean *prosciutto crudo* (cured ham), porcini mushrooms, parsley, capers, two or three pickled cucumbers, sage and rosemary. It should be served very hot with a garnish of black verjuice grapes. “*Capriolo in salmi*” (roebeek marinated in herbs and wine) is another local speciality. A sauce is prepared with the wine from the marinade, the meat scraps, green chilli peppers, pickled cucumbers and anchovies. It should be finished with the sauce and served with potato dumplings sautéed in the refined sauce of the roebeek itself.

The cheeses of Friuli also boast ancient traditions. The most important among them is Montasio, the most typical of all the cheeses of Friuli, protected by the DOP (Denomination of Protected Origin) label. This cheese takes its name from Altopiano di Montasia, an isolated area on the north-eastern border among the Alpine peaks, in an area protected by the tops of the Jof Fuart and the Jof Montasio, both of them over 2700 metres (9000 feet). It is a cooked cheese, obtained from cow’s milk. The cream is allowed to rise from the evening milking and the milk is mixed with the milk from the morning milking. At the end of this first phase, the curd is deposited in the appropriate hoops, where it is kept under pressure for several hours. During the course of the operations the moulds are turned frequently. The next step is salting, first in brine and then dry, before passing to the ageing period. Fresh Montasio, *da tavola* (table cheese) is ready after a month and a half. After six months it becomes *mezzano* (medium) and after a year it becomes *239mprovi* (mature). The cheese is straw yellow and crumbly. The cylindrical form *Ricotta affumicata* (smoked ricotta cheese) is also produced. This is a typical preparation of ricotta, common in various cheese factories in the mountains of Friuli, very typical of Val Canale in the area crossed by the Udine-Tarvisio motorway, above all in the towns of Pradis di Sopra and Malborghetto. The ricotta, made from cow’s milk whey after the processing of Montasio, is compressed into brick-shapes and smoked with beech wood aromatised with juniper and herbs. A tasty table cheese, smoked ricotta is also used to accompany typical local first courses such as *gnocchi di patate* (potato dumplings) and “*cialzons*” (stuffed pasta). “*Frico Friulano*” (melted cheese fritters) is dish whose origins are tied to the poverty of this land. Today it is a compulsory starter in traditional meals in Friuli, but its origins are humble. The farmers, before bringing the herds to pasture, would leave a pan with leftover cheese rinds on the hot ashes of the hearth. When they returned, they found the cheese rinds melted, transformed into a sort of golden fritter. Today it is prepared in two ways: a few spoonfuls of grated Montasio cheese are poured over melted butter and browned, or pieces of potato are first added and then flattened when they are tender, and then covered with Montasio cheese.

Sweets may be last but are certainly not least. The people of Friuli and the people of Venezia Giulia could seriously debate the differences between the “*gubana*”, a focaccia cake typical of Friuli, and the “*putizza*” which is prepared in a similar way and is made only in the area of Trieste. The truth is that there is more than one kind of “*gubana*.” The one made in the valleys of Natisone is different from that of Cividale, and in Trieste the “*putizza*” has been absorbed into the “*presnitz*” (sweet pastry roll with raisins, nuts and candied fruit), which is of Hungarian origin. To complicate matters, sometimes sugar is used as a sweetener and sometimes honey is used. Apart from this small complication, the two areas are united by a series of more or less similar biscuits. And among the high-ranking cakes there are the great cakes of Viennese tradition, from the “*Sacher*” to the “*Dobos*.”

IL VIN NOSTRAN

Prin: sapà, netà, uaià,
 sojletà, verderamà.
 Son lis tassiss di pajà
 e un sol nùl al fàs tremà.
 Prima zappare, pulire, potare,
 trattare la vite con zolfo e verderame.
 Ci sono le tasse da pagare
 e un solo nuvolone ti fa tremare.

Ermete Zardini (*Cormòns, 1868-1940*)

PRINCIC DARIO, OSLAVIA, COLLIO, Friuli – *Biodynamic*

Your palate is bored. Your palate needs a sock in the gills. Let's shock it. It lives! They live. The whites are yellower than ripe corn, cloudier than just-fermented cider, purer than the driven grape skin. The Sauvignon veers towards amber-red, so put your preconceptions into neutral and your taste buds into overdrive and experience a wine with minerality, relentless focus, bitter bite and guts. Princic's wines have the same feel as those of La Stoppa and Valentini: unfiltered and minimally sulphured, they taste of the earth, of rock salts and bitter stony fruits, in other words edgily natural. This may not be everyone's cup of tea (or Sauvignon) but thank goodness in an era of branding and conformity that we have the opportunity to dance on the wilder shores of winemaking. Trebez is a triumphant triumvirate of Sauvignon, Pinot Grigio and Chardonnay if not quark, strangeness and charm. This orange-rosé (the result of extended skin maceration) wine is bone-dry with a hint of dried grape-skin and suggestion of butterscotch. It's very understated, a wine that you have to meet more than halfway. Try the whites with braised veal shank. The Pinot Grigio has a dark pink-amber colour, with exotic and ripe fruits, mutating all the time. Apricot skin, mandarin and ginger surge across the tongue and there's a touch of astringency to remind you of the original grape. Not just a great Pinot Grigio, a wine reeking (in the classiest sense) of individuality. Punch downs and twenty-day skin maceration account for the delicate amber colour of the Jakot. Two years ageing on the lees in vat completes the process. The nose is understated – apricot kernels, butternut and warm spice (ginger). The wine is smooth and marrow-like in the mouth edged with wild herbs, beautifully fugitive. Jakot? Tocai – forgivable persiflage.

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| 2020 | VINO BIANCO RIBOLLA GIALLA | W |
| 2019 | VINO BIANCO TREBEZ | Or |
| 2019 | VINO BIANCO JAKOT | Or |
| 2020 | VINO BIANCO SIVI | Or |
| 2018 | VINO BIANCO FAVOLA | Or |

I was reading Jamie Goode's excellent wine blog when I noticed he had written about resveratrol aka the molecule that made red wine sexy to drink. Although resveratrol may indeed have a wealth of beneficial health properties red wine may not be the best way to get it. He talks to an expert in the food and health field called Professor Corder.

'The 240elabeling240 story has become a bit of a publicity stunt for those lacking knowledge in the field', maintains Corder. 'At a dose of 22.4 mg/kg per day (used in the recent mouse study reported in Nature) and typical resveratrol levels of 1–2 mg/litre in wine, the dose in human terms for wine would have to be around 1568 mg/day or 780–1560 litres per day'...

... which is a trifle above my normal consumption. And there I was so looking forward to my bottle of Teran (Refosco) from Friuli. Purely for medicinal reasons, of course! Apparently, it is so full of procyanidol that in the Carso/Karst region they prescribe it over the chemist's counter for digestive and liver problems. It can dissolve anything – even the oak in an Australian Chardonnay.

The French Paradox is nothing new. It's funny how wine has always been viewed as having therapeutic qualities. Pasteur described it as "healthful and hygienic" and an English doctor, Francis Anstie, of Westminster Hospital, wrote a detailed treatise in the 19th century about which illnesses should be treated with which wines. Dyspepsia was Burgundy (coincidentally high in antioxidants), port for anaemia and old sherry for typhoid. So, if our Victorian sewers finally buckle under the weight of infrastructural neglect, fish out that bottle of Bristol Cream from the cupboard that you've been hoarding on the offchance of a maiden aunt popping over and inoculate yourself. If the typhoid doesn't get you, the cure will!

AZIENDA AGRICOLA ZIDARICH, DUINO AURISINA, CARSO, Friuli – Biodynamic

As further evidence that there is more viticultural diversity in Italy than perhaps anywhere else on the planet, we give you the Carso – the thin slice of land connecting Trieste to the main mass of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia. Officially speaking, this is Italy, but as is the case all along Italy's border with Slovenia, the wine culture transcends national boundaries. Winegrowing Carso extends well beyond the border into Slovenia (as does winegrowing Collio further north), and its trio of peculiar local grapes – the whites Vitovska and Malvasia and a strain of the red Refosco known as Terrano – are uniquely Slavic contributions to the “Italian” viticultural whole.

Carso is a limestone-rich plateau that extends out from the city of Trieste and reaches toward the Julian Alps to the north. The heavy limestone content of the soils likely gave the zone its name (Carso is thought to be derived from a Celtic word meaning “land of rock”), and it lends the wines, both white and red, a firm acidic backbone and mouth-watering minerality. On the white side, this means flinty, fragrant accompaniments to fresh seafood in Trieste, Muggia, and other fishing towns along Friuli's Adriatic basin, while the red Terrano is a high-acid companion to the heartier, Slavic-and-Austrian-inflected food further inland (you'd be surprised how good a tart, tongue-piercing red like Terrano can be as a contrast to the richness of Stinco di Vitello). The Azienda Zidarich is located in Prepotto, near Duino Aurisina, which is a small and characteristic village of the Carso area. The landscape is extremely varied and stimulating. The vegetation of the environment is very different and enhances the peculiarity of this territory dedicated to viticulture. Jagged chalky rock is the keynote of Carso viticulture, which is carried out on small terraces of red, iron-rich soil that have been reclaimed from the woodland. This lends the wines the characteristic acidity and mineral notes.

The Vitovska is part macerated on the skins for twelve to fifteen days. It has a fine, delicate, fruity nose suggestive of plums, yellow cherries and poire william, followed by a palate with an upfront entry as you might expect from a variety that shares its environment with the bora gales that batter the coast.

The Terrano is made with a variant of the Refosco grape (known as Refosco Istriano or Refoscone) grown in characteristic red soil. The peculiar quality of the sun and soil of the Carso area contribute to the wine's particular characteristics. Low in alcohol, it is sometimes prescribed by doctors to cure digestive problems as well as to patients who need iron, because its acidity is thought to be beneficial.

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| 2021 | CARSO VITOVSKA | W |
| 2021 | VITOVSKA KAMEN | W |
| 2021 | CARSO VITOVSKA – magnum | W |
| 2021 | CARSO TERRANO | R |

Low Ugh-ahol wines

A de-alcoholised wine has just been launched in Italy. Called Wine Zero the 0.5% “wine” is made from fermented juice that is then given a full lobotomy in a stainless-steel vacuum. Following on from the local Pinot No-Grigio, Rusk-ati and Zero d’Avola this version quite rightly comes from all over the plains of Spain and is available in three colours: pale, utterly transparent and cochineal. There is also a Spanish-American oak-aged red marketed under Oak-a-hola! Label.

An advertising campaign called “Fear the mark of Zero” will launch the product. A sequel advert called “From Hero to Zero Point Five” will stress the wisdom of drinking wine that will only make you ill or crazy because of its incredibly bad taste.

The wines have been praised for stopping alcohol abuse by an Alcohol Awareness pressure group. “Who’s going to abuse alcohol, when you can abuse this bat’s piss so easily?” leered a spokesperson.

Said one local commentator: “There is a gap in the Italian market for wines like these and that gap is called the entrance to the town sewer”.

RONCO DELLE BETULLE, IVANA ADAMI, ROSAZZO, Friuli – *Organic - certified*

Ronco delle Betulle nestles in the hilly eastern part of Friuli in a subzone called Rosazzo, an estate of approximately seventeen hectares, of which ten are under vine. The hills of Rosazzo benefit from a special microclimate determined by several geographical factors: its proximity to the sea and its altitude. The sea mitigates the climate, the elevation ensures that Rosazzo is well ventilated and well lit, whilst the vicinity of Mount Caterina protects the area from the northerly wind. Ivana Adami has a purist wine-making philosophy: that the essential character of the wine derives from the sun, the soil and the area and that typicity should be respected and preserved, never altered. Elegance and freshness are other watchwords; these are wines with keen acidity.

The Sauvignon is grown on marl and sandstone. The grapes are hand-picked and placed in small crates, destemmed and left to soak for a few hours before controlled fermentation. It is then left on the lees with batonnage for four months and aged for a further six months in bottle before release. It is delicious with good structure and acidity with pronounced aromas that recall sage, tomato leaves and yellow peppers. This sassy wine enjoys a dance with all manner of crustacea: crayfish, cold lobster and crab mayonnaise, but will also wash merrily down snacky supper dishes such as omelettes with herbs and asparagus risotto.

The exceptional Cabernet Franc is from low-yielding (35-40 hl/ha) vines from grapes harvested in mid-October. The skins are soaked for twelve days and there is a malolactic in wood. 40% of the wine is aged in large Slavonian barrels; 30% in second fill barriques and 10% in second fill tonneaux for sixteen months with ten months on the lees to gain aromatic complexity and mouthfeel. The wine is bottled without filtration. The aromatic fruit is bolted together by some serious acidity, but the wine has more personality and texture than a lot of “string-beany” Cabernet Francs. The following tasting note by Jamie Goode describes it à point: “Brilliant cool climate red with great balance. Deep red/black colour. Lovely nose is vivid, mineral and leafy edged, with blackcurrant and raspberry fruit. Savoury, leafy fruit on the palate. Pure and concentrated with an attractive chalky minerality”.

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| 2022 | ROSAZZO SAUVIGNON BOCOIS | W |
| 2020 | REFOSCO DEL PEDUNCOLO | R |

The public has been submerged in a tide of “legally-built” wines which have been made with wine making corrective processes and advanced technologies. These are intended to compensate the imbalance that man has been careless enough to make in the vineyard. These wines are all rather similar and certainly satisfy the taste that has been “imposed” on the market. They are technically perfect, but they have no soul and authenticity to connect the grape and the wine to the soil and environment. Even for the trained palate it has become virtually impossible to tell the difference between all these technical wines even though they are from different places. True wine is an expression of nature of which the winemaker can only be a humble interpreter. Wine must have its own personality, culture and tradition of the earth. It has to transmit all these sensations to those who are looking for taste and bouquet that are inextricably linked to the land and the grape.

www.truewine.net

MASSA VECCHIA, FABRIZIO, TOSCA & VASCO NICCOLAINI, MASSA MARITIMA, Toscana – Biodynamic

Fabrizio subscribes to the deceptively simple sustainable agriculture theories of the Japanese farmer-philosopher Masanobu Fukuoka, detailed in his 1975 book, “The One-Straw Revolution.” “We use no chemicals, no herbicides, really not even much in the way of machines,” What little ploughing is done, usually to “rip” the soil between the vine rows to turn over the crop cover, is performed by one of two white, long-horned oxen kept by Fabrizio for this purpose. Francesca Sfordrini has taken up the reins with several partners and continues to work the farm with respect for nature and the cycles it imposes.

The wines are as original and uncompromising as everything else about this exercise in purist winegrowing. Take, for example, the Massa Vecchia Ariento which is 100% Vermentino. The wine is fermented with the skins, which is conventional for red wines but still highly unusual for whites. The grapes are pressed by foot twice a day for five days then the wine spends three weeks on the skins, with a daily punch down. Aged in small chestnut casks, the resulting dry white wine is nothing short of thrilling, with a bright golden colour and a powerful scent of wild garrigue herbs amongst the notes of lemon oil and orange and just the slightest astringency (from the skins) in the finish. It reminds us of the wines of Princic and Gravner and even the nonpareil Trebbiano of Valentini. Try with stuffed sardines (an Elba speciality) or cacciucco (fish stew) a variation on the famous dish from Livorno and most loved by Napoleon during his stay on the island. Ariento’s amber partner in crime is made from the pleasingly aromatic Malvasia grape. Think apricots with a dusting of white pepper and spice – best served from the carafe.

As well as the fabulously funky Vermentino, we are listing a light red/rosé, a red and a raisiny Aleatico. Cloudy, volatile, sweet-sour – it’s not just that nowt is taken out, but it seems that a whole lot has been shovelled back in to La Querciola. The colour – hazy ruby red. The nose – what a nose, more of a full-blown conk, wafting morello cherries on aromatic gusts of balsamic vineyard. Fresh in the mouth, earthy and smoky, with marked yeastiness this Sangiovese is truly a walk on the wild side. The rosé is barely that, a deep ruby-complexion’d blend of Merlot and Malvasia Nera (of course). The nose is earthy and herbal: there’s fennel, eucalypt and red chicory, liquorice and cherry and the mouth manages to be soft and refreshing. As crazy volatile rosés go this is madder than Mad Jack McMad, the winner of this year’s Mr Madman competition. As for the Aleatico, from sun-shriveled grapes, it is a true oddity, a sort of red Muscat being “wild, sweet and volatile with musky, herby, grapey fruit and a blast of vinegar” (Jamie Goode).

For Fabrizio simplicity and deference is everything. In an interview with Matt Kramer he observes: “Wine is not something separate from the earth, from the planet, or from us. When you cultivate vineyards with care and you make wine in a way that allows everything to come through, then it’s enough, don’t you think?”

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| 2022 | MASSA VECCHIA ARIENTO ~ Vermentino | Pr |
| 2022 | MASSIA VECCHIA ROSATO | Ro |
| 2021 | MASSA VECCHIA SANGIOVESE | R |
| 2021 | MASSA VECCHIA POGGIO A VENTI | R |
| NV | MASSA VECCHIA ROSSO | R |

These wines are only available on allocation, alas

IL PARADISO DI MANFREDI, FLORIO GUERRINI, MONTALCINO, Toscana – Biodynamic

Il Paradiso di Manfredi is a tiny estate of 2.5 ha in the heart of Montalcino. In the 50s Manfredi worked for the famous Biondi Santi estate. In 1958 he bought Il Paradiso di Manfredi where there were more olive trees than vines and indeed in that period in Montalcino the olive oil production was higher than the wine production. Initially they were harvesting around 10000 kg of olives each year but at the beginning of the 60's a big freeze destroyed all the olive trees and Manfredi decided to replant everything with vines.

In 1982 Manfredi died, and Florio, Manfred's son in law, decided to work on the estate full time.

Florio had always been passionate about wine and helped Manfredi, but his main job hitherto had been as a maths teacher. Il Paradiso di Manfredi today is one of the best expressions of traditional Brunello di Montalcino. Viticulture and vineyard rhythm is effectively biodynamic. Pesticides and weedkillers are eschewed, the waxing and waning of the moon determines activity in the vineyard and the winery. They hand-pick the grapes (yields are around 42hl/ha), the wild ferment takes place in concrete vats (no temperature control...) after which the wine spends 36/40 months in big casks of Slavonian oak (25/30 hl). By law a Brunello di Montalcino may be ready for the market in January five years after the harvest ... for Florio a Brunello is ready when... it is ready. Truly a Grolsch moment. For example, they are now releasing together 2002 and 2000 vintages and bottling the prized 2001 vintage just for us, because we are the sort of impatient school kids who just can't wait for a good thing. Florio also produces a Rosso di Montalcino from the same vineyard... the only difference between the two wines is the period that it spends in wood (usually ten to twelve months).

The wines are everything you hope for great Sangiovese displaying wicked wild cherry fruit along with notes of herbs, leather, liquorice, pepper and spice and nascent prune, tar, and tobacco aromas. It's so savoury that the food you are thinking of cooks and present itself at the table.

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| 2022 | ROSSO DI MONTALCINO | R |
| 2017 | BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO | R |

The Vine – ‘Cometh the full grape cluster on the vine. The rain falleth. Clusters thicken, purple they are as bruises, as thunder, yet each grape containeth within itself a measure of joy and dancing, the quick merry blood of the earth.

The Grape Harvest – ‘Cometh at last the hour of full ripeness. Labourers toil all day, they cram the baskets, their arms are red. The master of the vineyard, he goeth about the streets in the last of the sun, bargaining as such as sit idle against the wall and them that throw dice in the dust. For the grape harvest must be ingathered.

The Treading of the Grapes – ‘And he that presseth the hoarded grapes, look, his breast and his thighs are red, as though he had endured a terrible battle, himself scatheless. And still more and more grapes are brought to the press where he laboureth, this hero.

Wine – ‘Now it standeth long, the vat, in a cellar under earth, as it were in a cold grave. Yet this is in no wise a station of death. Put thy ear against the vat, thou hearest a ceaseless murmur, a slow full suspiration. The juice is clothing itself in sound, in song, in psalmody.

From A Treading of Grapes – George MacKay Brown

*Five qualities there are wine's praise advancing;
Strong, beautiful, fragrant, cool and dancing.*

Sir John Harington

LA PALAZZETTA, FLAVIO, LUCA & TEA FANTI, MONTALCINO, Toscana – Organic

The 18-hectare family run winery and vineyards are situated on the south-eastern edge of the Montalcino appellation in the tiny village of Castelnuovo dell' Abate. Flavio Fanti is a traditionalist – utilising large Slovenian and French oak for his Brunellos. Flavio's Brunello are a testament to the amazing zone of Castelnuovo dell' Abate. He cultivates organically with due respect for the land and his beloved appellation. The wines have structure, power and purity, without doubt, built for the long haul.

Flavio fashions his wines himself, a grower, and a cellar-master. In addition, his daughter Tea has earned her doctorate in Oenology and assists in the cellar and more duties are being passed to Luca.

In the vineyards, grapes are grown with care and according to organic farming methods. In 2016 La Palazzetta was awarded with the "Ecofriendly Cellar Diploma" for the production of healthy wines for consumers, and their commitment to ecologically sustainable values, the realization of projects aiming to protect land and vineyards, and the actuation of energy saving plans. La Palazzetta wines received organic certification from the 2018 harvest.

All grapes come from the estate vineyards in Castelnuovo dell' Abate in the southeastern section of Montalcino near the abbey of Sant' Antimo, situated 365 m above the sea level on limestone soils rich with stony galestro (marl) substrate. The climate is one of mild winters, hot summers, rainy and humid springs and autumns in these rocky lands create very fragrant wines with intense colours and pleasant acidity and tannins.

For the Rosso di Montalcino the fermentation occurs in stainless steel vats with a maceration of 13-15 days. The wine is matured for one year in seasoned 500-litre French oak tonneaux. Since Flavio's Rosso di Montalcino comes from Brunello-registered vineyards, and since the essential vinification is identical (though elevage differs), his Rosso di Montalcino is practically de-classified Brunello. It does tend to come from younger vines, however, and the quantities produced vary to vintage. In more difficult vintages, the Rosso is improved with fruit from vines that would otherwise go into Brunello and the Brunello is improved by rigorous selection as well.

After a careful selection and harvesting of the grapes, fermentation begins for the Brunello. The wine is macerated 18-21 days in open top fermenters with indigenous yeasts, followed by malolactic fermentation and then matured for three years in 3,000 and 5,000 litre botti. With purity and power, balance and structure, Flavio's Brunello is definitely built for the long haul. Intense bouquets of blackberry and blueberry, with hints of chocolate, tobacco and balsamic. Harmonious and elegant with powerful tannins

The Brunello Riserva is only made in the best vintages, after fastidious selection and hand harvesting of the grapes, The wine macerates for between 21-23 days in open top fermenters, with indigenous yeasts and aged for four years in the big botti. Intense garnet red in colour. Powerful bouquet of blackberry and blueberry, with hints of chocolate, tobacco and balsamic. Harmonious and elegant with powerful tannins. This is a wine of extreme longevity.

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| 2022 | TOSCANA ROSSO | R |
| 2022 | ROSSO DI MONTALCINO | R |
| 2019 | BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO | R |
| 2018 | BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO RISERVA | R |

Assumptions like bigger is better; you can't stop progress; no speed is too fast; globalization is good. Then we must replace them with some different assumptions: small is beautiful; roots and traditions are worth preserving; variety is the spice of life; the only work worth doing is meaningful work; biodiversity is the necessary pre-condition for human survival.

Robert Bateman

MONTEVERTINE, MARTINO MANETTI, RADDA IN CHIANTI, Toscana

Montevervine is a small Chianti estate of eleven hectares, first planted in 1967 by Sergio Manetti assisted by legendary oenologist Giulio Gambelli.

By 1981 Manetti was finding the DOC Chianti too restrictive (producers were not allowed to use 100% Sangiovese and were required to blend in white grape varieties), so he decided instead to produce a premium Tuscan wine that he hoped would convey the terroir of his site, particularly with Sangiovese. Thus, he withdrew from the Chianti Consorzio, and Le Pergole Torte Vino da Tavola was born. Today, his son Martino remains committed to developing Montevervine following his father's recipe: 100% Sangiovese grapes, harvested late, fermented in cement tanks without temperature control, macerated on skins for 25 days, then matured in Slavonian oak for 18 months with a further six in French allier barriques.

Eric Asimov, the wine critic for the New York Times, wrote the following about Montevervine and it's a sentiment we share completely: "Sometimes I fall in love with a producer from the moment I first taste his wine. I know, I sound gullible. But really, if you can sense a purity, a commitment, and of course deliciousness and complexity, why hold back?" Le Pergole Torte is a profound soliloquy for Sangiovese. Named after the tiny 2-hectare vineyard from which it comes, Le Pergole Torte has one of the coolest microclimates in the region, giving the wine a shivering energy, a precision to balance the wine's obvious power. Le Pergole Torte is only made in top vintages; it is always 100% Sangiovese. If there is truly tremendous clarity to the wine, an articulation of nuance – dark berry fruit, dried cherry notes, smoke, gravel – make no mistake, Le Pergole Torte is meant to age.

But it's worth going a bit more into the philosophy of the Manettis. Although Sangiovese has been Tuscany's most famous variety for many centuries it hasn't always been accorded due respect. Chianti especially has had a roller coaster-ride of a century, from the insipid, watery "pizza wines" of thirty years ago to a preponderance of rather un-Sangiovese-like wines, anonymous and forgettable all at the same time. Although there are many great producers honouring the region with their wines, there have simply been too many Chiantis, blended into oblivion with heavy doses of Cabernet (or Syrah or whatever) and then lavished with new oak in a misguided effort to polish Sangiovese's true character.

Le Pergole Torte is one of those rare wines that sparkles with incredible charm. It is authentic and one of the gems of Tuscany – a landscape that is not without its share of treasures. The complex fruit of slightly bitter red cherry dominates the wine in its youth. It is gentle, silky, and seductive with a hint of grainy tannins to flesh out its finish. But it also has an ethereal bouquet of crushed red cherries and the wild scent of "sotto bosce", the forest undergrowth with its hints of mushroom and truffle and dried pine needles. There is the masculine and the feminine, the yin and the yang, of great wine to be found in this rendition which, for all its uniqueness, refers constantly to the profound traditions of this fine estate that has fought to preserve Sangiovese as the supreme grape of Tuscany.

The Montevervine has a plummy colour and a broad, ruby rim. The nose is soft and approachable, with blackberry and cherry fruit, though a fine, jammy ripeness. There is a sweet earthiness on the palate of a lovely mouth-filling wine, with a slightly bloody, baked plum pie quality and a fine juicy mid-palate. There are hints of chocolatey depth before fresh lemon acidity cuts through, with hints of spices and tobacco.

Pian del Ciampolo is the baby of the stable and could pass for a Piedmontese wine in a certain light. Light bodied as usual with great finesse. Really light plum, dried herbs, rose petals, balsam, extremely earthy/dusty and mineral-laden. Beautiful, lithe cherries and touch of herbs and earth. Good fruit finish with plenty of zing and spine.

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| 2022 | PIAN DEL CIAMPOLO | R |
| 2021 | MONTEVERTINE | R |
| 2021 | PERGOLE TORTE | R |

CANTINE VITTORIO INNOCENTI, MONTEFOLLONICO, Toscana

The estate lies between Montepulciano and Montefollonico and consists of about 32 hectares of which 12 are specialised vineyards, situated between 330 and 350 metres above sea level on medium-textured clay soils of Pliocene origin. The cellar buildings, dating back to end of the 13th century, are in the small, well-preserved medieval town of Montefollonico.

The oldest document referring to the wine of Montepulciano dates back to 789: the cleric Arnipert offered the church of San Silvestro or San Salvatore in Lanciniano, on Mt. Amiata, a portion of land with vineyards on it inside the castle of Policiano. Later in his "Historical and geographical dictionary of Tuscany" Repetti mentioned a document dating back to 1350 in which the terms for trade and exportation of Montepulciano wine were established. Records show that since the early Middle Ages the vineyards of Mons Politianus have produced excellent wines. In the mid-16th century Sante Lancerio, cellarman of Pope

Paul III Farnese, praised Montepulciano "perfect in both winter and summer, aromatic, fleshy, never sour, nor brightly-coloured, because it is a wine fit for Noblemen" – for the tables of noblemen, although the earliest labels read simply Rosso Scelto di Montepulciano. Moving on from the Middle Ages to the 17th century, Francesco Redi, renowned doctor and naturalist but also a poet, thoroughly praised the wine in his dithyrambic ode "Bacchus in Tuscany" (1685) in which Bacchus and

Ariadne extol the finest Tuscan wines. The poem ends: Montepulciano is the king of all wines! The wine continued to be praised throughout its history and in the 19th century the success of some wineries in important mid-century competitions was balanced by the severe opinion of His British Majesty's winemaker at the Vienna exhibition in 1873, when he complained that the single sample of Montepulciano present was "mediocre enough to raise a few doubts about Redi's praise".

When Vino Nobile made its debut as a DOCG in 1983 commentators were equally appalled at the poor quality. Now it is a more nobile beast worthy of an occasional panegyric. Aged in oak for two years and made from Prugnolo (plummy) Gentile (the local name for Sangiovese), Canaiolo Nero and Mammolo grapes, the Innocenti version is ruby red in colour tending towards garnet with age. It is a dense, spicy wine with cinnamon, plums and tea flavours finishing dry and slightly tannic with a delicate scent of violets. This is a wine with plenty of stuffing – perfect with steak grilled with olive oil and salt.

Made from Sangiovese and Canaiolo Toscano grapes with a medium period of maceration, the Chianti is a little (not so little) belter. With the wines from the Classico region topping ten quid it's great to find a rustic uncompromising Sangiovese.

Lovely meaty style of wine with flavours of spicy ripe cherries, roasted herbs, leather and liquorice.

Try this with ribollita, a bread-thickened bean and black cabbage soup or pot roast pigeon cooked with sage and spiced luganega sausage with stir-fried fennel or braised celery.

The Rosso di Montepulciano has plummy warmth and the reassurance of a well-kept barnyard. Notes of saddle leather and wild rose assail the nose, the palate is sweet, soft and gently spicy, and the finish suggests beeswax on old wood. If you are a sanitary modernist, you'll run a mile, but if you enjoy a truffle up each nostril this will be your bag of earth.

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| 2019 | CHIANTI DEI COLLI SENESI | R |
| 2020 | ROSSO DI MONTEPULCIANO | R |
| 2018 | VINO NOBILE DI MONTEPULCIANO | R |
| 2016 | VINO NOBILE DI MONTEPULCIANO RISERVA | R |

AA SAN FERDINANDO, VAL DI CHIANA, Toscana – Organic

San Ferdinando's estate spreads over 60 hectares in the heart of Tuscany in the area of Val di Chiana noted for its tradition of oil and wine production. The Grifoni family, inspired by the passion and by the respect for this land, purchased the farm in 1998. The vineyards, at an altitude of 300 metres above sea level, occupy a total area of nine hectares and are planted with local Ciliegiole, Sangiovese, Pugnitello and Vermentino. Most of the vineyard activities, hoeing included, are rigorously done by hand, while tractors are used for topping and treatments that follow the principles of supervised pest control. All operations that are part of the productive cycle of the wine always occur under the supervision of the watchful eye of Simone, who takes care that the vineyard is treated like a garden, with great respect for the environment and for nature. Weedkillers and insecticides are completely banned with plants sown in the vineyard rows and, green manures are frequently used. Podere

Gamba is the vineyard name, lying on medium-textured stony clay soils rich in potassium. The blend is Sangiovese and Pugnitello (85/15), the grapes harvested in mid-October normally. Harvest is manual, and grapes are sorted, before destemming and a light crushing. The two grapes are vinified separately in stainless steel tanks at a controlled temperature before being transferred into Allier oak barrels for eight months before being bottled. With its nose of forest fruit, cherry, liquorice and coffee this is a silky style of Chianti with soft tannins and good juice.

Pugnitello, by the way, is named after an ancient Tuscan grape variety, the word referring to the form of the cluster, which resembles a small fist (pugno).

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| 2022 | CHIANTI PODERE GAMBA | R |
| 2022 | TOSCANA IGT CILIEGIOLO | R |

The first documented references to the Cilieggiolo are from the early 17th century when the Florentine writer Soderini described a “Ciregiuolo dolce” with a long bunch, a somewhat large berry, and a sweet – “dolce” – and fragrant flavour. This description of the physical characteristics of the variety corresponds to present-day Cilieggiolo, as does the observation that the grape does best in notably warm climates. There exists, nonetheless, in popular and folk descriptions of Cilieggiolo, another tradition which attributes the origins of the grape to Spain and ascribes its presence in Italy to pilgrims who returned with it to Italy from the sanctuary of Saint James in Compostela. Hence the other name once widely used for the grape in Italy: “Ciliegiola rossa tonda di Spagna”, or the “red and round Cilieggiola of Spain”. At the present time, Cilieggiolo is cultivated almost exclusively in Umbria and Tuscany.

TENUTA CAPARSA, PAOLO CIANFERONI, RADDA IN CHIANTI, Toscana – Organic

The vineyards here are truly in the heart of Chianti, a perfect location, radiating out with the cellar as their centre. The best vines are situated a few hundred metres farther up the hill from the cellar (450 metres above sea level) and are heavily planted with Sangiovese. Small amounts of Canaiolo, Malvasia Nera, Colorino, and Trebbiano are also grown. Respect for nature and balance with the larger environment are core principles at Caparsa. Sixty percent of the estate’s land remains forested for biodiversity. “Herbicides simplify a vineyard,” Cianferoni has stated. Chemicals have an undeniable dulling impact on a farm’s products. Making wines this thrilling has to be done naturally.

Cianferoni is in the process of selecting and replanting portions of his old vineyards with plant stock culled from his oldest vineyards: massale replanting. He believes these 46-year-old vineyards produce wines that are rustic at first yet are innately very age-worthy. The vines grow in gallestro and alberese soils. The roots must work hard to derive life from this rocky ground, fight to reach the abundant water deep under the surface. Cianferoni appreciates the struggle of his vines. “When life is too easy it becomes boring, and you kill yourself” he said. We need toil to sustain us, and so do vines.

Caparsa’s Caparsino Chianti Classico Riserva is in a league of its own. “Others use notes or paint, I use nature.” The wine is 95% Sangiovese. Cianferoni points out the richness and acidity of Caparsino as fundamental elements necessary for the wine to age. Caparsino shares its name with the house Cianferoni lives in on the property. “It is a wine for wine lovers, with great complexity and strong emotions. It is too much for some people. It represents, more than the other wines, the terroir (of Caparsa.)”

Cianferoni says his riservas benefit from 15-20 years of ageing. But they are fundamentally meant to drink. “It is great with beef, simple bread and olive oil. The wine is to provide just a little happiness, not to get out of your mind.” Caparsa’s cellar is stone, old and cold, with minimal technology. Everything here is deliberate. Fermentations begin with wild yeasts, and for the reds, last about 12 days. Cianferoni uses 10 hectolitre large barrels to age his reds. “Wood has many risks. Small barrels dry too much the wine. And the extra tannin (from small barrels) can be toxic.” He likes a complex mix of Slovenian, American, Hungarian and French oak for his big barrels. Cianferoni bottles once per year, an average of 20,000 bottles. “If I stay small I control everything.” He ferments in concrete.

Rosso di Caparsa is certified organic by CCPB. It comes from Radda in Chianti, the heart of Tuscany, on hilly, high-elevation vineyards. Wild yeasts are used for fermentation, and the wine ages in stainless steel. I’ll let Paolo explain the blend: “The Wine “Rosso di Caparsa is made with Sangiovese and two white grapes: Trebbiano and Malvasia. This wine remembers the ancient Chianti wine made for the peasant to drink a lot. It is a brilliant red, with very intense aromas of flowers. The taste is very agreeable. It is not full-bodied, so you can drink a lot of it. It is not a white wine, not a rosé wine; it is a natural expression of a traditional wine.”

What might Robert Hughes say about this sanguine maquis-inflected number? Possibly that it “possesses the prototypes of strong sensation: blazing lights, red earth, blue sea, mauve twilight, the flake of gold buried in the black depths of the cypress; archaic tastes of wine and olive, ancient smells of dust, goat dung and thyme, immemorial sounds of cicada and rustic flute.”

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| 2020 | CHIANTI CLASSICO | R |
| 2016 | CHIANTI CLASSICO RISERVA DOCCIO MATTEO | R |
| 2001 | VIN SANTO – 50 cl | Sw |

We watched the ocean and sky together
Under the roof of blue Italian weather

Shelley (not one of his finest moments)

PODERE LE BONCIE, GIOVANNA MORGANTI, CASTELNUOVO BERARDENGA, Toscana – Organic

Giovanna Morganti is quickly becoming recognised as one of the best of the new generation of Tuscan winemakers. Her small estate is only three hectares, and her only wine is called “Le Trame” (the intrigues) signifying the wheeling and dealing required to purchase the land. Giovanna’s father was a legendary winemaker who believed in Tuscan varieties long before the flying oenologists identified this area as super pay-dirt. She studied oenology herself and went to the work in the mid-1980s for San Felice wines in Castelnuovo Berardenga, near Siena, on a project to plant around 300 traditional Tuscan grape varieties collected from old vineyards. When Giovanna’s father gave her a small farm with olive groves, called Le Boncie, she added a vineyard planted with her favourites from the experimental project – Sangiovese, obviously, but also Cilieggiolo, Colorino, Fogliatonda Mammolo and Prugnolo. She makes only one wine – Le Trame Chianti Classico – and releases it a year later than most winemakers.

Planted to a very high density, 7000 vines per hectare, the vineyard is primarily Sangiovese, with a few rows of Fogliatonda for blending. Fermentation takes place in traditional open-topped wooden tanks. Gambero Rosso comments on Le Trame’s “great, and on occasion sublime, fruit”, and Giovanna’s “traditional values & modern technique”. A Chianti Classico notable for purity and grace from an organically farmed vineyard. Drink with the classic harvest meal at Le Boncie: pasta with meat sauce, stewed rabbit with seasonal veg.

Giovanna’s wine is made to the rhythms of nature, according to terroir and the vintage. As with many organic growers the objective is not to please or seduce the critics (particularly the American ones), but to present a wine that is true to itself as far as possible. Following the voice of the inner critic Giovanna Morganti answers the famous Socratic question: “And what is good, Phaedrus, and what is not good – need we ask anyone to tell us these things?”

2022 “LE TRAME” TOSCANA IGP

R

FATTORIA DI RODANO, CASTELLINA IN CHIANTI, Toscana

Fattoria di Rodano is located in the heart of the Chianti Classico in the famed region of Castellina in Chianti. The original farm dates back from the middle ages, when it was used as a lodge for pilgrims travelling from northern Europe to Rome. Its pristine vineyard that spread to over 100 hectares is located at 200-300 metres above sea level, is the perfect location to create classic, soulful Chianti Classico. The estate has been in the Pozzesi family since the 1700s. Vittorio Pozzesi, is the President of the Chianti Classico Consortium, and he runs the winery along with his son Enrico and winemaker Giulio Gambelli. The pride and joy of the property is their Viacosta vineyard, a south-facing vineyard of 35- to 45-year-old vines. The wines are aged in a combination of traditional Slovenian botte grande and small barriques. The result is wine that combines pure fruit and a spirit of earthiness. The vineyards are constantly being replanted with the newest Sangiovese clones and double density vines per hectare.

The Chianti Classico “normale” comes from vineyards facing southwest in the Castellina district. The wine, a blend of 90% Sangiovese with 5% each of Colorino and Canaiolo, respects the tradition of Chianti Classico but also has “modern components” from the aging in small French barrels. Luscious plum, cinnamon, wild strawberries with a ruddy cherry sweetness mark this excellent value Chianti Classico. The savoury fruit is well balanced and lifted by the piquant acidity. Elegant and lengthy in the finish. The wine is unfinned and unfiltered – all the meat left on these bones!

The Chianti Classico Viacosta is made from 100% Sangiovese. 60% of the wine spends 20 months in large oak botte, the remainder in small barrels – half of which are new. Initial concentrated flavours of classic bitter cherry and smoked almonds open out to an impeccably balanced palate showing plenty of dark chocolate, black cherries and cigar box aromas. The finish displays a dash of vanilla and cedar from the French oak aging. Forward red and black fruits are lush and coat the mouth, while chewy tannins offer up a powerful grip.

2020 CHIANTI CLASSICO

R

2019 CHIANTI CLASSICO “VIACOSTA”

R



It looks like something Dali would have painted after a night on the runny cheese, but this proves that the juice of the Alicante Bouschet grape is, in fact, red.

ANTONIO CAMILLO, Maremma, Toscana – Organic

Antonio Camillo worked for fifteen years as a cellar master in the most important estates in Maremma (the last eight at Poggio Argentiera). Recently Antonio felt the necessity to fly with his own wings and produce his own wine so he bought two vineyards totalling five hectares in the area between Sovana and Pitigliano (in the south of Maremma on the border with Lazio).

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| 2023 | VERMENTINO DI MAREMMA MARITIMMO | W |
| 2022 | TOSCANA BIANCO PROCANICO | W |
| 2023 | MORELLINO DI SCANSANO "COTOZZINO" | R |
| 2023 | MEDITERRANEO ROSSO | R |
| 2023 | ROSSO TOSCANA ~ 5 litre BIB | R |

IL FORESTIERI, DARIO MARINARI & EZEQUIEL ALLASSIA, ALTA MAREMMA, Toscana – Organic

Agricola i Forestieri was born in 2019 as two friends and colleagues decided to embark on their own winemaking journey together. Dario Marinari cut his teeth working in vineyards and wineries in both Italy and France. He was an apprentice to the folk-legend Stefano Amerighi in Cortona and gained experience in biodynamic agriculture and natural winemaking at Agricola Le Nuvole, Mas de Daumas Gassac before landing at Ampeleia in Tuscany. His friend Ezequiel Allasia was born in Argentina and moved to Tuscany over 16 years ago and is now an "adopted native" in the Tuscan Maremma. He is currently the cellar master at Ampeleia, where the two met and ultimately decided to create their own project together: Agricola i Forestieri. These vineyards are tiny parcels, often co-planted in the ancient Etruscan "agricoltura promiscua" method with various local varieties all planted together, such as Sangiovese, Cilieggiolo, Montepulciano, Aleatico and Grenache for the reds with Trebbiano, Malvasia, Moscato and Ansonica for the white grapes. Elevations range from 250-600 meters giving the wines remarkable balance and complexity.

Vinification takes place in a small cantina where each parcel is fermented and aged individually before a careful assemblage of the various aging vessels and vinification methods is made to create the finished wines. All fermentations use native yeast and each moment, each step in the process is deliberate and careful attention is paid to every detail: ripeness of grapes, de-stemming vs whole cluster, skin maceration, cement tank vs amphora vs ceramic egg vs stainless steel vs cement. Sulphur is used only if and when necessary; Dario and Ezequiel are not dogmatic about the use of sulphur, rather they use it diligently and only when necessary to help create a balanced, pure wine...all of these decisions result in wines that are simply stunning.

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| 2023 | RIGOMALE BIANCO | W |
| 2022 | GIROTONDO ROSSO | R |
| 2021 | TOSCANA ROSSO | R |

MONTENIDOLI, ELISABETTA FAGUIOLI, VERNACCIA DI SAN GIMIGNANO, Toscana – Organic

Elisabetta Faguioli is the living metaphor of her land, and she greets you, as the land welcomes you, with a smile that testifies to her joy in extending you hospitality. She shares with you her vision of the world and impresses you with the same quiet strength that millennial culture of winemaking possesses. And you accept her for the elegance of her eloquence and gestures. So says Luigi Veronelli.

Everything about Elisabetta radiates poetry, a deep sense of tradition and spiritual feeling for the land. The land is in her blood, thanks to her family, who cultivated vines and olive trees in Custozza, not far from Verona, since the 1700s, and also thanks to her childhood, spent wandering the vineyards of Valpolicella.

Montenidoli is the hill of the little nests; higher up the slopes are the Triassic terrains, the oldest in Tuscany, rich with minerals for the red wines, whilst further down are Quaternary terrains on the slopes, where the calcareous sediments left by the Ligurian Sea feed the white wines and enrich their perfumes. The Etruscans were the first to discover this treasure and plant their vines, followed by the Romans and the Knights Templar. Elisabetta and family arrived in 1965 to see how they could capture the wonderful potential of the terroir.

Montenidoli's vineyards are organically grown. For fifty years no herbicide, insecticides or any other chemicals have been used. This is a microclimate brimming with life. The vineyards are aglow with fireflies by night and dancing with ladybugs by day. "We began to break up the clods of earth and make hummus, raising earthworms and also rabbits, for their precious manure. Now, we leave the hoeing to the roots of plants we sow in the vineyards and till under each spring". Sulphur and copper are the only substances used to treat infection. And only if necessary, because sunlight and clean air are perceived to be the best medicine to make the vines healthy, strong, and resistant to disease and bad weather.

Work in the vineyard is vigorous and vines are monitored from the time the first buds appear in the spring, whereupon a preliminary selection of bunches is made. Before the invaiatura (or veraison) the grape bunches are checked. Grapes tend to reach optimal maturity between the end of September and the first week of October. The harvest is by hand, with an initial selection of bunches, which are laid flat in small baskets for their trip to the winery.

The bunches destined to go into the various wines are divided up, destemmed, and set to macerate in chilled tanks. Only the white grapes destined to become Vernaccia Tradizionale are pressed and following the old tradition the must macerates at length with the skins and is pressed as soon as the fermentation begins, to extract the flavour of the terroir. The Tradizionale is straw yellow tending towards gold, with herbal and almond perfumes, rich flavours, and a dry, crisp aftertaste. The finish smacks of savoury spice and some bitter almonds, and some warmth. Ideal with Mediterranean dishes cooked with extra virgin olive oil and sushi also with difficult to match vegetables such as asparagus and artichokes.

Vernaccia Fiore is made with the free-run juice, displaying all the finesse and elegance of which Vernaccia is capable. It ferments in steel, and ages on the lees to gain roundness and persistence. Displaying considerable depth, it is full, with rich, elegant white berry fruit supported by greenish accents and spice from grapes, and by clean rich white berry fruit acidity.

Il Templare Bianco is a blend of 70% Vernaccia, 20% Trebbiano Gentile and 10% Malvasia Bianca also made from free-run juice. The wine is fermented in barriques which resemble the small casks used in Tuscany since immemorial time and matures in wood for 12 months. The bouquet is rich, with greenish accents and gunflint supported by bright acidity and clean bitter white pear and spice; it's quite graceful and a pleasure to sniff, offering many facets. On the palate it's full and bright, with ample rich white berry fruit supported by savoury notes and a fair amount of languid minerality that flow into a clean peppery finish.

It is the wine for bivalves and crustaceans. Ideal too with salt cod, swordfish and tuna and balances the spiciness of Indian dishes, and the hot peppers of Mexican food.

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| 2023 | VERNACCIA DI SAN GIMIGNANO "TRADIZIONALE" | W |
| 2023 | VERNACCIA DI SAN GIMIGNANO "FIORE" | W |
| 2020 | IL TEMPLARE ~ Vernaccia, Trebbiano Gentile, Malvasia Bianca | W |
| 2023 | CANAILOLO ROSATO | Ro |

The Spirit of Wine
Sang in my glass, and I listened
With love to his odorous music,
His flushed and magnificent song.

- 'I am health, I am heart, I am life!
For I give for the asking
The fire of my father, the Sun,
And the strength of my mother, the Earth.
Inspiration in essence,
I am wisdom and wit to the wise,
His visible muse to the poet,
The soul of desire to the lover,
The genius of laughter to all.

'Come, lean on me, ye that are weary!
Rise, ye faint-hearted and doubting!
Haste, ye that lag by the way!
I am Pride, the consoler;
Valour and Hope are my henchmen;
I am the Angel of Rest.

'I am life, I am wealth, I am fame:
For I captain an army
Of shining and generous dreams;
And mine, too, all mine, are the keys
Of that secret spiritual shrine,
Where, his work-a-day soul put by,
Shut in with his saint of saints -
With his radiant and conquering self -
Man worships, and talks, and is glad.

'Come, sit with me, ye that are lovely,
Ye that are paid with disdain,
Ye that are chained and would soar!
I am beauty and love;
I am friendship, the comforter;
I am that which forgives and forgets.' -

The Spirit of Wine
Sang in my heart, and I triumphed
In the savour and scent of his music,
His magnetic and mastering song.

PATERNA, GABRIELLA TANI, AREZZO, Toscana – Organic

Paterna is a very tiny "cooperative sociale", comprising 3 farmers only who share their land and work in the farm. They produce olive oil, strawberries, and many seasonal vegetables and fruit, as well as wine. The farm is run organically (they have been organic farming 252lumiest in Tuscany), produce their own herbs used to test biodynamic preparations as well (although they are not totally into BD yet), and own a little "Agriturismo". Like many growers that have been working in a natural fashion far before natural wines became fashionable. The Chianti "Paterna" DOCG Colli Aretini is obtained from

Sangiovese grapes (90%), plus other local varieties (like Colorino del Valdarno, Canaiolo, Ciliegiole, etc ...), with a production of about 70 quintals of grapes per hectare. The 8-hectare vineyards are properties of the cooperative and situated on the hills (300 metres above sea level), near Arezzo, at the foot of Pratomagno mountain and in front of the Chianti hills. The soil structure here is loose and rocky. Some vineyards are 30-40 years old and others are 6-7 years old. The winemaking is traditional and simple: soft pressing and destemming of the grapes, with low doses of sulphites and native yeasts for the ferment. The fermentation lasts for 8-10 days with repeated pumping-over the must and the maturation takes place in tank. The wine is bottled one year from harvest and is allowed to mature for a further 6-8 months before release.

Il Terraio is a blend of Malvasia and Trebbiano (95%), plus Orpicchio (5%). Grapes are destemmed. 80% is fermented in stainless steel vats, and the remaining 20% is skin-macerated in cement vats with no temperature control. Fermentation takes place with indigenous yeasts, after which both parts are blended and aged in stainless steel tanks. Aromatic yet restrained, refreshing citrus fruit together with stone fruit and apples. Lovely texture and mouthfeel, followed by a wash of refreshing acidity, plus notes of toasted almonds and baked bread.

2023 TOSCANA BIANCO "IL TERRAIO" ~ Malvasia, Trebbiano, Orpicchio
2021 CHIANTI COLLI ARETINI ~ Sangiovese + other local grapes

W
R

ANDREA OCCHIPINTI, TUSCIA, Lazio – Organic – certified PCCB

This estate is based on the slopes surrounding the volcanic lake of Bolsena; the region is part of Maremma (called “Tuscia” in Lazio), just about 15 minutes’ drive from the Tuscan border, a spectacular terroir known for the infamous “Est Est Est” white, now fortunately making something else as well... Andrea works essentially with Aleatico di Gradoli (the local Aleatico, style wise a bit more on the delicacy and spiciness than Massa Vecchia) and with Grechetto Rosso (called Grechette due to proximity with Umbria, but part of the Sangiovese family, although it tastes completely different than any Sangiovese I ever tried). These are real wines of terroir, pure and natural. Andrea fell in love with the vineyards of Gradoli while he was at the Agrarian University of Tuscia, so much so that they became the subject of his master’s thesis in 2004. He was able to rent and purchase 4 hectares of vineyards planted in the 1990’s. They are set at 450 metres above sea level on the volcanic slopes of Bolsena Lake, the biggest volcanic lake in Europe. Situated just one hour north of Rome, the lake provides a unique microclimate that together with the particular terroir and Andrea’s objective to preserve and promote the local indigenous varieties, Aleatico and Grechetto Rosso, produce wines with the flavour of tradition and the effervescence of innovation. The vines are farmed organically, and harvest is manual with particularly low yields. The grapes for the Aleatico Bianco are destemmed into stainless vat and cement and pressed without maceration (because it is a red grape) Ambient ferment proceeds with indigenous yeasts and the wine is matured in tank undergoing a natural malo with a light filtration and a little SO2 added just before bottling. The wine is delightfully “shelly” with a leesy bite –almost like a very grown-up Muscadet. Rosso Arcaico is an equal blend of Grechetto Rosso and Aleatico. The grapes are destemmed into amphorae for a 30-day maceration. The natural fermentation takes place, and the wine matures in clay vessels of 250 – 600 litres. The fruit is generous with notes of liqueur cherry, macerated soft summer berry fruits and a bittersweet aftertaste. The tannins are very gentle, and the texture is chocolatey but certainly not heavy.

Alea Viva is 100% Aleatico. Very expressive, aromatic nose combines floral raspberry, liquorice, quinine, cinnamon and white pepper. Breezy, pure, fresh flavours hint at red cherry, dill and gunflint, complicated by a strong note of nutmeg. This intensely flavoured, classically dry wine finishes with polished tannins and outstanding energy and perfume. This is a rare example of dry Aleatico, a wine that is usually sweet.

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| 2023 | SOTTOBANCO BIANCO | W |
| 2023 | ALKES ROSATO | Ro |
| 2022 | GRECHETTO ROSSO/ALEATICO “ROSSO ARCAICO” | R |
| 2022 | ALEA VIVA ~ Aleatico | R |

DAMIANO CIOILLI, OLIVANO ROMANO, Lazio – Organic

Damiano only makes wines from the local Cesanese grape on a total of 4.5ha divided between 2 plots. Olveano is surrounded by three mountains around, including Mount Simburini, which screens cold air from Abruzzo making it quite a windy microclimate which benefits the vines. The red volcanic soils confer delicacy and minerality. The vineyards are farmed organically – only copper and sulphur are used, with compost from local cows mixed in with wild boar compost! He has used some very old vines from his grandfather’s time (0.5 ha) near an orchard to create a massale selection. The grape is the aforementioned Cesanese di Affile and the Cesanese Comune (the “neglected” clone, yielding bigger bunches, used for lightness and freshness). Damiano harvests early to prevent high alcohols even if phenolic maturity is not perfect, preferring to retain acid. Things are kept simple in the cellar with steel & cement being used, whilst the top red sees some large barrel ageing. The Silene undergoes a 3-7 day fermentation on its own yeasts in stainless tanks and a further 11 months ageing in cement. This vintage is delightful, being fresh, easy drinking, mineral and delicate with a medium body.

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| 2022 | CESANESE “SILENE” | R |
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PODERE SASSI, LEONARDO SASSI & ANDRIANA MAREGA, Lazio – Organic

The farm Podere Sassi lies in a beautiful location overlooking the surrounding valleys of the southern Sabina. It’s a small biologic agricultural holding that is characterised by a pure, strong and unyielding approach, one devoted to a zero intervention policy that faithfully preserves Nature’s work. There is no place for pesticides and every other intervention that doesn’t fully adhere to their principles. In 2007, Leonardo Sassi took over his grandfather Antonio’s old farm, which had previously specialised in raising Chianina cows, making olive oil and co-operative wine. The farm is in Tarano, a picturesque spot in Lazio on the Umbrian border. Slowly, Leonardo has put the farm back into working order, a process which took several years, and today there are 3.5 hectare under vine. The winery is now certified organic and the winemaking minimal intervention. Leonardo bottled his first vintage in 2017, ten years after his stewardship of the farm began. His great passion for the real wine, one with a strong character and personality, has brought about a collaboration with Danilo Marcucci to make wines that truly represent the unique land in which they were born. The vineyards are planted at 300 metres above sea level. In the winery the wine is made without any added yeast or temperature control, no added sulphites or filtration of any kind. In this area of the Sabina, at the border with the Umbria region, the Ciliegiole grapes has its historically legitimate habitat, while the Sangiovese and Montepulciano give life to a structured red wine. The Lazio Malvasia and Trebbiano Giallo are the base of the white wine.

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| 2022 | CASA MIA BIANCO ~ 1 litre | W |
| 2021 | PICCOLI PASSI BIANCO | W |
| 2021 | SASSOLINI ROSSO ~ Ciliegiole | R |

EMILIA-ROMAGNA

Situated in northern Italy, with its eastern border on the Adriatic Sea, the region of Emilia-Romagna includes nine provinces, divided into two sectors. In the west, in Emilia, are the provinces of Piacenza, Parma, Reggio Emilia and Modena. In the east, in Romagna, are Ferrara, Forlì, Ravenna and Rimini. Bologna straddles the two and is the region's capital. This is gastronomic heaven. Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese is the first solid food a baby in this region is fed. It comes in 75-pound wheels and has been made by hand in the same manner for 700 years. It is unmistakably nutty and fragrant, is delicious to eat on its own—it will melt in your mouth—or you can grate it over pastas or vegetables. The animal of choice in Emilia-Romagna is the pig. Italians will tell you that the pig is like the music of Verdi—nothing goes to waste. Nose-to-tail eating indeed! Indeed, the pig gives its heart and other bits to make charcuterie that is unrivalled anywhere in the world for delectability (says me). Most famous is the silken prosciutto di Parma, the exquisite air-cured ham. Bologna loves its mortadella, a delicate sausage studded with pistachio slivers and eaten either in slices or chunks. Modena favours *zampone*, stuffed pig's trotter (feet) that is boiled and served at New Year's with lentils. Ferrara likes *salama al sugo*, a very soft sausage that crumbles when cooked and is served with mashed potatoes. Eggs and abundant flour make the sheets of fresh pasta for which the region has no rival. When cut, these become tagliatelle that will be tossed in ragù, a delicate meat sauce sweetened with carrot and softened with milk. Tortellini, cappelletti and tortelloni are pastas of various sizes that embrace such fillings as prosciutto, mortadella, ricotta and chard, or pumpkin with candied fruit. The region also boasts gorgeous fruits and vegetables. And, of course, it has grapes. Emilia-Romagna grows a great quantity of them—and up until recently, quantity was prized far more than quality. Traditionally, the people of the region preferred their wines young and frisky rather than mature and complex. In this regard, they went against the wisdom that bold sturdy food called for bold sturdy wines. Here, instead, a fruity and lightly acidic wine was thought to complement rich food because it contrasted with it. But in the past ten years there have been subtle changes on both the food and wine fronts. For one: As the food is getting lighter, in accord with heart-healthy dining, the wines are getting bigger. The other great change is a movement toward excellence. In the early 1970s, they were direct and uncomplicated, pleasing to drink but not world-class like those from Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Piedmont and Tuscany. The most famous red was the very agreeable Lambrusco, which bore little resemblance to the confected horror that still stands on supermarket shelves in this country. The Lambrusco the Italians enjoy has an agreeable dry, grapey flavour and often (but not always) a light sparkle and the best examples of this wine merit reconsideration as a companion to food. With its remarkable ability to enhance the flavour of pork and cut the fattiness that can accumulate in the mouth, it is the perfect wine to go with the region's charcuterie.

Less well-known are Bonarda and Gutturnio, reds from the province of Piacenza. These grapes grow in profusion near the banks of the nearby Po, Italy's largest river. Bonarda is similar to a less fruity Beaujolais and does not age well. It pairs admirably with charcuterie, vegetable soups (especially those incorporating beans) and many meats. Gutturnio is made either as a still wine, or with a slight sparkle. It has gained more acceptance recently because it has a structure that allows it to combine with either light or more substantial dishes. Barbera, lighter than its Piedmontese cousin, is seen on its own, or as part of a blend (usually with Bonarda). Try with Piadana Romagnola, a sort of griddled doughy pancake stuffed with ham and grilled zucchini or spinach and parmesan. Albana di Romagna was Italy's first white wine to be awarded the DOCG designation in 1987. Produced from the grape of the same name, it comes in four different types, though usually only the secco (dry) and 254mprovi (richly sweet) are seen.

In Praise of Lambrusco

Slow food pilgrims who take their hunger, scrip and staff to Bologna and environs know that it's possible to find interesting, well-balanced Lambrusco from artisanal producers and go-ahead co-operatives. We are talking frothy and refreshing wines that one can sip on the piazza or enjoy with a pizza. Little of the quality Lambrusco escapes Emilia-Romagna; this is a happy little warbler from the land of Verdi. The grapes are picked the first week of October. Vinification takes place with the maceration of the grapes on the skins to obtain a wine rich in colour and body. After a gentle pressing of the grapes the must is repeatedly pumped over to extract the most possible colour and body. The wine goes through a natural fermentation. It is then left to rest until December or January. This process allows the wine to filter naturally from impure substances. The wine is then put into temperature-controlled tanks where a secondary fermentation takes place for about 1-2 months. The wine is an inky dark purple colour, almost black, and it pours out with a bright and very persistent raspberry-colour froth. Black plum and strawberry aromas tickle the nose with a touch of fizz and the cherry-berry flavours are slightly sweet, more prickly than fizzy, shaped by crisp acidity and distinct peach-stone bitterness in the finish. At 11% alcohol, it's on the light side for a table red but carries more weight than low-alcohol, mass-market Lambruscos. It's a fine quaffer. Traditionally sipped as an aperitif or pizza wine, it works well with hot-and-spicy dishes. *"Red like wrath, sparkling like life itself, as clear as friendship, Lambrusco invites to a high tones bouquet with this land's such different flavours blending them in a unique hymn of joy, the bright joy of this Lambrusco. In these lands only, finds its birth a wine which merges with air, rich of scents and chants while merely pouring it out. These are not ordinary hymns, on the contrary they are lively, sparkling, uncommon arias inspired by Verdi's operas. Only the places that inspired Giuseppe Verdi's music could generate such a wine... it has the power of a companion's song, of a friendly drink, of a debate between old experts in food and women. This Lambrusco only is able to arouse strong emotions, to move your soul, to always surprise."* It pairs wonderfully with cooked salumi such as Mortadella di Bologna and the typical deep fried with a splash of lard bread puffs of Modena/Reggio Emilia/Parma, known as gnocco fritto (or torta frita in Parma). Often served along with gnocco fritto are the small baked bread discs known as tigelle, that have a texture similar to piadina, the signature flatbread of Romagna, which is the area stretching from Bologna to Fellini's hometown of Rimini on the Adriatic. Another Modenese specialty that works beautifully is borlengo, a super thin flatbread rubbed with cured lard, rosemary, pancetta and crushed garlic.



Bring your Lamb-ruscus to the slaughter

Profumi d'Autunno

*Cammino nel ricordo dei miei pensieri,
quando lungo la riva dei miei 255mprovi piangevi,
divorando I miei silenzi.*

*E' un vagare dolce e malinconico in mezzo a questi sentori e profumi d'autunno.
Vedo danze di vecchi fiori accarezzati dal vento
e timidamente baciati da moribondi raggi di sole .*

*Nulla copre o nasconde il profumo di Te che dai miei ricordi riaffiora.
L'essenza della vita e quella della morte danzano abbracciate sul prato.
Tu non sei qui e piove.*

*Piove dai miei occhi fino in fondo al mio cuore
ma non si spegne il bisogno di Te che lentamente mi consuma.*

Augusto Zuffa

CAMILLO DONATI, Emilia – organic certified – biodynamic practising

The Donati estate is a family estate started in 1930 which is now run by the third generation of Donati – Camillo Donati, his wife and their children. They cultivate 11 ha of vines (7 of which they own as Tenuta S. Andrea and 4 which are leased at Tenuta Bottazza) using organic and biodynamic practices. They are about 20 km away from Parma in the hillside at an altitude of around 250 m with an eastern exposition. There are a number of diverse strains of the Lambrusco grape family, but the main Lambrusco grape of the Parma zone is Lambrusco Maestri and it is planted on flat plains because of its characteristic resistance to humidity and mildew, and also for its relative abundant fruit. For this reason, the Donati do a severe pruning to produce low yields of better quality. All the grapes, including the white, are fermented like red wines (with skin contact), without temperature control, and use no other controls or enhancers at fermentation, no fining, no acidification or de-acidification, no selected yeasts, etc. These are natural petillant wines deriving from the traditional method of refermentation in bottle, a method that does not require preservatives and which makes this wine, unlike those produced in charmat method, age better. The wines are not filtered and are topped with a crown cap (a traditional closure for some decades in this region). There may be resulting sediment and the bottles should be poured carefully without a lot of intense movement.

The Donatis make real (biodynamic) red wine that happens to be Lambrusco except that this is a traditional, unfiltered, bottled fermented Lambrusco that is quite dry and only gently sparkling. Slow food pilgrims who take their hunger, scrip and staff to Bologna and environs know that it's possible to find interesting, well-balanced Lambrusco from artisanal producers and go-ahead co-operatives. We are talking frothy and refreshing wines that one can sip on the piazza or enjoy with a pizza. Little of the quality Lambrusco escapes Emilia-Romagna; this is a happy little warbler from the land of Verdi. It has a deep, brilliant crimson colour. It has soft brown-sugar and strawberry pulp aromas, with a little hint of briar. On the palate, it is frizzante, with quite a robust, serious, earthy chewy-cherry fruit and a quite intense plum-skin grip. Mouthfilling and well-textured, there is plenty of racy raspberry acidity and lovely balance. It pairs wonderfully with cooked salumi such as Mortadella di Bologna and the typical deep fried with a splash of lard bread puffs of Modena/Reggio Emilia/Parma, known as gnocco fritto (or torta frita in Parma). Often served along with gnocco fritto are the small baked bread discs known as tigelle, that have a texture similar to piadina, the signature flatbread of Romagna, which is the area stretching from Bologna to Fellini's hometown of Rimini on the Adriatic. Another Modenese specialty that works beautifully is borlengo, a super thin flatbread rubbed with cured lard, rosemary, pancetta and parmigiana.

This is a style of wine, however, that would happily unite Klingons, Dick Swivellers, ardent neckgrazers and the King of old Dunfermline town in an orgy of uncritical guzzling. I invite you to cast aside your preconceptions and bring your lambruscos to the slaughter. Emilia-Romagna, of course, is Lambrusco-shire. Ask for a glass of house red in any Bolognese tratt and, as likely as not, you'll be given a beaker of unapologetically foaming purple-red liquid. Like so many wines Lambrusco has become adulterated in the translation – usually in the confected, sweetened shambrusco versions that have rocked up on our shores for so many years. This one delivers rasping toothsome satisfaction and then some.

The Trebbiano has already gained a bemused following. Trebbiano – workhorse grape, right? Sparkling Trebbiano – what's all this about? This is about making a wine naturally, with no disgorgement or filtering. It is so natural you can see the yeast doing the backstroke in your glass. Cloudy and smelling uncannily of fermented apples the wine is bone dry on the palate, refreshing and with surprising depth of flavour.

The Malvasia secco is one of those sparklers where spring flowers are entwined with autumn windfall. Malvasia, from northern Italy, usually reminds me of orange blossom honey over drooping orchard fruits coated with sweet spice and pepper. Amber and hazy to a fault (lava lamp alert), wafting aromas of tangerine and musk mixed with pollen. Donati's Malvasia wine prickles, skitters and scythes across the palate unveiling the texture of bleached apricot skins and the sensation of warm peach, as well as delicate impressions of sweet grass, jasmine and tea-rose – all teased along with breezy orange citrus. The finish is ale and hearty, refreshing to the last hoppy drop. As the bottle is consumed – and it will be consumed – the wine mellows to a jaunty, twinkling grapiness or maybe it is just so darned drinkable that the edges only appear to soften. The sedimentary final glass crowns the naturalness of the wine; more often than not a thick orange powder has precipitated and these coagulated lees glow like a phosphorescent paste (nature's portion indeed).

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| 2023 | MALVASIA SECCO FRIZZANTE | Sp |
| 2023 | TREBBIANO SECCO FRIZZANTE | Sp |
| 2023 | MALVASIA ROSA SECCO FRIZZANTE | Sp/Ro |
| 2023 | PICCOLO RIBELLE FRIZZANTE | Sp/Ro |
| 2023 | LAMBRUSCO ROSSO FRIZZANTE | Sp/R |

LA STOPPA, ELENA PANTALEONI & GIULIO ARMANI,, RIVERGARO, Emilia – Organic – certified Suolo e Salute

La Stoppa is an ancient estate with vineyards stretching along the Trebbiola valley, not far from the river Trebbia, in the province of Piacenza. The estate extends over 52 hectares, 30 of which are planted with vines and dominated over by an elegant medieval tower. Over a century ago, the estate's previous owner planted French varieties, producing both wines of significance, as well as others of curiosity through the addition of Italian styles: Bordeaux, White Bordeaux and Pinot Noir. In 1973 the estate was acquired by the Pantaleoni family who, within a short space of time, had invested in and restructured the vineyards, as well as renewing the cellar. Today the company is headed by Elena Pantaleoni, with the assistance of winemaker Giulio Armani. The naturally low yields (due to the average age of the vines and poor soil) together with the intrinsic quality of the grapes, have made possible the creation of wonderfully characteristic wines, which reflect their vineyards of origin and speak for themselves without the need for excessive reworking in the cellar. This does not mean that no use is made of modern technology or small barrels. On the contrary. However, these serve to accompany the wine towards its full maturity rather than to falsely modify it in any way. Today

La Stoppa produces a limited number of wines: some derived from the local varieties – Malvasia, Barbera and Bonarda, others from historically introduced varieties of French origin such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinot Noir. The objective is to create modern wines without betraying the history and expression of the territory, manifesting themselves through the subtle tones and unique character of the wines produced. The Agno is a blend of Malvasia Aromatico (60%), Ortruga and Trebbiano from 35-year-old vines grown at 250m. The grapes are macerated on the skins with native yeasts for thirty days in cement and the wine is matured half in tank and half in French barriques. Amber in colour and aromatically redolent of peach, pear and sweet apricot, this is, as Randall Graham might say, "like Gewürztraminer on acid". The Macchiona is another blend of Barbera and Bonarda and is matured for twelve months in Slavonian oak barrels. A gorgeous meaty wine with raunchy wild berry aromas and the ultimate in savoury sour-cherry finish. We invite you to do the Macchiona! The Trebbiolo is a Barbera/Bonarda which smells and tastes like liquidised fennel salami. Reassuringly rasping it goes with fennel salami as well as wild mushroom risotto.

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| 2020 | MALVASIA BIANCA AGENO – Malvasia di Candia Aromatico, Ortruga, Trebbiano | Or |
| 2022 | TREBBIOLO ROSSO ~ Barbera, Bonarda | R |
| 2016 | MACCHIONA ~ Barbera, Bonarda | R |
| 2016 | MACCHIONA – magnum | R |
| 2006 | MACCHIONA | R |
| 2023 | MALVASIA PASSITO "VINO DEL VOLTA" – 50cl | Sw |

AA DENAVOLO, GIULIO ARMANI, Emilia – Organic practising

This amber gem, tautology intended, is wrought from vines grown in a beautiful isolated old organic vineyard in the hills of Piacenza (Emilia), that Giulio Armani, winemaker at La Stoppa, rents close to his own personal vineyard of Denavolo, with an 'e', named after a local mountain. However, under EEC rules apparently, a table wine can't be given the name of a place, hence the corruption "Dinavolo". Go figure.

The grapes are a lairy lot. 25% Malvasia di Candia Aromatico, 25% Marsanne (called Champagne locally although I can't believe that), 25% Ortrugo and 25% of an unidentified grape variety. Ignorance is bliss here and sod the DNA fingerprinting.

Meanwhile, Ortrugo a.k.a Trebbiano di Tortona, is found in particular in the hills around Piacenza, often blended with Malvasia, as it is for this wine. The vines are vigorous and give constant production. The juice is intense yellow in colour, fleshy and high in acidity and its wines have a good alcohol level. Four months' maceration on the skins is followed by a year in botti. The length of maceration varies according to the richness of the vintage. In 2006, for example, the wine was macerated for twelve months, and the juice obtains its remarkable colour, aroma, and structure from its contact on the skin. No filtration or fining makes this a natural wine, par excellence.

Cloudy tangerine colour, initially some tiny bubbles beading on the rim. Floral (apricot blossom), but also suggestive of cider apples and red pears, clean, textured, vinous with a good yeasty bite, warm fruitskins, beeswax, dry cinnamon, oatmeal and apple acidity to complete the wine. Amazingly youthful and not just alive, actually living. Ease into a carafe, sup and sip with gnocchi, salt cod or smoked cheese.

The Mansano Bianco comprises Sauvignon Blanc, from a parcel planted in the late '80's and located just adjacent to Giulio's property. With almost eight months of maceration in steel tanks, a spectrum of Sauvignon notes come out: grapefruit pith, lemongrass, passionfruit, tropical flowers, mango skin and sage. Pulp and full from end to end, the Mansano maintains a sprightly lick of acid, and plenty of phenolic grip, keeping all of the punchy tropical vibes very much in check.

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| 2023 | CATAVELA BIANCO | W |
| 2022 | DINAVOLINO BIANCO ~ Malvasia, Ortruga, Marsanne | W |
| 2021 | MANSANO BIANCO ~ Sauvignon | W |

“The fundamental importance of conviviality and the right to pleasure are still the basic principles upon which all Slow Food events and activities are built. The movement believes that any traditional product encapsulates the flavours of its region of origin, not to mention local customs and ancient production techniques. With this in mind, Slow Food is working not only to protect the historic, artistic and environmental heritage of places of gastronomic pleasure (cafés, inns, bistros), but also to safeguard the food and agricultural heritage (crop biodiversity, artisan techniques, sustainable agriculture, rural development, food traditions).”

SLOW FOOD ITALY – Website

PAOLO BEA, MONTEFALCO, Umbria – Organic ~ Vini Veri

“Il vino e vivo”

A real artisan producer making organic hand-crafted wines. References in the archive of Montefalco, a beautiful Umbrian hill town (aren't they all?), document the presence of the Bea family in this region as early as 1500. This tiny estate is the classic Italian Fattoria, producing wine, raising farm animals for trade and home consumption and working the land to produce olives, fruits and vegetables. Paolo Bea, the senior member of the family, is the guiding force behind the production of these intensely pure wines, assisted by his son, Giuseppe, who farms the vineyards and Giampero who looks after the cellar. No herbicides or pesticides are used at Paolo Bea. He believes that wine is an expression of nature and looks forward to the differences in each harvest (hence the Rosso de Veo in 2002). The wines are produced in the traditional way; grapes are handpicked and bottled without filtration.

Sagrantino is the predominant grape, covering 60% of the vineyard area. The remaining 40% is planted to Sangiovese and Montepulciano, with a small parcel planted to several white grape varieties.

All grapes are harvested manually, and the reds undergo an extensive cuvaison that lasts up to four weeks. Malolactic fermentation occurs in stainless steel. The Montefalco Rosso is bottled after 20 months, while the Sagrantino secco and

Montefalco Riserva remain in barrel for an additional period before bottling (without fining or filtration). The Sagrantino is amazing: the grapes are left to macerate for 39 days. It has a dark purple hue with a full, powerful nose of raisined berries and smoke. The palate unfolds an array of blackberries, currants, cinnamon and clove, is mouth-filling, warm and dense. Montefalco Rosso Riserva “Piparello”, made from 60% Sangiovese, 25% Montepulciano, and 15% Sagrantino. Fairly deep garnet. Gorgeous, warm, earthy, chocolate-y, animal scents wrapped around the aroma of blackberries. Extraordinary mouthfeel’ medium-weight silky, but so light as to be almost evanescent. The amount of flavour from this vinous cloud is astonishing, as is the perfect integration of the bright acidity.

Rosso de Veo is the wine of the 2002 vintage. As the Montefalco and Sagrantino wines were not made, this is a testament to nature. “You gave us this; we give you this in return.” On the one hand, powerful, bruised plums and dried figs, on the other delicacy and beautiful persistence.

The Passito is made by leaving the grapes to dry after the harvest. A white mould forms that balances and concentrates the acid, sugar and tannins. The grapes, as raisins, contain approximately 30% sugar at this point and they are then crushed. Fermentation begins and slowly progresses until the sugar level reaches 16-18% whereupon pressing takes place with the resulting wine carrying about 90 grams of residual sugar. The wine is then aged in stainless steel and barrel. Huge, raisiny, port-like nose’ but lacking the smell of alcohol that young port so often has [this wine is not fortified], and carrying extra scents that go beyond Port [such as tobacco and wet leaves]. Pretty rich on the palate, fairly sweet, and ever so much gentler than Port, with great fresh-apple acidity. Tastes something like a beautiful cross of dessert-wine motifs from Portugal, Spain, southern France and Italy.

We adore these wines. They’re ornery, puckering, edgy, but they reconnect you with what wine is about is about and where it comes from. They remind me of Seamus Heaney’s poem: Blackberry Picking,

*At first, just one, like a glossy purple clot
Among others, red, green and hard as a knot.
You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet
Like thickened wine: summer’s blood was in it
Leaving stains upon the tongue...*

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| 2015 | ROSSO DE VEO | R |
| 2016 | SAGRANTINO DI MONTEFALCO “PAGLIARO” | R |
| 2016 | MONTEFALCO RISERVA “PIPPARELLO” ~ Sangiovese, Montepulciano, Sagrantino | R |

MARCHE

Andrew Marr: I hear Prince Harry had another bad encounter with the paparazzi

Paul Merton: Yes, those cheap Italian wines are really terrible

Have I Got News For You

Pasta... Pecorino... (Rosso) Piceno

Pasta triumphs in the Marche, with preference given to homemade versions. Housewives prepare mountains of wide tagliatelle, and maccheroni destined to be filled with exquisite flavours. Consider the maccheroni di Campofilone, a thin tagliatelle dressed with a ragù of pork, veal and fresh tomatoes. Recipes are handed down the generations. Even today in the country the would-be daughter-in-law must pass muster with her future mother-in-law: she must know how to lay out a perfectly round layer of pasta that is of uniform thinness, and to cut it in a variety of shapes. One of the region's signature dishes, *Vincisgrassi*, is a special recipe that reflects the Marchigiani attitude to life. Handmade with care, this festive dish is a type of lasagne that is layered with truffles or veal sweetbreads, chicken livers and mushrooms dusted with grated cheese and covered with béchamel sauce. Legend has it that a chef made the dish centuries ago for an Austrian prince who fought in the war against Napoleon in 1799.

Pesaro, on the Adriatic coast, is famous for its "brodetto" or fish soup. Like Châteauneuf-du-Pape brodetto may contain up to thirteen different kinds of fish (yes, I know, with ChNeuf it is grape varieties not fish!). It is often flavoured with wine vinegar and sometimes a sprinkle of saffron. Also prepared along the coast, the "brodetto marchigiano" made with fish dipped in flour, fried in a mixture of oil, onion and parsley, and flavoured with saffron. Breathtakingly fresh local seafood might feature a cast of calamari, lobster, cockles, sea dates and spider crabs – that chilled Verdicchio sounds just the ticket.

Further inland other ingredients come to the fore. One specialty is the "pecorino di San Leo", a cheese made from sheep's milk, "ricotta" (a kind of cottage cheese) from Urbino, "bazzott" (a local fresh cheese) from Fano, and the "olive ascolane", big white olives filled with a mixture of cheese, egg, nutmeg, white minced meat chopped and mixed with prosciutto, mortadella and salame, lemon peel and parsley, then dipped in beaten egg and bread crumbs and fried in oil – the ultimate antipasto, the tardis of olives. Made according to a tradition that can be traced back to as early as the 16th century in the province of Pesaro-Urbino, *Casciotta di Urbino* has a pale yellow paste that is lightly perforated by characteristic little holes. Made primarily from ewe's and cow's milk, *Casciotta* should be eaten after a maturation process that lasts from 20 to 30 days. Mild and only slightly acidic, it is enjoyed simply with a slice of *ciauscolo*, grilled polenta, or with sweet accompaniments such as jams and pears.

The Marchigiani cherish every inch of the pig. *Ciauscolo*, a type of spreadable pork, is traditional in this part of Italy. This specialty is made from the belly and shoulder of the pig and flavoured with salt, pepper, fennel, garlic, and orange rind. Other pork specialties include Carpegna Prosciutto, Soppressata da Fabriano, and Fegatino, a liver sausage.

Nor are vegetables neglected. Courgettes are sautéed with pancetta, onion and garlic and then stewed with tomatoes. Cauliflowers are coated with a light egg batter to which some cooks add 259elabel (a local liqueur made of aniseed) and fried. During a spring festival beautiful broad beans are picked and served with caciotte cheese, and in May at the Marchigiano Artichoke Festival in Montelupone the famous Marchigiano artichokes and Monteluponese artichokes are served at stalls and at dinners held in the town square.

MARCHE

Continued...

CIU' CIU', CONTRADA CIAFONE, OFFIDA, Marche – Organic – certified CCPB

The farm was established in 1970 in Contrada Ciafone (Offida area) and is under now the direction of the Bartolomei brothers, Massimiliano and Walter. Made with grapes grown on the calcareous and clayey soil the Rosso Picenos of Ciu' Ciu' are typically dense and meaty with a strong scent and full-bodied structure. We begin with the vermilion rose-perfumed Bacchus with its delightful nose of strawberry, morello cherry and liquorice root. The wine has an uncomplicated juiciness that begs for a second and third glass. It can even be merrily chilled. The Gotico is of sterner disposition; like its little brother it is an amalgam of Montepulciano and Sangiovese but with the added poke of new oak. Still the flavours of terroir come through abundantly; behind the sweet gush of ripe plum fruit there's a solid mulch of earth and minerals. The Pecorino is greeny-yellow and has a pleasant floral nose with clean, pleasing and refined aromas of banana, broom, apple, hazelnut and plum followed by a hint of vanilla. The mouth follows the nose, a slightly round attack however balanced, agreeable crispness, good body and intense flavours. A prime candidate for seafood, risotto, or grilled cheese.

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| 2023 | VERDICCHIO DEI CASTELLI DI JESI "ARBINUS" | W |
| 2023 | FALERIO ORIS ~ Pecorino, Passerina, Trebbiano | W |
| 2023 | VINO BIANCO (ORIS) ~ 5 LITRE BIB | W |
| 2023 | OFFIDA PECORINO "LE MERLETTAIE" | W |
| 2023 | ROSSO PICENO "BACCHUS" ~ Montepulciano, Sangiovese | R |
| 2021 | LACRIMA MORRO D'ALBA | R |

Gina Lollabrigida: I will now sing you all a song
 Bob Hope: And I will translate
 Lollabrigida: I didn't know you spoke Italian
 Hope: I speak fluent Italian – with both hands

FATTORIA SAN LORENZO, NATALINO CROGNALETTI, MONTECAROTTO, Marche – Organic – certified Suolo e Salute

Fascinating wines which will be eventually bottled when there is a new moon; the wind is blowing from the right direction and God willing. Who said we were commercial? Not me, guv.

Whisper it not in Gath, but mad grower alert on the Adriatic horizon. Consider this Valentini of Verdicchio, this Marquis de Marche, who bottles odd quantities of odd vintages on a whim and prayer, or as nature dictates. You may not invoke the sanity clause or comment that he is as mad as a Marche hare as such treats are in store for those who appreciate the fine and incredibly rare. Consider also that we are the only wine merchant in the world to receive the 2006 Marche Bianco (and, no, not because he's trying to hustle us – it is worth its weight in grapes), so we are going to hide it at the bottom of a deep well for a decade and forget about it. Nor do your eyes deceive you: the presence of oldies but goldies confirms that this is Verdicchio that acquires profound wisdom with age, when all the discrete flavour components have melded to create a wine that is beautifully mysterious, not unlike old Chablis, old Vouvray or old Trebbi-valentini.

Vigne dell Oche is an intense style of biodynamically-farmed single vineyard Verdicchio which derives its complex flavours from vat-ageing and lees contact. Yellow-gold colour, aromas of warm apricots, toasted hazelnuts and creamed ginger, builds in the mouth, and given definition by excellent citrus acidity. Good with squid or fish from the plancha. The Riserva turns up the volume; it is like an old bold Chablis given a Mediterranean twist.

The reds sing from a more orthodox hymn sheet: being big, juicy and cherry-chunky. The fascinating name of the Lacrima Morra d'Alba is derived from the variety of the same name, the Lacrima, a native of the district. It is reputed to be of extremely ancient origin (o best beloved) and is still cultivated only in the commune of Morro d'Alba in the province of Ancona and the territories of neighbouring communities. The great diversity of varieties still to be found in central & southern Italy makes it extremely difficult to trace the pedigree of this breed, which is descended from a family of "Vitis vinifera" that is ancient. Oh, I said that already. The name may be derived from some legend or simply from the nearly oval shape of the grape or the pyramidal form of the cluster, both resembling tear drops. The wine is almost a varietal, for all "correction" is limited to the addition of 15% of Montepulciano and/or Verdicchio grapes. The use of the "governo Toscano" is recommended in making the wine. The method involves the inducement of a second fermentation of the wine, following racking, through the addition of a certain quantity of must pressed from selected and partly dried grapes. The addition must be made no later than December 31st of the year of the harvest. The Vigna Paradiso Lacrima is a different vale of tears. Much Lacrima is dilute, confectioned and semi-sweet, whereas this version, made from yields of one bunch per vine, is fermented dry, has a snappy, rasping personality, and, for the quality, won't have you crying all the way to the bank.

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| 2023 | DI GINO | W |
| 2022 | LE OCHE | W |
| 2020 | CAMPO DELL OCHE | W |
| 2009 | IL SAN LORENZO | W |
| 2022 | ROSSO PICENO GINO ~ Montepulciano, Sangiovese | R |
| 2020 | ROSSO CONERO ARTU | R |
| 2015 | FRIGIDUS PASSITO ~ 50cl | Sw |

COLLE STEFANO, MATELICA, FABIO MARCHIONNI, Marche – Organic – certified IMC

Collestefano was started in 1998 when Fabio Marchionni took over the estate that had been in his family for years. After getting his degree in agriculture, where he did his thesis on Verdicchio di Matelica, he went to Germany to work for Weingut Zähringer where he learned to work and farm organically with minimal impact to the environment. He then worked briefly in wine bars and restaurants before taking over the family farm.

His Verdicchio has been consistent in quality, winning at least two glasses from Gambero Rosso since the 2001 vintage (twice winning three glasses). It is a great value for an organic wine. The Matelica zone is further inland and at a higher elevation than the more common Verdicchio di Castelli di Jesi. Matelica wines tend to be brighter and more elegant whereas the Castelli di Jesi wines often have a little more fruit and heft. Colle Stefano comprises 15 hectares nestled in a cold and dry microclimate alongside the Esino River between the Appenine Mountains and the Adriatic. The Verdicchio is from 100% estate grown and organically-farmed fruit. Vineyards are at an average altitude of 420m. Soil is alluvial with limestone and chalk. Manually harvested grapes are softly pressed and slowly fermented in stainless steel.

Collestefano is textbook for the Matelica style – bright and crisp with floral notes and a hint of pine.

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| 2023 | VERDICCHIO DI MATELICA | W |
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ABRUZZO

Although located between northern and southern Italy, the cooking of Abruzzo betrays more southern influences and consists of two different and distinct cuisines: the coastal one based on fish and that of the hinterland based on pork and lamb.

Brodetto Abruzzese is the fish soup of the Adriatic. As is customary in these things there are myriad versions of this. It is made with assorted fish such as monkfish, rascasse, red and grey mullet, John Dory and hake, the discarded heads and tails of which are used to make the stock. Garlic, tomatoes and cuttlefish are slowly cooked together, and the resultant sauce is put at the bottom of earthenware pot, topped by a layer of raw fish and a few mussels, then some more cuttlefish and tomato sauce and finally wine and fish stock is added. Other marine dishes include small squid eaten raw, seasoned with chilli, and octopus is cooked with chilli. Chilli also features in the local *Maccheroni all Chitarra*, a lamb ragù used to accompany a type of square homemade spaghetti called tonnarelli.

Abruzzo is well known for its pasta. *Chittarina*, a sheet of pasta that's cut into thin spaghetti by pressing it against what are, essentially, guitar strings, is usually served with a tomato sauce and fresh herbs. *Paccheri* is tubular shaped pasta, about an inch in diameter, but falling 'flat' once cooked. The sauce is a cinghiale (wild boar) sauce...a delicious combination with Masciarelli's "baby" Montepulciano, for example. Local pork products include *prosciutto d'Aquila*, similar to the Spanish jamon Serrano, and *ventricina*, a sausage made with pork, chilli, wild fennel and orange zest. As in all other mountainous regions, the shepherds prepare lamb just as it was hundreds of years ago. It might be cooked "a catturro" (in a large copper pan in the open air) with basil, onion, sage and chilli, or with cheese and egg, or all'arrabbiata, which is alive with chilli.

Cheeses are of great importance in the regional diet, pecorino being the favourite. The local *caciocavallo* is made from buffalo's milk, and is spiced with chilli. *Scamorza*, a pear-shaped curd cheese, is made from cow's milk and is sometimes grilled on a spit.

The most important produce of the region, cultivated near the regional capital L'Aquila, is the spice saffron. The quality is highly regarded, but, ironically, it rarely features as an ingredient in local cooking!

EDOARDO VALENTINI, LORETO APRUTINO, Abruzzo

The lowly Trebbiano grape, overcropped everywhere across Italy, becomes world-quality, refined, and ageworthy in Edoardo Valentini's (and now Francesco's) hands in Abruzzo. The wine, best after years in a cool cellar, shows a kaleidoscope of flavours that are creamy and crisp at once, ranging from freshly toasted hazelnuts to coconut shavings, and has an underlying bracing acidity that lends it an uncanny capacity to age. But let's pour a glass of this beautiful wine and test the evolution. Give it a little time to open and out comes that elegant, minerally nose with ripe citrus aromas. Take a sip and experience how full and mouthfilling it is, how piquant and almost fat (but not quite). Note how refined the flavours are, how intensely they are rendered by its swathe of acidity, the sort that gives wines like this great potential for improvement with age. Observe how long the minerally finish is with its notes of hazelnut and liquorice. Nick Belfrage describes Valentini's Trebbiano as the quality equivalent of a very fine white Côte de Beaune.

With crooked bells on, I would have thought.

Valentini's wines display a startling naturalness, their tiny, individual flaws only enhancing their profound charm. Taking years to develop their full profile, the wines often need plenty of aeration to blow off the occasional hint of reduction. This all falls perfectly in-step with one of Valentini's favourite lines, "Natura non facit saltus" or "Nature doesn't leap."

The Montepulciano d'Abruzzo is only made in certain vintages and then minuscule yields allied to a reputation for hermetic privacy means that receiving an allocation at all is doubtful. Nevertheless, we have secured a reasonable quantity for your (and our) delectation. It is difficult to describe so pure and yet brimming with intangibles, except to say that it has that perfect equipoise of delicate fruit and minerality that characterises all great wine (and particularly red Burgundy). We enjoyed a bottle at San Vincenzo's famous seafood restaurant Gambero Rosso. There was a different aroma in every swirl, an ever-changing canvas of flavours and textures in every mouthful.

The Cerasuolo is probably Italy's finest rosé. It is released a year and a half after the vintage, having undergone a period in cask, and it too is markedly individual. The colour is coral pink and the nose evokes ripe apricot and Mediterranean spices. The palate is rich with intense cherry minerality and ripe cherry fruitiness. Refutes any suggestion that this is an inconsequential wine style. Sipping this you can imagine yourself in a painting by Dufy.

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| 2020 | TREBBIANO D'ABRUZZO |
| 2022 | EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL |

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|-----|
| W |
| Oil |

GIANNI MASCIARELLI, SAN MARTINO SULLA MARRUCINA, Abruzzo

Gianni Masciarelli, who died in 2008, and his wife Marina Cvetic have been among the shining beacons of Abruzzo. For years, this beautiful land, with its abundance of sun, great soil and the easy-to-grow Montepulciano grape, had wallowed in mediocrity as scores of producers were clearly taking advantage of what was given to them. Gianni, along with his inspiration, the reclusive genius Edoardo Valentini, proved to the rest of the world, through hard work, low yields, and a desire to be the best, that Abruzzo and the Montepulciano grape could produce world-class (and then some) wines.

Over the years, his limited production wines have reached an exalted, cult status. The Marina Cvetic (overseen by his talented wife) is their go-to Montepulciano, sourced from three vineyard sites that are mostly around 30 years old. The style here is big wine with a sense of balance, deep, dark, brooding black fruits, earth, truffle and mineral, all surrounded by copious yet ripe tannins and perfect acidity. That makes this bruiser light enough on its feet to accompany even the famed “crudo” (read “raw”) seafood preparations so prevalent in Abruzzo. After 24 hours, this wine was still going, even better than the night before. Boasting a Gambero Rosso winemaker of the year award and 92 points from the Wine Advocate, this one has it all.

Sourced from two of the same vineyards as Marina Cvetic the Villa Gemma is no stranger to the Gambero Rosso, regularly garnering the three glasses. The wine spends almost two years in French oak before resting another year in bottle prior to release. This fills the senses with soaring notes of coffee, cigar box, thick black fruits, minerals, spice, currants... the whole sensory caboodle.

Powerful on the palate yet somehow civilized (probably due to the bottle aging at the cellar) the Gemma is opaque with a rich, elegant and complex nose. The first impact gives both power and refinement, then the fruit appears followed by flavours of tar, cocoa beans, balsam and the classic liquorice. Though less serious than its brethren the standard Montepulciano d'Abruzzo punches well above its weight. With its delicious bright cherry fruit flavours this bouncy red provides happy accompaniment to most pasta dishes. The Cerasuolo is a delicious pearly-pink wine, refreshingly uncomplicated, just damn refreshing in fact, liquid testimony to the importance of not being earnest. To be drunk, nay guzzled, al fresco, with garlicky fish soup or with a plate of mixed salamis.

The two whites couldn't be more different. The basic Trebbiano d'Abruzzo is typically floral with gentle apple and almond fruit. The Trebbiano d'Abruzzo Marina Cvetic, on the other hand, manages to combine great extract, a nose of finesse, fruit warmth and mineral freshness, power and depth of flavour.

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| 2023 | TREBBIANO D'ABRUZZO CLASSICA GIANNI | W |
| 2023 | TREBBIANO D'ABRUZZO “MARINA CVETIC” | W |
| 2020 | MONTEPULCIANO D'ABRUZZO CLASSICA GIANNI | R |
| 2020 | MONTEPULCIANO D'ABRUZZO “MARINA CVETIC” | R |
| 2019 | ISKRA ROSSO COLLI APRUTINI | R |
| 2018 | MONTEPULCIANO D'ABRUZZO “VILLA GEMMA” | R |
| 2023 | GIANNI CERASUOLO D'ABRUZZO | Ro |

MADREGALE, CANTINA DI TOLLO, TOLLO, Abruzzo

Natural splendour abounds in Abruzzo, a region that stretches out from the mountains down to the sea, with as much as a third of its territory dedicated to nature reserves. This patrimony is protected tenaciously by the Abruzzi with their abiding vocation for vine-growing which has persisted down the ages. The majority of the hilly terrain used to grow grapes is made up of an average sandy-clay mix with a density which varies according to the gradient of incline and the direction faced. The gentle breeze from the Adriatic helps create a favourably mild climate over the hills, bringing the right amount of rain and high levels of sunshine.

All that remains is for the variations in temperature and winds coming from opposite directions, as inevitably occurs when the mountains face the sea, to work their magic, allowing the wines made to develop their characteristic intense bouquet. Of these merry madrigals the red, a stout little Montepulciano, has a six to eight-day maceration on the skins, is fermented in stainless steel, is light and juicy, with a whiff of fresh herbs and a palate of 262lumies cherry and white pepper. Bang it in a bucket on a summer's eve and serve it with hot or cold running lamb or the simplest pasta dishes that you can scarcely be bothered to rustle up such as Bucatini all' Amatriciana. The Chardonnay, an attractive straw yellow colour, has a pleasant tropical fruit nose and a citrus-edged palate. This would go nicely with spaghetti with clams, Chitarinna with shrimps and courgettes, or red mullet any which way.

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| 2023 | MADREGALE BIANCO IGT TERRE DI CHIETI | W |
| 2023 | MADREGALE PINOT GRIGIO TERRE DI CHIETI | W |
| 2023 | MADREGALE ROSSO IGT TERRE DI CHIETI | R |
| 2023 | MADREGALE ROSATO IGT TERRE DI CHIETI | Ro |

Madrigale

Occhi 263mprov e belli,
 Com' esser può che 'n un medesimo istante
 Nascan da voi sì nove forme e tante?

Lieti, mesti, superbi, umili, alteri
 Vi mostrate in un punto; onde di speme
 E di timor m' empiete:
 E tanti affetti e dolci e acerbi e feri
 Nel cor arso per voi vengono insieme
 Ad ogn' or che volete.
 Or poi che voi mia vita e morte siete,
 Occhi felici, occhi beati e cari ,
 Siate sempre 263mprov, allegri e chiari.

CANTINA SOCIALE FRENTANA, Abruzzo

Another winery where the roots of tradition are nourished by a progressive vinicultural outlook. Cantina Sociale Frentana is located in Rocca San Giovanni, south west of Pescara. The supreme quality of the terroir allied to the natural ebullience of the grape variety creates something very special. The wine is fermented in the state-of-the-art winery in stainless steel tanks accentuating the natural ripe fruit flavours. Bold Montepulciano with fruit as thundering as a church organ being walloped by a demented orang-utan yet nowhere near as vulgar. The combination is irresistible: plum-skin fruit allied to leathery warmth with an all-over chocolate finish. A wine that your bank balance will love repeatedly. The Trebbiano is as fresh and fruity as the Monty is burly and rough-edged. Lovely apple-blossom fruit on the nose and attractively fresh palate of yellow plums, pears and apples.

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| 2023 | TREBBIANO D'ABRUZZO "FRENTANO" | W |
| 2023 | BIANCO IGT TERRE DI CHIETI – 20 LITRE KEY KEG | W |
| 2022 | MONTEPULCIANO D'ABRUZZO "FRENTANO" | R |
| 2022 | FRENTANA ROSSO – 5 litre BIB | R |
| 2022 | FRENTANA ROSSO – 20 LITRE KEY KEG | R |

So You Think You Know About Trebbiano?

Edoardo Valentini's Trebbiano d'Abruzzo seems to hail from another planet; no-one has a clue why the wine is the way it is – we've found that its optimum drinking period is 10-15 years from vintage after a couple of hours in the carafe. This is the theory as told to us by Valentini's son: in the 1950s with the industrialisation of the Italian wine industry the Trebbiano Toscana was imported into Abruzzo to supplement the local version. Being a more robust, high-yielding variety with bigger grapes it eventually entirely replaced the indigenous Trebbiano of Abruzzo (and thus became known itself as Trebbiano d'Abruzzo). The Valentini family, using records dating back to the 1860s, discovered the properties of the original Trebbiano and using clonal selection (over a period of 40 years!) in one vineyard of 2.5 hectares have essentially recreated the old Trebbiano with all its unique qualities. As far as we know this is the only example of traditional Trebbiano d'Abruzzo and is made in a traditional way to express the style and the terroir (big old foudres).

This solitary hill has always been dear to me
 And this hedge, which prevents me from seeing most of
 The endless horizon.
 But when I sit and gaze, I imagine, in my thoughts
 Endless spaces beyond the hedge,
 An all-encompassing silence and a deeply profound quiet,
 To the point that my heart is almost overwhelmed.
 And when I hear the wind rustling through the trees
 I compare its voice to the infinite silence.
 And eternity occurs to me, and all the ages past,
 And the present time, and its sound.
 Amidst this immensity my thought drowns:
 And to founder in this sea is sweet to me.

IOLE RABASCO, PESCARA, Abruzzo – Organic

Iole Rabasco inherited her family's small vineyard and olive grove, neither of which have ever been treated with chemicals. And she's taken that blessing and run with it. Her property is nestled in north-central Abruzzo where you have unique meso- and micro-climates. Her 3.5 hectares are located in the village of Pianella, in the province of Pescara, about 40 kilometres from the Adriatic Sea. The base of the Gran Sasso mountain range runs along its western edge.

Almost all of her vines are Montepulciano, but she also has a couple of rows of Trebbiano. These vines, on average, are 40-years-old, and are 450 metres above sea level. Soils are calcareous clay mixed with alluvial sediment and fossil remains. The vines are trained in the traditional tendone-style pergola, and all the work is done by hand. She intentionally keeps her yields low. She prefers, as do we, her wines to have acidity and freshness rather than power and extraction.

No chemicals ever touch Iole's vines or the wines in her cellar. The Rosato Cancelli is direct press Montepulciano from the Cancelli vineyard site, a bowl that starts at the base of the La Salita slalom run and jumps a small road to climb the gentler adjacent slope. This wine is part of a serious Abruzzo tradition — no skin maceration as is the custom, a fact belied by its electric raspberry hue. In 2016, Iole opted to ferment the rosato in cement and then age in stainless steel (rather than her classic fibreglass damigiana used in years past), producing a super fresh and vibrant wine laced with tension and electricity. Cancelli culture.

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| 2022 | DAMIGIANO BLANCO ~ Trebbiano | W |
| 2023 | CANCELLI ROSATO ~ Montepulciano | Ro |
| 2023 | CANCELLI ROSSO ~ Montepulciano | R |

PASSIONE NATURA, Abruzzo – Biodynamic

Passione Natura and Cirelli decided to embark on a joint project the aim of which was to produce high quality wines in the bag in box format. Passione Natura use biodynamic grapes and traditional winemaking methods. Intervention is minimal, pesticides are never used and sulphur only sparingly at bottling (bagging). Most of the grapes come from the hillside where the microclimate is moderately continental. Some grapes are sourced from growers in the foothills where the climate is cooler. At least two terroirs live in this wine. The typical south coastal terroir with clay soils and the warm summers, and the mountain terroir with the sandy soil and cooler climatic influence. Farming is biodynamic and vines are trained in pergola, Abruzzese-style. Yields are low, very low for Montepulciano, grapes are picked by hand and fermented whole bunch in tank with indigenous yeasts and a very little sulphur is added at bottling.

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| 2021 | UVA TREBBIANO | W |
| 2022 | UVA MONTEPULCIANO | R |

MOLISE

In the hills of Molise, lamb, kid and mutton are popular, along with pork for sausages, salame and soppressata, sometimes preserved in terra-cotta vases under fine local olive oil. Prosciutto may be salt cured, though it is also smoked—rare in Italy. Prominent cheeses are caciocavallo from the town of Agnone, pecorino and scamorza. Part of the Caciocavallo Silano DOP is in Molise.

The port of Termoli provides *triglie di scoglio* (red mullet, base of a tasty soup), fresh anchovies, squid, crabs, clams and sea snails. Molise produces quantities of dried pasta, though in country homes women still often roll the dough by hand. Specialties include *sagne* (lasagne), *laganelle* (tagliatelle), *crejoli* (similar to the Abruzzi's *maccheroni alla chitarra*) and *recchietelle* (orecchiette). Pasta is often served with ragout of lamb and pork, invariably with *diavolillo* (chilli pepper), and a grating of sharply flavoured pecorino cheese. The tomato, fresh or preserved, is omnipresent in Molise, as are beans and artichokes. Campobasso is noted for giant white celery. The region also produces fine extra virgin olive oil.

Polenta is as popular as pasta in places. Cornmeal is cooked in a mush, though the flour may also be used for a type of pizza. Molise has a tasty array of cakes, biscuits and pastries, and one of the most bizarre of desserts: blood sausage with chocolate and pine nuts.

DI MAJO NORANTE, CAMPOMARINO, Molise – Organic – certified

The Di Majo Norante winery is located to the north of the Gargano in Molise on the estate of the Marquis Norante of Santa Cristina. This estate has been dedicated to the cultivation of vines since the 1800s. In the 1960s a modern cantina was constructed and vines were replanted in the Ramitello zone. Optimal exposure, constant breezes during the summer, excellent soil composition and a slope toward the Sciabolone and Madonna Grande valleys, blend together to create a particularly favourable environment for the production of wine. Alessio Di Majo strives to produce the best quality possible at a price that is extremely affordable to the consumer. To ensure consistently high quality, he has hired renowned oenologist, Riccardo Cotarella, as a consultant. In another example of his dedication to quality wine and environmentally sound agriculture, Alessio di Majo makes his wines from organically grown grapes. The winery received certification from AIAB (Associazione Italiana per l'Agricoltura Biologica) in 1997. Sangiovese IGT is made from 100% Sangiovese grown in the Sciabolone and Martarosa vineyards and harvested in late October. The vineyards are situated 165-328 ft. Above sea level, with south-western exposure and a clayey, calcareous soil composition. The wine is aged in large oak barrels for 6 months. This Sangiovese exhibits a fresh bouquet of violets and woodland berries. It is smooth and refreshing on the palate with loads of ripe fruit and represents excellent value.

The Contado is from 100% Aglianico grown on Italy's south-eastern coast. The grapes were harvested in late October/early November and macerated in contact with the skins for 20-30 days. After fermentation, the wine was aged in a combination of large casks and barrique for 2-3 years. Contado is ruby red in colour with light garnet reflections. The full and intense bouquet reveals ample amounts of mature fruit. The wine is soft and velvety on the palate and full-bodied, with balanced tannins and hints of almond in the lingering finish.

The Falanghina is typically perfumed with just-cut lime aromas. It is medium-bodied with good flinty fruit and a delicious almond and honey aftertaste.

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| 2023 | FALANGHINA RAMI | W |
| 2021 | SANGIOVESE | R |
| 2019 | AGLIANICO CONTADO | R |

FATTORIA DI VAIRA, MICHELE LORENZETI & ERIC NARIOO, Molise – Biodynamic methods

Fattoria di Vaira is one of the largest biodynamic farms in Italy, with more than 500 hectares, 40 of which are planted to vines. Here in Petacciato (Campobasso), they cultivate vegetables, grains and cereals, and produce fresh cheeses, olive oil and honey. Grape varieties include Falanghina, Trebbiano, Montepulciano, Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. After several years of applying biodynamic practices, professional analysis, carried out by independent laboratories, shows that the soil has been restored, reaching a degree of purity similar to wild soil. A wonderful, very clean environment, with animals, fruit plans, cereals. Shepherds, farmers, cheese makers, vigneroni all work in harmony in the farm. Soils are rich on sand and clay, and the climate is purely Mediterranean, a beautiful hillside estate, with a few directly on the Adriatic Sea, with the Southern Apennine Mountains just behind. The white blend is a blend of Fiano and Trebbiano. The Falaghina is whole bunch pressed, macerated for a five-days on skins. Trebbiano is a direct press. A dry yet aromatic wine, golden colour, with white flowers, apricot and peach. The red is 50% Montepulciano, the remainder being Cab Sauv, Merlot, co-planted old vines. 25% whole bunch, macerated in cuve for an average of seven days. Appealing violet-tinted colour, some elegance care of the Bordeaux grapes, a touch of typical Montepulciano rusticity, but more aromatic than a classic version.

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| 2022/23 | VINCENZO BIANCO | W |
| 2020 | VINCENZO ROSSO | R |

AZIENDA AGRICOLA GUIDO MARSELLA, SUMMONTE, AVELLINO, Campania

Irpinia has played such an important role in Campanian wine production that the rail line linking Avellino and Rocchetta Sant'Antonio was known as "the Wine Line." Completely planted in vines, the province of Avellino features products of international reputation, such as Greco di Tufo, Taurasi and Fiano. The Fiano di Avellino takes its name from the variety that the Romans called Vitis Apiana. That was because the vine's grapes were so sweet that they proved irresistible to bees (api).

The wine, which was already highly appreciated in the Middle Ages, originated several millennia ago. An order for three salme (a measure) of Fiano is entered in the register of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. And Charles d'Anjou must have enjoyed the wine, since he had 16,000 Fiano vines planted in the royal vineyards.

This very small estate is located near town of Mercogliano and represents a jewel in the enological panorama of the Avellino district and sprang to prominence when Paolo Massobrio and Marco Gatti, two well-respected food and wine journalists, selected the Fiano in their "100 Best Italian Wines". Marsella produces only one wine, and its 266eolian266tion is strictly made using only estate-grown grapes and traditional techniques. A deliciously pure style of Fiano with restrained, subtle yet concentrated notes of peach kernel and toasted hazelnuts.

2021

FIANO DI AVELLINO

W

ENZA LONARDO, CONTRADE DI TAURASI, AVELLINO, Campania

The family Lonardo has been producing Aglianico in Contrade di Taurasi for generations. All their vineyards have an excellent southern exposition. Alessandro Lonardo decided at the beginning of the '90s to continue the activity of farmer, and started the refurbishment of his small estate, replanting old vineyards replacing the previous vines with more modern guyot and cordone speronato, in order to considerably reduce yields. In 1998 Alessandro's daughter, Enza, started vinifying and commercialising Taurasi DOCG. Lonardo is one of the leading exponents of "old-style" Taurasi.

Red in colour with shades of orange. Spicy, strong aromas of black fruit, plums, burnt black cherries, coffee and vanilla are prevalent. Smooth, full-bodied and complex on the palate this wine displays further secondary notes of leather, game and tobacco. Gorgeous ripe tannins make it a good accompaniment to the local salamis and cheerful rustic gatto di patate. Or, when in Campania, assay it the rugby-ball shaped local pizza containing provolo (a fresh cow's cheese), small sweet tomatoes and basil; melanzane (aubergine) and zucchini (courgettes); friarielli and salsiccie; fior di latte (mozzarella).

2016

TAURASI

R



Alfonso Arpina from Monte di Grazia ~ 100 + year old vines in pergola

VIGNETI TARDIS, JACK LEWENS & BRUNO DE CONCILIIS, CILENTO, Campania – Organic conversion

Vigneti Tardis is the result of a collaboration between Jack Lewens (former sommelier, now co-owner of Leroy Restaurant, Shoreditch) and his long-time friend Bruno de Conciliis of Viticoltori de Conciliis. They farm organically and biodynamically, producing wines with a hands-off approach from 3.6 hectares of vines in Cilento, Campania.

Cilento is in Campania's southerly province of Salerno, while the varieties are the same as the famed appellations of Taurasi and Avellino, the territory is vastly different. Dominated by the Parco Nazionale del Cilento, Vallo di Diano e Alburni, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, there is no big agriculture and the coastline is a protected marine park. The soils are dominated by sedimentary limestone and range in pockets from schist to quartz, clay, granitic sand and slate. All vineyards are farmed organically (some in conversion) using biodynamic treatments. Wines are made with a light touch in inox and/or used oak.

The focus is firmly on the region's indigenous varieties with Aglianico, and its long forgotten, larger-berried and thinner-skinned clone, Aglianicone for reds (see below for a suggestion that the grape is actually a distinct variety); while whites are made with Fiano, Malvasia, Coda di Volpe and other aromatic varieties. In a region normally known for producing big, powerful wines, these are a more delicate, less extracted interpretation, with great drinkability and individuality. There are seven wines in its range called "La Settimana" ("the week"), each named after a day of the week.

Mercoledì is Fiano, fermented in tank and left on its lees until bottling, when it gets a fining with bentonite and 15 mg/ml addition of SO₂. Soft zippy Fiano with beeswax, lime oil, pineapple and a saline lift to finish. Versatile. Great mouthfeel. The pretty-in-pink Lunedì is Primitivo direct-pressed and fermented for three weeks on Fiano skins. It has a very interesting spicy, herbal nose with some reductive notes. The palate is fresh, bright and elegant with some savouriness. So digestible with lovely complexity. Think flowers and pink grapefruit.

Venerdì is a field blend of Fiano, Malvasia, Trebbiano and Coda di Volpe. The Fiano is fermented and aged in tank, whereas the other grapes mature on the lees in 500-litre barrels. With a touch of maceration (the Fiano spends two weeks on skins) it has a golden colour, aromas of nectarine, orange peel & white pepper. Saline character on the palate with notes of white peach, orange blossom, spice and a hint of grip.

Martedì is an old variety of Aglianico called Aglianicone with bigger berries and thinner skins. Although according to Wiki (according to J. Robinson, J. Harding and J. Vouillamoz Wine Grapes – A complete guide to 1,368 vine varieties) it is not a clone and only genetically related. Whatever! Only four days of maceration on this wine and then aged for nine months in tanks. It's just free run with no pressings. Rich but very fresh with sweet blackberries, mulberries and black cherries, showing nice structure with a vivid, vital character. In 2019 vintage the vineyard was destroyed by hail, so future vintages will feature Aglianico more prominently.

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| 2022 | MERCOLEDI FIANO ~ Fiano | W |
| 2020 | VENERDI BIANCO ~ Malvasia, Coda di Volpe, Trebbiano, Fiano | W |
| 2021 | MARTEDI ROSSO ~ Aglianico | R |
| 2018 | GIOVEDI ROSSO ~ Aglianico | R |
| 2023 | LUNEDI ROSATO ~ Primitivo | Ro |

FRATELLI FELIX, TERROIRS PROJECT x VIGNETI TARDIS, Campania – Organic methods

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|------|---|---|
| 2023 | CAMPANIA BIANCO ~ Fiano, Falanghina | W |
| 2023 | CAMPANIA ROSSO ~ Barbera, Sangiovese, Aglianico | R |

TENUTA GRILLO, GUIDO ZAMPAGLIONE, ALTA IRPINIA, Campania – Organic

This Donchi brayed for your attention – now it is the turn of his faithful retainer.

This is the result of organic viticulture and meticulous winemaking. The vines are densely planted at an altitude 800 metres above sea level on poor soils. Natural fertilizers and other treatments with sulphur and copper. After a manual harvest in October the wine receives long maceration on the skins, is fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged on the lees in tank. Only a tiny amount of sulphur is used, and the wine is bottled unfiltered. A white wine for lovers of skin contact. This is golden-amber in colour from being raised in an open vat, cloudy in the glass, and has seen very little sulphur. The nose comes alive with fresh green notes, aromatic yellow fruits, and dried herbs. The palate is round and full of citrusy, lemon intensity finishing with a hint of tannin.

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| 2020 | FIANO "SANCHO PANZO | W |
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The olive trees make scanty shade: they are too ferociously pruned hereabouts. The whole of the southern incline is planted with them wherever a little soil can be scraped together, and their oil is excellent – better says Pliny, than that of Venafrum – probably because the inhabitants know the secret of preparing it... Alas, these trees are remorselessly uprooted wherever the soil will feed the more profitable grape; Capri has lost half its olives, Ischia all: a consummation to be deplored since the vine, however gladsome its summer greenery, is bare for six months a year when its straggling limbs have a peculiarly unkempt and disreputable appearance. Were the landscape alone to be considered, I could wish that some new scourge like phylloxera might be introduced, for there is enough wine in the country already.

Norman Douglas – *Uplands of Sorrento*

GRECO DI TUFO

Without doubt, the Greco di Tufo, from which the wine of the same name is made, is the oldest variety of the Avellino area. It was imported from the Greek region of Thessaly by the Pelasgian peoples. A confirmation of the millennial origin of the wine is provided by the discovery of a fresco at Pompeii, traced in the 1st century BC. A brief poetical inscription was added to the fresco, apparently by a frustrated lover: “You are truly cold, Bytis, made of ice, if last night not even Greco wine could warm you up.”

Among many legends concerning wine, the province of Avellino can even boast of one miracle involving the beverage. According to the story, San Guglielmo of Vercelli emulated the miracle of the Marriage of Cana in turning water to wine at Bonito.

The Greco variety was originally cultivated on the slopes of Vesuvius, where it was given the name Lacryma Christi. It was later planted in the province of Avellino, where it was given the denomination Greco di Tufo.

BENITO FERRARA, TUFO, Campania

Gabriella Ferrara's estate is small, family run and specialises in Greco di Tufo. Her vineyards are situated in the heart of Tufo itself. There are a mere three and a half hectares of vines. The south-facing vineyards are 450-600 metres above sea level in a hilly area, the soil rich in calcium, phosphorus, potassium and silicon as well as the volcanic sulphur that so characterises this region.

Planted about 30 years ago, the vines are espalier-trained with Guyot pruning. The peculiarity of the grapes is that the cluster is divided in two, a greater and a smaller part: they are the “twin souls” or “aminae geminae”. The agronomist Columella described it in such a way, while Cato and Giovan Battista Della Porta defined it “Graecia” and “Graecula”. Floral nuances with richer aromas of almond and hazelnut and mineral tones usher in a palate that is full of golden apple, peach and cinnamon. The difference between the two Grecos is one of minerality – the Vigna Cicogna has terrific length afforded by a rich smokiness. It is mineral and flavoursome – a wine which will evolve slowly and surely in the bottle. At present the wine subtly insinuates hawthorn and lime flower as well as ginger and hazelnut. This would go beautifully with the poetically named Mozzarella in Carrozza, Spaghetti alla Puttanesca and Polpo alla Luciana- octopus simmered for two hours with tomatoes, garlic, chilli and parsley.

2022 GRECO DI TUFO “TERRA D’UVA”

W

CANTINA VADIAPERTI, RAFFAELE TROISI, MONTEFREDANE, AVELLINO, Campania

The estate vineyards are located in and around the town of Montefredane and situated at between 350m to 600 m above sea level. Soils combine volcanic rock and well-draining tufo, which are mineral-rich. Vines range from 25 to 50 years old. At this altitude, harvest typically runs into mid-October. The family historically has only made single-variety wines; in fact, winemaker Raffaele Troisi's father was the first to bottle a commercial single-variety Fiano wine. Grapes are harvested by hand and pressed full cluster directly, fermenting on indigenous yeasts in temperature-controlled, stainless-steel tanks. Wines are aged on fine lees in tank. Classic Greco with refined notes of ripe fruit, golden delicious apples lifted by floral and acacia honey nuances. The palate is fresh and structured with good balance and length and a perceptible bitter almond finish. This simple Greco would be lovely quaffed with simply boiled cecenielli served on a bed of lemon leaf with a few drops of lemon and a thin film of oil. Or stuffed cuttlefish. Or tubetti con cozze. The Coda di Volpe (the name means fox tail) is straw yellow in colour with aromas of ripe fruit, (pineapple, white peaches), as well as delicate scents of broom (or broom-broom – aka basil brush) and liquorice.

2022 CODA DI VOLPE

W

2022 GRECO DI TUFO

W

It was the ancient mariner
He stoppeth one in three
He looked me up, he looked me down
And then he said to me

I've scoured across the seven seas
I've hunted high and low
To source new grape varieties
To enter in a show

So bring forth a glass of Ischian wine
To slake my salty thirst
Quick! A tumbler of Biancolella, good fellow –
My albatross is about to burst!

MONTE DI GRAZIA, ALFONSO ARPINA, COSTIERA AMALFITANA, Campania – Organic – certified ICEA

Alfonso Arpina's vineyard holding is tiny, a mere 2.7 ha located in the commune of Tramonti, in the heart of the Monte Lattari and a stone's throw away from Costa d'Amalfi while 45 km from Naples. The terraces on which the vineyards have been planted consist of volcanic ashes, originating from former eruptions of the nearby Vesuvius as well as red clayey soils. Although a secluded spot, well hidden from Naples, there is continuous ventilation coming from the nearby coast as well as inland winds blowing from the north, which not only have a mitigating effect in summer as well as winter, but the constant thermal movements provide to the special microclimate in this part of the hills. A delicious peculiarity. Consider 120-year-old vines from ungrafted vines unaffected by phylloxera. The organic methods used at Monte di Grazia also further limit the yields. The vines were planted in the traditional "tendone method", their leaves trained to form a canopy that protects the grapes from the sun. It is like a pergola with an overhead trellis from which the grapes hang down. The poles that hold up the tendone are made of chestnut wood from trees in the nearby hills and the vine "branches" are attached to the tendone by willow shoots. All the grapes are naturally picked by hand (usually in the first ten days of November) and yields are typically low: 30 hl/ha. Different vineyards are vinified separately and, while malolactic fermentation is hoped for it does not always occur. Sulphur is never added to the wine. The red grape, Tintore di Tramonti (90%), (the remainder being Piediroso) is grown almost exclusively in the Monte Lattari Valley and belongs to the Teinturier family. The flesh and the juice of these grapes are red in colour. The anthocyanin pigments accumulate in the grape berry itself. The free run juice is therefore red. The ageing period is brief and takes place in big barrels followed by a further twelve months in bottle before release. The Rosso is dark in colour, almost black-violet. The nose is very inviting with bright cherry and stalky dark fruits. Plum, spice and lots of dark fruits, with succulent red and dark fruit palate, with hallmark freshness. The impression you get when smelling a wine just finishing fermentation with notes of hay. Lovely stuff – we're back in Marcillac territory. The white is a bracing white wine which sings of white pepper, chalk and citrus flower with an electric undercurrent of minerality. The grapes used are Paella, Ginestra and Biancolella—heirloom varieties that are trained in the traditional tendone method where vines are raised in a canopy above the ground, much higher up than modern methods.

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| 2021 | MONTE DI GRAZIA BIANCO ~ Pepella, Ginestra, Bianca Tenera | W |
| 2021 | MONTE DI GRAZIA MELOGNA ROSSO | R |
| 2018 | MONTE DI GRAZIA ROSSO ~ Tintore di Tramonti, Piediroso | R |

PUGLIA AND CALABRIA

Greeks were among the earliest settlers in this region, dominating the indigenous Messapicans, the Daunians, the Peucetians, as far back as Mycenaean times, perhaps even earlier. Taranto on the Ionian Sea was a Greek colony from the eighth century B.C., a flourishing capital of Magna Graecia, the great cosmopolitan Greek world beyond Greece itself. Puglia has known many conquerors since-the Romans, of course, and then the Byzantine Greeks, Lombards, Arabs, Normans, Angevins, Aragonese, and Spanish, the armies of the popes and of the German emperors, Bourbons who ruled from Naples, Turkish corsairs who harried the coasts, on and on, in a rich and mercilessly cruel history of conquest, betrayal, loss, and gain. Each incursion, each struggle, left its mark on this land, from the ancient dolmens scattered across the landscape to the baroque fantasies of cities like Lecce and Martina Franca. There are magnificent castles and citadels, like Castel del Monte, grand and enigmatic, an octagonal monument in alabaster-coloured stone to what some say was the cabalistic vision of Frederick II, Puglia's greatest ruler. There are spectacular eleventh- and twelfth-century Romanesque churches like the soaring seaside cathedrals of Trani and San Nicola at Bari, and rock-carved chapels and hidden grottoes, the walls of which were plastered by monks, saints, and hermits with feverish and apocalyptic visions. There are clusters of white-walled villages and fortified farms called masserie, set well back from a dangerous coast once beset by pirates and marauders. And, of course, there are the trulli, the characteristic vernacular architecture of the Murge, the high grassy plateau of central Puglia. Stone dwellings capped by corbel-vaulted roofs built of overlapping circles of flat stones called *chiancarelle*, the trulli are both disturbing and anachronistic, like the dwellings of a race of aliens set down in our midst. Traditionally, it is said, they were built of unmortared stone so they could be quickly torn down when the Bourbon tax-collector came around, then rebuilt just as quickly when he was gone from sight. Their roofs are often decorated with painted symbols whose meanings have long since been lost. For all the richness of its history, however, Puglia is, has always been, a land of poverty, a land of emigration.

"La cucina pugliese nasce come cucina povera" – the cuisine of Puglia was born as the cuisine of poverty, an observation manifestly illustrated in a myriad of ways: pasta made without eggs, bread made from the hard-grain durum wheat flour that flourishes locally, and a diet based on vegetables, including many wild vegetables like *cicorielle*, wild chicory, and *lampascione*, the bulb of a wild tassel hyacinth, foods that are foraged from stony fields and abandoned terraces. Meat is not much eaten and beef until a few years ago, was almost unknown on Pugliese tables, with horsemeat being preferred. For Christmas and Easter feasting, weddings and baptisms, Pugliese cooks look to what are called *animale da cortile*, farmyard animals, especially chickens and rabbits, although this rocky landscape being sheep country, lamb is the very symbol of feasting, as it is in most of the Mediterranean.

Because it is based on home cooking, this is a *cucina delle donne*, created by women cooking at home rather than male chefs in professional kitchens. It is a cuisine without rules and regulations, based solely on what's in the family larder, which is then stretched and expanded to feed those who may show up *al 270mprovisé*, at the unplanned last minute. It also means that a recipe changes from one village to another, even from one household to another, without the cooks themselves always being aware of it. It's almost impossible to speak of authenticity when a word like *ciambotta* describes two entirely different dishes-a mixture of vegetables in Monopoli, a mixture of fish in Bari, just thirty kilometres to the north.

In this culture of sparsity, nothing is wasted. Stale bread is cut into cubes or crumbled and toasted in oil to make a garnish for pasta and vegetable dishes. Vegetables themselves, at the height of their season, are dried, pickled, or preserved in oil to eke out the larder in the lean months of the year. Figs are dried or boiled down to make a syrup, and grape juice, after the first pressing, is boiled to make a thick molasses called *mosto cotto*, to be served at Christmas poured over the fried sweets called *cartellate*.

Puglian olive oil is legendary and used as a basis for the cuisine. Tomatoes, artichokes, fennel, chicory and onions are all eaten raw, dipped in the fruity oil as a part of a fine array of *antipasti*. *Polipetti* (tiny curly octopus) are often eaten raw as well with a little oil and lemon juice, or quickly fried. Other specialities include *tarantella* (salted tuna) and cheese, particularly *burrata*, a mozzarella stuffed with cream.

Several dishes stand out, for example, 'ncapriata or *fave e cicoria*, a purée made from dried peeled fava beans (with or without a potato added), dressed with a thread of olive oil and eaten with steamed bitter greens, preferably wild chicory. The presentation becomes more elaborate with the addition of chopped red onions marinated in vinegar, fried or pickled green peppers, steamed *lampascioni*, fried black or green olives, and other condiments. *Ciceri e tria* is another such: being homemade durum wheat pasta (no eggs) in the form of flat tagliatelle or noodles (*tria*), cooked with chick-peas and mixed with about a third of the pasta that has been kept apart and fried in olive oil until it is crisp and brown, with a surprisingly meat-like flavour. The Pugliese love their pasta; another classic is *orecchiette con cime di rape* – again, homemade durum wheat pasta, shaped in the form of "little ears," cooked with the bittersweet vegetable we know as broccoli rabe or rapini, and dressed with oil, garlic, anchovies, and perhaps a little hot pepperoncino. One final dish that arouses the kind of theological passion reserved for such classics as cassoulet and *bouillabaisse* is called *tiella* or *taieddha* or *teglia*, depending on where you are in Puglia and what dialect is being spoken. Into the *tiella* goes a mixture, a carefully structured layering of several ingredients that may or may not contain rice (this is the problematic part, as we shall see) but will almost always contain potatoes. Another element will be a vegetable, such as artichokes, zucchini, or mushrooms, depending on the season, and the final ingredient is sometimes bits of salt cod or more usually mussels, the Mediterranean black mussels that have been cultured for centuries in the Mar Piccolo, Taranto's inner sea. Food historians and writers, in Puglia and elsewhere, often suggest that this is a Pugliese version of Spanish paella, derived from the Spanish in the centuries when they occupied Puglia along with much of the Italian south. But *tiella* is really very different from paella as the latter is quickly cooked on top of the fire, while *tiella* is baked in the oven for quite a long time. Moreover, paella is a dish that was associated, until quite recently, only with the rice-growing area around Valencia and not with other parts of Spain at all. Rice is not grown in Puglia, and is not essential to the Pugliese dish.

FATALONE, PASQUALE PETRERA, GIOIA DEL COLLE, Puglia – Organic – certified ICEA

Local viticulture in this area has a long tradition: excavations carried out in the archaeological site of Monte Sannace (to the north-east of Gioia del Colle) revealed an extensive Peucetian settlement (VIII-III cent. BC) and led to the recovery of numerous pieces of pottery for containing wine and olive oil. The territory is rich in historic tradition: as well as the aforementioned site of Monte Sannace there is the Norman-Swabian Castle, the cathedral and not far away the Grotte of Castellana, the Sassi of Matera and the Trulli of the Valle d'Itria – more cultural history than you could shake a considerable stick at.

The geological history is no less fascinating. Once upon a time between the cretaceous plate of the Bari area and the Southern Apennines, the saddle of Spinazzola formed a broad strait that linked the Ionian Sea to the Adriatic, where the today's territory of Gioia del Colle was submerged (as evidenced by the discovery of marine fossils in the local soils). The typical Murgian hill soil is a mix of clay and limestone, rocky and packed with minerals. Thin layers of red earth mixed with limestone and silica sit on huge fossil-rich monolithic reefs confirming the origin of this land and the name of the locality Spinomarinino recalls its original shape: coastal prominence in the strait of sea which submerged the low surrounding lands.

The region has a marked agricultural inclination with notable cultivations of vineyards, almond and olive groves, cherry and plum orchards. The hilly terrain confers to these lands' optimum climatic conditions for viticulture, by way of a right microclimatic balance of sun, winds and mild temperatures. At the end of the 18th century Nicola Petrera, an ancestor of the current owner, chose the Spinomarinino hill, the most aired and sunny one in the Gaudella area, to grow Primitivo grapes. Filippo Petrera has preserved both tradition and passion for this Primitivo until this very day. The family ensures the greatest care in every detail: organic farming, grape selection, processing, and bottling. The family processes only their own estate grown grapes under the brand name "Fatalone", with a total production of 40,000 bottles per 6 hectares of vineyards. The 271eolian271tion process takes place in open-cycle wine tanks, without the aid of yeasts, with frequent pumping of the must over the pomace. The must is kept in contact with grape skins for three to five days at 28°C; a gentle pressing and a slow fermentation then completes the process.

Fancy some laid-back Primitivo, man? Talk about soothing the savage yeast! Tranquillity and harmony by diffusion of new-age sounds in the cellar supports "the activity of the living enzymes inside our natural wines sensitive to music therapy" runs the philosophy of the winery, or more succinctly, from healthy and happy vine roots to healthy and happy vine fruits and enzymes with a spring in their step, a wiggle on their hips and a "New Age" song on their lips. We think Pasquale should play Fatalone Boy Slim and The Primitives – that should sort the wine out.

The straight Primitivo cuts to the chase with its sweet tobacco scent and flavours of sour black cherry, mussel plum and toffee. A smooth, warm, balanced red it finishes on an aftertaste of toasted almond, typical of the Primitivo of Gioia del Colle. Recommended with lamb cooked with garlic, rosemary and Primitivo – natch.

The Riserva is exotically rich and super-ripe oozing scents of fruits-in-alcohol and spicy-toasted wood. This monster has smoothed out over time: it is warm and velvety with dried fruits baked under a marzipan crust. Serve with stewed and braised meats such as Filetto di Maiale alla Calvacanti, Stufato alla Napoletana and with cheese.

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| 2022 | PRIMITIVO GIOIA DEL COLLE | R |
| 2021 | PRIMITIVO GIOIA DEL COLLE RISERVA SPECIALE | R |

LA CASADA, CALEO, Salento

When I think of Negroamaro I taste in my mind's tongue a vinous version of valrona-shocked espresso. This is not such a wine. Where you expect bitterness there is softness. The characteristic "scorched earth" quality is also absent. The wine is pleasant, round and just peppery enough to remind one of its Mediterranean origins, but just don't expect to be able to headbang to it. The Salice is an interesting wine, a blend of Negroamaro and Malvasia Nero. An appealing nose of sweet cherries and stewed plums with some curious gamey notes.

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| 2022 | NEGROAMARO DEL SALENTO | R |
| 2020 | MARCHESE DI BORGOSOLE SALICE SALENTO RISERVA | R |

AA NATALINO DEL PRETE, SALENTO, Puglia – Organic – certified Ecograppo Italia

This Negroamaro is packed with flavour and loaded with character. There's an abundance of rich, almost brooding fruit, backed by wonderful spice and herb notes. The vineyard has been organic since 1994, the wine is fermented on natural yeasts and there is no fining or filtration. No wonder it has so much (wonderful) character. Very complex and "pulpy" aromas of minerals, dried flowers, blackberry, barnyard, liquorice, mocha, and pine tar. The wine in the mouth is big, full-bodied, dense and chewy in texture, with a powerful, fine, deep, and polished tannic structure on which are hung rich, vivid, three-dimensional flavours of juniper, black cherry, blackcurrant, prune juice, sap, and woody herbs. The finish is very long, intense, warm and dry, with clear flavours of blood orange juice and raisins. A wine of powerful, expressive, and profound rustic elegance.

The Primitivo del Salento from 80-year-old vines is a robust wine with great depth and persistent character while at the same time transparent and terroir driven. Purple hued. Violets, plums, and spices with hints of liquorice.

The Pioniere is fantastic: 70-80+ old vines of Negroamaro and Malvasia Nera, a mix of old and archaic clones of these varieties that are currently being classified by the best research in Italy, never more than 3g SO2 added, with about 10 of total, ridiculously low yields, down to 25HL per hectare... a total bargain for the quality and the story behind. Super structured but super light to drink, full of sweet spices and charm.

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| 2022 | PRIMITIVO "NATALI" | R |
| 2021 | NEGROAMARO "ANNE" | R |
| 2021 | SALICE SALENTINO IL PIONIERE SALENTO ROSSO | R |

Gioia's "Primitivo"

*Of ancient birth I am
of noble stock
I love a life of genuine taste.
Therefore, the hill, the rock
are my true home.
I rejoice
when the hot summer sun
burns the soil
I turn violet.
Even more I take pleasure
in seizing its beams,
which day after day
give me more and more strength
while my joyful roots
spread out and seek refuge
within the cool cracks in the rock.
It fell to my lot
to be overlooked and mistreated
in my native country
guest of honour and of great prestige
in far California
(nemo propheta in patria).
Thanks to generous hands,
with love and passion
and great sacrifice,
I was snatched from the insane oblivion,
I was given life and pride
and all I need and deserve
so that my strong vinestock
with its austere name
PRIMITIVO DI GIOIA
could still find a decorous place
in the country of Gaudella,
gentle and genuine rise in the Murgia hills
in the surroundings of Gioia.*

ANTICA ENOTRIA, Puglia – Organic – certified ICEA

Antica Enotria has 12-hectares of vineyard just a few kilometres from the Gulf of Manfredonia. These have been cultivated organically since 1993. The older vineyards are trained to the traditional local Puglia pergola, while the younger plantings, put in less than ten years ago, are trained to the spurred cordon. The finest vines are the varieties indigenous to Puglia, the Nero di Troia, Primitivo, and Negroamaro, as well as varieties classic to areas bordering Daunia, such as Aglianico and Falanghina. Montepulciano too deserves mention, planted as it is in a vast area from the Abruzzo in the north down to the Tavoliere delle Puglie in the south. Sangiovese is also grown. Historically, Daunia is the homeland of the Nero di Troia grape, whose origins are lost in the mists of time. The grape enjoyed its time of greatest popularity in the second half of the 1800s, since the great agricultural estates exported the wine widely as a fine bottled wine. This cuvee is a blend of Nero di Troia, Montepulciano and Sangiovese from exposed calcareous-clay soils. The wine is fermented in tank for eight days and matured in the same vessel. Deep ruby red colour and violet nuances with a characteristic bouquet of cherries and forest berries. On the palate this wine is soft, dry, with nice tannins and a good freshness.

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| 2022 | BIANCO IGT PUGLIA ~ Falanghina, Fiano | W |
| 2023 | NELLAMIATERRA BIANCO | W |
| 2022 | NELLAMIATERRA ROSSO | R |
| 2022 | ROSSO IGT PUGLIA ~ Nero di Troia, Montepulciano, Sangiovese | R |
| 2022 | VRICCIO PRIMITIVO | R |

CANTINA DI VENOSA, Basilicata

Cantina di Venosa is a cooperative established in Basilicata Region in 1957 by twenty-seven founders. Today it has five hundred Members bringing to the winery grapes from over 900 ha. Of vineyards. Cantina di Venosa is located close the beautiful town of Venosa, an architectural jewel in the northeastern part of Basilicata, and is a major producer of Aglianico del Vulture doc. The Vignali is a blend of Chardonnay, Greco and Malvasia from 8–15-year-old vines planted at 350-400 metres above sea level. Harvest is at the beginning of September with a selection of hand harvested grapes. Grapes are harvested and transported to the winery early in the morning. Ferment is in stainless steel tanks at low temperatures; the fruit is aromatic and easy with enough mouthfeel to make it food friendly. The Aglianico is a modern and well-structured wine which is full of juicy fruits. It has a deep red colour and a cherry and raspberry bouquet. If you like a hefty portion of (oak) chips with your cheap n cheerful Aggers then this is not for you, but we prefer our wines with a juicy lift.

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| 2023 | BASILICATA BIANCO VIGNALI ~ Chardonnay, Greco, Malvasia | W |
| 2022 | AGLIANICO ROSSO | R |

Recipes

Western Spaghetti

8oz spaghetti
 1 crow
 100 dollar bills
 7 mussels
 6 fl oz good hock or Pinot Gringo wine, with a smoky finish
 1 dirty dozen bad eggs
 2 ugly fruit
 10 galls Colt 45
 1 wild bunch parsley
 2 oz Indian tea
 1 oz che root (grated)
 1oz arrowroot (grated)
 4 oz true grit
 Palomino pepper sauce
 horseradish sauce

Rinse the spaghetti pieces to remove the starch and then hang 'em high to dry. Bring a pan of water to the boil and drop in the spaghetti and the crow. Add a fistful of dollars and the magnificent mussels, dead or alive. After only a few minutes turn the heat to low and introduce the good wine, the bad eggs and the ugly fruit. Simmer enigmatically. Now, though narrowed eyes, add a few dollars more, the beer and the parsley and cook for a further ten minutes. Strain and serve, sprinkling the dish with the tea, grated roots and grit. Add the sauces to taste. Eat at sunset.

First, Peel The Otter – John Henry Dixon

I PARIETI, MATTEO SANTOITEMMA, Puglia – Organic

"I Parieti" was founded in 2019 with the aim of continuing the agricultural activity on the land and on the family farm of Matteo Santoiemma in Gioia del Colle, in the Murge between Bari, Taranto and Matera. I Parieti is the stone of Puglia.

Carved by the wind, innervated with roots, full of water and light. A wind that, when it does not blow from the north, comes from two seas and gives refreshment, at night, after endless sunny days. "I Parieti" is a story of love towards one's own land: the Murgia, a continuation of the sub-Apennine ridge that crosses the Apulian peninsula. Love is that, unconsciously cultivated at an early age and then resurfaced - and indulged - in the years of maturity, towards a territory, its expressions and its singularity. And then there is Matteo Santoiemma's decision, which starts from these loves, to reappropriate with conviction his own roots and the family's agricultural tradition in order to lead directly the land and the farm owned by his great-grandfather. The farm to which the lands and the masseria refer is composed of 7 hectares of land with vineyards, olive groves and arable land with cereals and legumes and is governed both from a strictly agricultural and oenological point of view by Matteo himself, who is in charge of the direct management of the alberello and espalier vineyards of Primitivo, devoting himself to the exploration of the native territorial varieties such as Verdeca, Fiano and Minutolo with the aim of making the most authentic expression of these varieties in the different micro-areas, applying the principles of organic and biodynamic agriculture in the vineyard and respecting the grapes in the cellar. As a consequence, the choice of spontaneous fermentations and macerations in open vats is natural and consistent, in order to reduce the stress of the fruit to a minimum.

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| 2023 | SCAZZARIDDE BIANCO | Or |
| 2021 | CARPARO MACERATO BIANCO | Or |
| 2021 | PRIMITIVO TATARRANE | R |
| 2020 | PRIMITIVO CEPPI SPARSI | R |

CALCARIUS, VALENTINA PASSALACQUA, Puglia – Organic – certified Suolo e Salute

Calcarius is the project of Valentina Passalacqua, started in 2017 in Apricena in the Gargano region of northern Puglia where it abuts Abruzzo. Valentina has been the leading exponent of biodynamics in Puglia since 2000, her farm comprising up to 80 hectares of vines, fruit and vegetables.

This part of Puglia is composed of a pinkish/whitish calcareous bedrock, the consequence of compacted limestone rocks crystallising in the Jurassic period more than 150 million years ago (the same as the Kimmeridgian geological era). The landscape is marked by loose rocky deposits, the result of the limestone erosion, and variegated clays created by the chemical and physical process of decomposition of these calcareous rocks. The vineyards of Gargano are rooted in the Magna Grecia, as Ovid referred to this region which had been settled by Hellenic settlers from the 8th century onwards. The grape varieties are the fruit – as it were – of this historic fusion of two cultures, being Nero di Troia, Greco Bianco, Bombino, Negroamaro and Aleatico.

And the wines are naturally made with ambient spontaneous alcoholic fermentations, which Valentina and Danilo describe as "a processing of mineralization...the salts present in the grapes in an organic form turn into mineral inorganic components. The unstable composition of the must acquires a new stable and mineralized form in the wine."

The Calcarius Bianco is Bombino Bianco. Though Bombino (meaning small bomb) Bianco shares many synonyms with Trebbiano Toscano (also known as Ugni Blanc), the two grapes are unrelated. DNA research has also shown that Bombino may be one of the parent varieties of the Impigno grape of the Ostuni DOC in Apulia and of the Moscatella Salvatico grape that is also native to the same region. In Abruzzo it was synonymous with Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, but now it seems they are differentiated. Whatever, this version is marked by ripe lemon and that characteristic Mediterranean fleshy golden-yellow fruit – think apricots, both flesh and skin. The crunchiness is exalted by the limestone/seashell minerality and then fills out on the mid-palate before the salty finish.

The Orange a tasty maceration of Falanghina, the Rosso is 100% Negroamaro, the Roz is a dark pink blend of Aleatico and Nero di Troia. Hellen Bianco is Greco and Hellen Rosso, pure Nero di Troia. The calcareous terroir is the style in each and every wine. If chalk is your ball of chalk, these wines talk the chalk.

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| 2021 | CALCARIUS HELLEN BIANCO ~ Greco Bianco | W |
| NV | CALCARIUS NU LITR BIANCO ~ Bombino Bianco ~ 1 litre | W |
| NV | CALCARIUS NU LITR ORANGE~ Falanghina – 1 litre | Or |
| 2020 | CALCARIUS HELLEN ROSSO ~ Nero di Troia | R |
| NV | CALCARIUS NU LITR ROSSO ~ Negroamaro | R |
| NV | CALCARIUS FRECCIABOMB PET NAT ~ Nero di Troia | Sp/Ro |
| NV | CALCARIUS FRECCIABOMB ORANGE PET NAT | Sp/Or |

CATALDO CALABRETTA, CIRO MARINA, Calabria – Organic – certified Suolo e Salute

Cataldo Calabretta represents the fourth generation of a family of winemakers and is the leader of a group of young winemakers working organically and with low intervention. After studying Oenology and Viticulture at the Faculty of Agriculture of Milan, he worked for a few years in a number of Italian wineries, before deciding to refurbish the old family cellars with his sisters. For the past ten years, the estate has been run according to the principles of organic farming, an ethical choice, which year after year is paying off: they have renewed the vineyards, continuing to cultivate their vines on hilly land located in the heart of the DOC. They only use indigenous yeasts and don't add anything to the wines other than a minimal amount of sulphites. In the cellar, they renewed an old cement cuve, which proves to be an excellent vessel for the ageing of Cirò wine.

Cataldo practices classic farming with bush training (also known as albarelo), traditional viticulture, with organic manures, works the soil and allows grass to grow between the rows in the winter in order to nourish the soils. Hand-harvested grapes are destemmed into vats and undergo a six-day maceration and proceeded by a spontaneous ambient ferment, before maturation in cement tanks for ten months and bottling without filtration or fining.

As mentioned, Gaglioppo is a very tannic and acidic variety that during the 80s and 90s was perhaps somewhat stripped of its original elements and made in the most round and soft way possible, losing the otherwise sharp and angular characteristics of the grape. A noble wine that can stand against Nebbiolos, Sangiovese and Nerelli.

The wine has a bright brick red colour (even in youth) which the hallmark of this variety. Ethereal on the nose, the fruit is initially shy, but coaxed out of its shell, reveals a range of flavour including leather, liquorice and dried prunes. There is plenty of tannin, but its natural high acidity this is an elegant Gaglioppo further enhanced by the salinity which characterises wines from the Ionian coast.

Ansonica (or Inzolia) is not very common in Calabria, but it has the characteristic of being well suited to coastal terroirs. The vines are ideally situated on a single hectare of vineyard in Strongoli, only 300 metres from the coast of the Ionian Sea. The wine has an intense yellow almost golden colour, aromas of white flowers with secondary notes of dried fruit and hazelnuts. On the palate, the Ansonica is quite a full-bodied wine with excellent persistence and a salty mineral lick at the end.

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| 2023 | ANSONICA IGP BIANCO | W |
| 2022 | CIRO ROSSO CLASSICO SUPERIORE ~ Gaglioppo | R |

NASCIRI, DOMENICO & FRANCESCA, GERACE, Calabria – Organic – certified Ecograppo Italia, biodynamic methods

Run by Domenico and Francesca, (no surnames no pack drill), Nasciri is a project designed to regenerate the land, giving nature centre stage. In Calabrian dialect, Nasciri means "born", bearing witness to the notion of regeneration and to achieve this, not only are they organically certified, but they also follow biodynamic practices, with activities such as pruning, decanting and bottling undertaken when the moon is on the wane. Work is hands-on; Domenico and Francesca (along with collaborators Jaswinder and Gurtej) oversee all work starting in the vineyard, through to 275eolian275tion.

We are starting with three wines from the estate. Greco Bianco, an autochthonous variety typical of this area (and not to be confused with Greco di Tufo from Campania), derives from mainly clay soils, with the vines enjoying a good exposure to the sun. The vineyard itself is 200m above sea level, approximately six km from the sea, and ten from the mountains. 2018 itself was a good year, with plenty of sunshine and not too much rain. With this wine, Nasciri wanted to elevate Greco, a grape often overlooked and underappreciated. The wine captures the warmth of the Med with its golden/amber colour, subtle and complex aromas and enveloping palate that is still mineral and fresh, thanks to the element of balancing acidity. The Greco Nero, another indigenous grape has a bright ruby colour and is vinous with composed, well-integrated tannins and an appealing freshness on the finish.

The Calabrese Nero is inspired by Domenico's grandfather who used to make the wine for the family. Calabrian families still produce this kind of wine today. The name, Vinu i' casa, means the wine of the home in local dialect and has three main features: a little bit of acidity, very moderate alcohol, and easy-drinking fruity quality. Nasciri have created their version of a home wine.

These are all very natural wines (almost no sulphur is used) with the accent on drinkability.

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| 2022 | IGT GRECO BIANCO | W |
| 2018 | IGT GRECO NERO | R |
| 2016 | CALABRESE NERO ~ Nero d'Avola | R |

SARDEGNA

A Sardinian meal always begins with an appetizer: wild boar ham, sausage lamb or veal trotters, clams or mussels cooked *alla marinara* with white wine, garlic, and parsley, *burrida* (dogfish marinated in a walnut and garlic sauce), *bottarga* (salted, dried and pressed roe of tuna or mullet) served in paper thin slices with lemon and olive oil. The accompanying breads are fabulous. Some examples are: *su civraxu*, the most common, large, round, flour loaf; *su coccoi* made with hard-wheat semolina and cut on top with scissors to form small decorative points (*is pizzicorru*) that become crisp and golden when baked; *su pani carasau* or carta musica (literally, sheet music) a round, wafer thin, crisp sheet of flour and semolina. Excellent served with salt and olive oil, it is then called *su pani guttiàu*. *Pani carasau* is used to make a homely but delicious first course, *su pani frattau*, in which the thin sheets are first dipped in broth or boiling salted water, layered with tomato sauce, minced meat and grated cheese, and topped with a poached egg. Another flat bread is the soft, round *spianadas*.

First courses include: *sa fregula*, an irregularly shaped, grain-sized pasta served in fish broth; *malloreddus*, a small grooved pasta flavoured with saffron and served with tomato sauce and cheese; *culingionis*, ravioli made with semolina (often with a potato puree and mint filling); and *panadas*, a round cylindrical pie filled with vegetables, meat or eels. *Panadas* are such a popular specialty that there is a yearly festival dedicated to it in Assemini in July.

The traditional Sardinian meats are spit-roasted suckling pig (*porceddu*), baby lamb, and kid. The more adventurous might want to try *sa cordula*, cleaned lamb intestines sautéed with peas, or knotted into an intricate braid with variety meats and oven or spit roasted. Another speciality is *sanguinaccio*, a pork-blood sausage sweetened with raisins and sugar, served boiled or roasted. The big powerful Cannonau is the ideal partner for this hearty peasant cooking.

Sardinia is Italy's leading producer of organic produce, accounting for nearly a third of the nation's land cultivated by biological methods. Tomatoes are used generously in sauces, as are artichokes, fava beans, peas, aubergine and zucchini. Foods here are redolent of herbs, including wild fennel, juniper and myrtle, used with hare, boar and game birds.

The varieties of fish that Sardinians prefer roasted over coals are: *orate* (gilthead bream), *mormore* (striped bream), *spigole* (sea bass), *triglie* (red mullet), *muggini* (grey mullet), and *anguille* (eel). *Aragosta* (lobster), *gamberi* (shrimp), *vongole* (clams), and *seppiette* (tiny squid) are used in all sorts of pasta and rice dishes. The Vermentino, with its delicate aromas of fruit and hint of almonds in the finish, is a wine to be drunk with the smell of the sea and the heat of the sun. In addition to being the perfect complement to all kinds of seafood recipes, from shrimp salads to elaborate seafood platters with vegetables and smoked *cernia* or swordfish, this wine is delicious as an exciting aperitif for all occasions. The Vermentino di Gallura DOCG's finesse comes from the combination of ongoing quality control, the richness of the granite decomposition of soil and the microclimate where the original grapes are grown.

The shepherd's ancient tradition has led to the production of many different types of cheese now produced in modern factories. Among the most well-known is the popular *fiore sardo* or *pecorino sardo*, a firm cheese made from fresh, whole sheep's milk and lamb or kid rennet. *Pecorino romano* is a drier, sharp cheese made with boiled steep's milk and lamb rennet. *Dolce sardo* is a softer, cow's milk cheese. A singular cheese, unlikely to appeal to the tourist, is *casu marzu* (literally, "rotten cheese"). It is produced when tiny white larva form in the cheese, gradually reducing it to a creamy consistency. The taste is said to be both delicate and piquant. Casu marzu is not sold commercially but is still made privately for home use. The idiosyncratic sherry-style Vernaccia di Oristano is a marvellous wine for all occasions to go with cheeses for all occasions.

"Another market with its own very characteristic flavour is that of Cagliari, in the island of Sardinia. Spread out in large baskets large as cartwheels are all the varieties of fish which go into ziminu, the Sardinian version of fish soup; fat, scaly little silver fish streaked with lime green; enormous octopus, blue, sepia, mauve, turquoise, curled and coiled and petalled like some heavily embroidered marine flower; the pescatrice again, that ugly hooked angler fish; cold stony little clams here called arselle; tartufe di mare; silvery slippery sardines; rose-red mullets in every possible size, some small as sprats like a doll's-house fish; the fine lobster for which Sardinia is famous."

Elizabeth David – *Italian Fish Markets*

Women, vague in the orchard undershadow, are picking the lemons, lurking as if in the undersea. There are heaps of pale lemons under the trees. They are pale, primrose-smouldering fires...

DH Lawrence – *Sea and Sardinia*

CANTINA GIUSEPPE SEDILESU, Sardegna – Organic

Located in the village of Mamoiada in the central province of Nuoro this is a 13-hectare estate purchased in 1975. Some of the vines were already a hundred years old although the family has continued planting over the years. Grapes are destemmed prior to a twenty-day maceration and are softly pressed. The ambient ferment uses wild yeasts and thereafter the interventions are minimal with no filtering, fining and only a small amount of sulphur before ageing in 500-litre used oak barrels for twelve months and a further couple in bottle before release. The Cannonau has a shiny ruby-red colour and plum fruity aromas, as well as pomegranate and cherries. The Mamuthone is ideal for red grilled meats, on the spit, and with mild seasoned cheeses. Mamuthone is the name of a masked figure that is closely connected to the history and folklore of this village of Mamoiada. It was a term used by the locals to describe pirates who had come to the village to pillage it, and having been captured after a fierce battle, were enslaved by the villagers, bound with ropes and dressed up in fleeces adorned with bells to indicate their whereabouts. The ensemble was finished off by a terrifying mask. Alexander McQueen would have been proud. Produced with Granazza, indigenous grape of Mamoiada, a truly unique wine. Intense notes of Mediterranean macchia combines with a full, complex, yet well-balanced palate and rich and enveloping finish.

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| 2021 | CANNONAU SARTIU | R |
| 2021 | CANNONAU DI SARDEGNA "MAMUTHONE" | R |

ALBERTO LOI, CARDEDU, Sardegna

The Alberto Loi Estate was established by the end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties by Alberto Loi, born in Jerzu in a family of wine cultivators, producers and traders of Cannonau wine. The present owners, Alberto Loi's boys, constitute the third generation of the family devoted to the production of Cannonau wine. The estate is located in Ogliastro, the east-central region of Sardinia, the most celebrated of the entire island for the production of the Cannonau wine. More precisely, it is situated in the countryside of Cardedu at just a few kilometres from Jerzu. The whole Ogliastro is rich with traces of the 277inerea civilization and it's not difficult to visit the remains of the Nuragh and Domus de Janas. You can find numerous local folklore organizations, which supervise the preparation of the country festivities, and the colourful country festival which takes place from April to October. The production of Cannonau DOC wine of the territory of Cardedu and Jerzu avails of the specific sub-denomination "Jerzu" provided under the rules for DOC of the Cannonau wine of Sardinia.

The basic Cannonau Sa Mola is ruby red tending towards garnet with an intense, slightly ethereal, rich, fragrant, floral bouquet reminiscent of mature plums, blackberries, wild berries and old rose and suggestions of aromatic wood and spices. The Riserva, made only in top vintages, benefits from extra time in cask. This is altogether a richer wine with more complexity being tasty with spicy tannins and warm in alcohol yet also surprisingly smooth. Balanced, intense and persistent it improves with ageing (from 2 to 6 years and even more in exceptional cases), which enhances the basic characteristics and gives rise to a particularly rich bouquet. Worth nibbling some aged Pecorino with this. Nibaru is the name of a local wild bushplant called "spaccasassi" (literally from Italian "stone breaker") which produces tiny round black berries, made of a round seed with a bit of pulp and skin around. There is one of these plants growing in the plot of Monica vines in the commune of San Vito, which produce this particular wine. This local wild berry has a very tannic and herbaceous taste, of "garrigue (the soil and wild plants that grow on the craggy hill of the countries in the Mediterranean region)", which can be detected in some of the wines of Cantina Alberto Loi, especially in this 'Nibaru'. Captivating nose with flowery perfumes of red flowers, both fresh and dried, as well as strong cherry-fruity notes and delicate minerality, combined with a gentle spiciness. Very tasty in the mouth with a hint of bitterness, plenty of stonefruit fruit and peppery tannins. I'm thinking slow-cooked shoulder of pork with fennel.

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| 2022 | VERMENTINO DI SARDEGNA "THERIA" | W |
| 2022 | MONICA DI SARDEGNA "NIBARU" | R |
| 2021 | CANNONAU DI SARDEGNA "SA MOLA" | R |

IN THE CANNONAU'S MOUTH

The origins and provenance of the Cannonau variety are still not known with absolute certainty but it is generally agreed that it appeared on Sardinia, having been brought from Spain, in the 14th century at the beginning of the period of Spanish domination of the island. Numerous experts argue that Cannonau corresponds from an ampelographical standpoint with the Canonazo of Seville and the Granaxa of Aragon. Cannonau found an ideal habitat on Sardinia and the local growers were so favourable to it that it soon spread to every part of the island. Eventually, it was being grown on about 20 per cent of the island surface planted in vines. Despite the considerable diffusion of the variety, the amount of Cannonau wine produced is rather limited because of the widespread practice of short-pruning as part of the albarello system of training the vines. That practice drastically curtails output, which in the provinces of Nuoro and Sassari averages about 30 to 40 quintals per hectare as opposed to the more than 100 quintals permitted under the production discipline with normal pruning. Gradually, however, the albarello system is being replaced by the espalier technique, which results in a wine with a lower level of alcohol, one that is perhaps less formidable but is clearly much more drinkable.

AA PANEVINO, GIANFRANCO MANCA, NURA, Sardegna – Organic

Pull up an armchair and warm your interest in wine at the crackling fire of extreme passion. This is the story of Gianfranco Manca, formerly a baker, who, having taken over his uncle's bakery made delicious, prize-worthy Sardinian breads.

With the bakery there also came some plots of land with some very old vines that had somehow remained although practically neglected for years. Panevino – you can see where I am going with this. The vines were trained in 278inereal278 (goblet), the traditional bush-system used on the islands of Italy, numbered over thirty different varieties, but mainly Cannonau. Since he was already an expert at fermentation with bread, Gianfranco believed the natural progression would be to understand wine fermentation with the help of these vines. He set about rehabilitating the old vines and planted a parcel of new vines of Monica and Carignano del Sulcis, the local strain of the famous grape. Although he started making wine in the mid 80's it wasn't until 2005 that he was ready to put a label on it and offer his interpretation to the rest of the world. "Following the steps of my family that lives the vineyard life since over a century, "panevino" ("breadwine") is born. Why panevino? Panevino is the essence, the essential, simplicity, daily life, celebration, truth: Daily life turned into celebration, celebration every day. All that I bring it with me in the vineyard, I hoe it, prune it... The vineyard returns it in the shape of a few concentrated grape bunches. The vineyard is the heart of our farm's activity; it covers five hectares, the rest of our life laboratory is made of olive trees, corn, vegetables, and legumes".

The vineyards are on exposed windy slopes with schist and limestone at five hundred metres altitude and are subject to dramatic temperature fluctuations. Minimal intervention is the watchword – one treatment only with sulphur and lime, no fertilizers (other than what the donkey might release something once in a while!) The same principles apply throughout the winemaking process: manual harvest of grapes in small boxes, no fining, clarification, acidification or deacidification in the cellar. "We use only GRAPES (and prayers)"

Gianfranco Manco, makes what nature gives him in each vintage. The whys and wherefores are irrelevant, you won't prise technical information from him – even with a special crowbar designed for the task. Suffice to say 2013 Rosso Chi No Nau is a Cannonau from centenarian vines and the 2013 Rosso Pikade is a blend of the gentler Monica plus Carignano. No sulphur in these wines. Su chi no nau (what I do not say), a play on words with the name of its grape variety: Cannonau. What's in a name? This is a celebration of wine silence, that fantasy land where people simply enjoy wine for the sheer pleasure of it, without the usual hot and cold running commentary, without getting mired in technical detail or lumpy semantics.

Alvas is an extraordinary white wine made with extended skin maceration (eighteen days). The motley cast of fragrant and spicy varieties features Retallada, Vernaccia, Nuragus, Seminano, Vermentino, Malvasia and Nasco. Nuragus has an interesting provenance: some experts believe that it was brought to the island during the XII century B.C. by Phoenicians; others believe that it's a native variety because its name is similar to the famous 278elabelin stone construction of Nuraghi. It's always been a resistant and adaptable variety and a good yielder: for this reason it is also known as "pagadeppidus" (pay debts), "preni tineddus" (fill up vats), and "uva de is paberus" (poor man's grapes). Alvas (meaning white – ha) is hazy-amber with a subtle nose of orange flowers, verbena, ricard and apricot skin. The wine smells warm, like bread dough just taken out of the oven. Smooth in the mouth the wine picks up notes of apricot jam, ginger, and white pepper (from the lees) as well as tannin and a faint nuttiness from the skin contact. In a word, Alvas is gorgeous. We drank it with baby squid stuffed with chorizo, pine nuts, sultanas, shallots, and parsley on the first night and with a chicken, fennel, carrot and black olive stew on the second.

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| 2019 | NIEDDU 'MBUSSU ROSSO | R |
| 2019 | PIKADE EEE ROSSO | R |
| 2019 | AXINA'E IXINAU ROSSO | R |
| 2019 | SENUSSI ROSSO | R |
| 2019 | ONNA ROSSO | R |

SICILIA

Sicily's history of colonization can be viewed by examining not only its architecture and language, but also its cuisine. The Greeks were the first to impose a culinary influence, and in a sense, Sicilian cooking is a microcosm of Italian cooking in general in that it absorbed and subsequently embellished such influences and developed a cuisine based on simple yet high quality local ingredients such as fish and vegetables. During the Arab colonization, nearly a thousand years later, new foods and new methods of cooking were introduced: the Saracens brought aubergines, spinach, bitter oranges, almonds, rice, apricots, sugar and sultanas as well as the techniques for making sorbet (sherbet). Next came the Normans with their methods of cooking, and of preserving fish and meat.

Pasta is extremely popular. It is dressed in a rich sauce and showered with grated pecorino or with salted ricotta (a local speciality). Pesto alla Trapanese is plum and sun-dried tomatoes pureed with garlic, almonds, basil, oregano, and pecorino and served with pasta twists called casareccia. The wonderfully named Zogghiu is a refreshing amalgam of parsley, mint, balsamic vinegar and capers – delicious with lamb or skate. Fish and pasta is particular Sicilian marriage, the best-known example being pasta with sardines and fennel. Again, there are innumerable local variants of this dish. The other favourite way to serve pasta is with vegetables, especially aubergines. As cookery writers never tire of telling us we can't get the wonderful small round purple Sicilian aubergines in this country. Were we able to we would undoubtedly try to replicate Bellini's masterpiece, pasta alla Norma, with aubergine, tomato and salted ricotta or caponata, an eggplant stew, which like rosé from a Mediterranean country, always tastes infinitely better in *situ*.

Fish is plentiful and the markets teem with the fruit (di mare) of the Sicilian seas. Swordfish deserving of the barbecue lie down with octopus; mullet, striped mackerel, sardines, and anchovies are plentiful. Fish may be steamed, grilled or baked, but simplicity is always observed in the preparation because the ingredient is king, a tenet laid down by the Syracusan Arcestratus, whose 4th century culinary notes predate those of Delia Smith as the earliest known to western civilization.

Sicilian sorbets and ice creams and other dolce (such as cassata and pasta reale) are brilliant. Wonderful quality of fruit combined with proud tradition ensures their reputation. Pleasures to be enjoyed with the great sweet wines of Pantelleria.

The wondrous Marsalas of Marco de Bartoli are not for the snappers up of unconsidered trifles. In fact, avoid the word trifle at all costs. These are glorious delicate nutty wines with needle-thread acidity and mellow warmth designed to sip and toast a Sicilian sunset. Or a Sydenham sunset.

CALEO, Sicilia

Another of those fragrant fruity white wines that Sicily seems to specialise in, this Inzolia, (otherwise known as Ansonica in Tuscany) from vineyards near Trapani, is more than merely drinkable with notes of almonds, citrus fruits and fresh herbs.

2023 INZOLIA TERRE SICILIANE

W

CIELLO & BAGLIO, ALCAMO, Sicilia – Organic methods

The dynamic Vesco family took over the winery 10 years ago and have since revolutionised the viticultural practices and invested heavily in cutting edge technology for the winery and bottling line. Their hundred hectares of organic vineyards are located high up in the hills above Alcamo. The wines are all certified organic and planted on south-east facing slopes on sandy soils 150 – 300m above sea level. The climate is clearly suited for producing the best quality grapes. The vineyards in three main sites: Alcamo for Catarratto and Nero d'Avola. The grapes tend to be picked earlier in the year than many of their neighbours which produces their customary bright, fresh style of wine.

The results are evident in the Catarratto and perfumed, fresh Nero d'Avola. These wines are a million miles from the overripe styles made by many of their peers. Night harvesting and modern temperature-controlled fermentations result in bright, fresh, modern wines. Fragrant, crisp Catarratto with a pleasant trace of pink grapefruit, apple-skin with soft almond on the finish and soft, warmy and plummy Nero d'Avola with good character. The first bottling of the Cielo tends to have the lees in evident suspension, the wine be chalky-opaque, but the fresh has that just-off-the-tank freshness. Subsequent bottlings will be a mite less cloudy; what you gain in clarity you lose a touch in mouthfeel. The Baglio red is 100% Nero d'Avola from their organic vineyards. Short maceration of a week of whole bunch (40%) and destemmed (60%) grapes. Wild yeast, no sulphur, no fining, no filtration. Chewy plum character, herbal with peppery tannins. The white 100% Catarratto from their organic vineyard. 3 days skin maceration, no fining, no filtration, no sulphur. The colour here is amber, the fruit is warm and spicy and the palate is rich without being heavy. Tasted blind you might pick this as an orange from northern Italy, made from a noble grape.

2023 CIELLO BIANCO CATARRATTO TERRE SICILIANA

W

2023 CIELLO BIANCO CATARRATTO TERRE SICILIANA – key keg

W

2022 MAREMOSSO BIANCO TERRE SICILIANA ~ Catarratto

W

2023 CIELLO ROSSO NERO D'AVOLA TERRE SICILIANA

R

2022 MAREMOSSO ROSSO TERRE SICILIANA ~ Nero d'Avola

R

2023 TULE BIANCO TERRE SICILIA

W

2022 TULE ROSSO TERRE SICILIA

R

*Et però credo
che molta felicità
sia agli uomini
che nascono
dove si trovano
vini buoni.*

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)

MARCO DE BARTOLI, MARSALA, Sicilia

Marco De Bartoli is considered one of Sicily's winemaking pioneers for his long-standing commitment to the native Sicilian white grape varieties, Grillo and Zibibbo. He produces them on two separate estates: the first in Marsala, in Sicily's south-west corner, the other on the small island of Pantelleria, south-east of Sicily. His belief in the value of traditional methods of production of these grapes and their wines was complemented by his equally strong belief in the future of Sicily as one of Europe's most vital viticultural areas. Grillo, which historically forms the basis of Marsala's classic wines, has been grown on the island since Phoenician times. From his Samperi winery, in the Contrada Samperi just west of Marsala, Marco De Bartoli produces several wines from this grape. "Vecchio Samperi" was first made in 1980. Named for the territory that houses De Bartoli's country estate, it is a prestigious "Vergine" wine made using the traditional solera method, in which small quantities of young wine are added to wines of older vintages as they pass through a sequence of wooden barrels. The complex, harmonious result celebrates the fruit of many harvests.

In 1982 De Bartoli created "Vigna La Miccia", classified as an "Oro" or gold Marsala, which is a sweeter, fresher dessert wine produced using a cold 280eolian280tion process; it reveals an intense bouquet of Grillo and Inzolia grapes.

Another facet of Marco De Bartoli's work with Grillo led in 1983 to the "Marsala Superiore", which is aged in oak barrels and fortified, as tradition would have it, with the "mistella" alcohol derived from must of Inzolia and acqua vite. In 1992 Marco De Bartoli added "Grappoli del Grillo" to his collection: here Grillo is vinified as a dry white table wine, with its unmistakable character of Mediterranean spice.

Pietra Nera is an aromatic dry wine made from 100% Zibibbo (better known as Muscat of Alexandria); it is delicate, attractive and alluring and would make good company with fish soup, sarde a beccafico, grilled bream or cous-cous. Like so many of our producers de Bartoli are trying to rediscover the natural flavour of wine using native yeasts and low sulphur during the 280eolian280tion. Out of this ambition was born the Integer wines. One's initial impression is of the uncompromising purity of the wine in the mouth – no corners have been cut, no corners of the palate will remain unchallenged by the wine. As Eric might say: "The Integer wines will knock you on your ass" (technical winespeak – I will explain later).

Made from sun-dried Moscato, Bukkuram is a wine of orange blossom, apricot and honey. Legend has it that Apollo himself was successfully wooed by the goddess of love, Tanit, when she substituted Moscato from the volcanic island of Pantelleria for his daily ambrosia.

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| 2021 | TERZAVIA BRUT NATURE ~ Grillo | Sp |
| 2023 | PIETRA NERA ~ Zibibbo | W |
| 2023 | VIGNAVERDE – Grillo | W |
| 2022 | ZIBIBBO INTEGER | W |
| 2021 | PASSITO DI PANTELLERIA BUKKURAM SOLE D'AGOSTO | Sw |
| 2014 | BUKKURAM PADRE DELL VIGNA 50 cl | Sw |

Looking soiled and crumpled, like the Roman Emperor who has sat up too late over the Falernian wine.

MARCO DE BARTOLI, MARSALA, Sicilia continued...

Vecchio Samperi, an example of the rare Vergine/Soleras style mentioned above, is aged using the fractional blending method known as solera, made famous in Jerez. Using a battery of progressively smaller casks, De Bartoli continually “tops up” his oldest wines with wines from the next-oldest vintage, with the newest wines going in the largest cask at the end of the battery. Vecchio Samperi is more than 40 years old, with the smoky, nutty complexity of a fine sherry. But Vecchio Samperi is unfortified, just as all Marsala was before the British came along towards the end of the 18th century and added spirit to it. The wine (from Grillo again) is dry, intense and mellow with flavours of chestnuts, Brazil nuts and orange peel. Try it with aged pecorino cheeses, or maybe slightly chilled alongside some shellfish or other seafood as an aperitif. It is a rare treasure in the world of wine and is described by Marco as a “Vino Liquoroso secco”.

For decades, the most famous wine exports of Sicily were the sherry-like fortified wines of Marsala, named after the Moroccan-accented port town on the island's west coast. The wines of Marsala, which have been banished to the kitchen in recent years, are perhaps the most vivid examples of the myriad ethnic influences that shape Sicily's culture and cuisine. The name Marsala, for example, is thought to be derived from the Arab phrase “Marsah-el-Allah,” or, “port of God,” a name likely bestowed on by the island's Moorish rulers centuries ago.

Marsala wine was first commercialised by the British, who, as in Jerez in Spain and Oporto in Portugal, created wines that could withstand long sea journeys by fortifying them with grape brandy. At its most basic, Marsala, like sherry, is a fortified wine made from white grapes (although there are some versions made from red varieties). And like sherry, Marsala is as stylistically diverse as wines come: It can be dry, semi-sweet, or sweet, and it comes in “oro” (gold), “ambra” (“amber”) and “rubino” (ruby) versions. There are also different age categories: Fine (aged only a year, not necessarily in wood); Superiore (aged a minimum of two years in oak or chestnut, and four years for Superiore Riserva); and Vergine/Soleras (aged a minimum of five years in wood and a minimum of ten for those labelled “Stravecchio” or “Riserva”).

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| NV | VECCHIO SAMPERI VENTENNALE – 50cl | W |
| 2018 | MARSALA SUPERIORE ORO “VIGNA LA MICCIA” – 50 cl | Sw |
| 2004 | MARSALA SUPERIORE RISERVA– 50cl | Sw |
| 1988 | MARSALA SUPERIORE RISERVA – 50 cl | Sw |

AA CARAVAGLIO, ANTONINO CARAVAGLIO, Salina – Organic

Nature is an 281eolian harp, a musical instrument whose tones are the re-echo of higher things within us. (Novalis)

The history of artisanal winemaking in the Aeolian Islands off the coast of Sicilia essentially begins with five Spanish families, one of which is Caravaglio. These noble pioneers were invited to travel to these wild, volcanic islands in the early 1500s to develop agriculture. Thus, for more than 500 years, the Caravaglios have cultivated wine grapes on Salina and Lipari, establishing early on the traditions and practices that would be followed for generations. Antonino Caravaglio's ancestors were certainly among the first to partner with Venetian traders bearing rootstock from Greece, planting the original Malvasia delle Lipari and Corinto Nero vines. Few vine-growing regions in the world can claim such an unbroken chain of organic cultivation. Grapes on these wind-swept hills have always been cared for naturally, cleansed by the sea-salty air of the Mediterranean and protected by the island's mineral soils, which also kept phylloxera at bay.

Antonino Caravaglio was among the first artisans in Sicily to become organically certified in the 1990s; historically, his family's vines and caper plants for centuries have been farmed according to organic principles. Grapes are harvested by hand and fermented with indigenous yeasts in temperature-controlled, stainless-steel tanks. White wines are aged in tank on fine lees for two to three months; red wines are aged on fine lees in a combination of 500L French oak casks and tank for one month. Very little sulphur is added during the winemaking process, to ensure the grapes' natural flavours are allowed to express themselves fully.

The Malvasia Salina is from organic vines grown in volcanic soils. The wine is now fermented in amphora. Beautiful, dry, aromatic white wine with peach blossoms, lemon zest, spring flowers, grapefruit, green melon and mouth-watering acidity.

Occhio di Terra Chianu Cruci is Malvasia delle Lipari and Catarratto. This wine is fermented with native yeasts only and rests on its skins for a period of time gaining colour and tannic structure. The ageing takes place in terracotta amphorae for 6 months. A variety of aromas emerge from this wine: chamomile, herbs (basil, rosemary, dried mint), followed by ripe yellow pulpy fruit such as loquat and mango. A tangy wine, supremely satisfying with a long persistence in the mouth and a wine that ticks so many of our nerdy boxes: Made from old Corinto Nero and Nerello Mascalese from the islands of Lipari and Salina, the Salina Rosso spends just two days on skins to derive its dark pink/ruby red vivid colour. The aroma expresses wild roses and black cherry scents, the wine is brilliant and clear in the glass. In the mouth there is a distinctive savoury presence, almost a smoky quality and perky red fruit flavours.

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| 2023 | OCCHIO DI TERRA MALVASIA SECCO SALINA IGT | W |
| 2023 | PALMENTO DI SALINA ROSSO ~ Corinto Nero, Nerello Mascalese | R |

SICILIA**VINO DI ANNA, ANNA MARTENS & ERIC NARIOO, ETNA, Sicilia – Organic methods**

Vino di Anna is a small domain owned and run by Anna Martens and Eric Narioo, high on the north face of Mt Etna, Sicily. Mount Etna is an incredible place to grow vines. The soils are black, fertile and rich in minerals. Mount Etna is in constant eruption, often sprinkling the vineyards with fresh cinders. The vineyards are located along terraces at high altitudes (600-1200 metres). The climate is extreme making it both an exciting and challenging place to make natural wine.

Makes a range of natural wines. The vineyards are farmed organically and tended by hand. The grapes are all hand harvested. The vines are albarelo-trained (bush vines) and range in age from 60 – 100 plus years old. Nerello Mascalese is the principal red grape. The white is a field blend of local grapes, mainly Grecanico and Carricante. The wines are made with minimal intervention, natural yeasts, no additives, no fining or filtering. Little or no SO2 is used.

The fifth Palmento wine made in their 250 + year old Palmento (traditional Etnean wine building) is predominantly Nerello Mascalese, from 60-100 year old bush vines coupled with a small amount of Nerello Cappuccio, Alicante (Grenache) and indigenous white grapes (Minella, Catarratto, Insolia). The grapes were hand harvested and transported to the Palmento. About 50% of the grapes were de-stemmed by the hand, the rest remained as whole bunches. The grapes were macerated for four days, being foot trodden several times. The fermenting must was then pressed and continued fermenting in stainless steel, used oak casks and Georgian qvevris (amphorae). After six months on fine lees the wine was bottled the last week of May without fining or filtering. Paler in colour than the previous vintages, this wine is floral with vibrant cherry and wild strawberry aromas. It is flavoursome, with a fresh acidity and soft, juicy tannins.

The grapes for the Jeudi 15 wine come from a 2-hectare vineyard in the contrada Monte LaGuardia at 800 metres on the northern slope of Mt Etna. 80-year-old vines of Nerello Mascalese are hand harvested with a small amount (less than 5%) of Nerello Cappuccio and Alicante (Grenache). 80% of the grapes were de-stemmed by hand into an open 30HL used oak fermenter. The rest were added as whole bunches. Fermentation was conducted by indigenous yeasts. The fermenting must was in contact with the skins for 8 days during which time it was gently foot plunged several times. The fermenting must was then pressed and transferred to stainless steel and a used oak cask where malolactic fermentation occurred. The wine was left on fine lees for six months prior to bottling without fining or filtration.

Vibrant ruby red in colour, this wine has attractive red fruit aromas (red currants, cherries, strawberries) coupled with floral and subtle savoury notes. The palate is medium bodied, with good fruit definition, firm acidity, and a fine tannin structure.

Vino di Anna is 80 yr old bush vines of Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio (10%), grown high on the north face of Mt Etna were hand harvested. The bunches of grapes were perfect in 2014 so a 15 HL wooden cask was filled with 100% whole bunches and left to ferment for 6 weeks. The grapes were not manipulated during this time. Once sufficient tannins and flavour had been extracted and the wine was balanced in structure the grapes were pressed. The new wine was aged for 9 months in the same oak cask prior to bottling without fining or filtration.

Fragrant, complex, multi-layered. Ripe red fruits with savoury undertones. Firm acidity and an austere tannin structure.

Palmento white is a field blend of indigenous grapes from Mt Etna, principally Catarratto (50%) and Grecanico Dorato (40%). The remaining 10% is a mix of Minnella Bianco, Carricante, Insolia and Uva Francese. The grapes were hand harvested in the middle of September, and whole bunched pressed into a small stainless-steel tank. Alcoholic fermentation was spontaneous and without temperature control. The finished wine underwent malolactic fermentation. A miniscule amount of SO2 was added. It remained on light lees for 8 months before it was bottled without fining or filtration. Mid lemon in colour, this wine has appealing citrus aromas, coupled with an underlying minerality. The palate is flavoursome, with a fresh acidity and an attractive sapidity.

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| 2023 | VINO DI ANNA PALMENTO BIANCO | W |
| 2021 | VINO DI ANNA JEUDI 15 BIANCO | W |
| 2020 | VINO DI ANNA BIANCO | W |
| 2021 | VINO DI ANNA VENDREDI 13 ~ Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio, Alicante | R |
| 2022 | VINO DI ANNA JEUDI 15 | R |
| 2022 | VINO DI ANNA QVEVRI RAMPANTE | R |

ETNELLA, DAVIDE BENTIVEGNA, ETNA, Sicilia – Organic

Davide Bentivegna, Etnella's founder, used to work for Siemens in Germany, but one day decided to abandon his office job and realise a dream to make wine. Without any experience – or family land – he had to start from scratch, which for him, meant organic farming and natural winemaking.

The adventure started in 2008, and the first wine, “Notti Stellate” Etna Rosso, was bottled in 2010 from the first company vineyard located in Contrada Galfina in Linguaglossa. From then the estate acquired more land, but maintained its artisan organic profile and respected the ancient tradition of farming on Etna, following the lunar calendar to guide work in the vines. They farm attentively and with very low use of only copper and sulphur, with most of the work performed manually. Grapes are always fermented with their own indigenous yeasts and use of sulphur is strictly limited.

With 15 different vineyards in seven different “Contrade” Etnella make 7 cru wines at altitudes varying between 500 to 1000 metres above sea level on the northern footslopes of Etna. The vineyards are trained in alberello style, or bush trained, an ancient method traditionally used on Etna, vines being planted on land terraced with dry-stone walls, constructed from the local volcanic stones. The proximity of the vines (6,000 – 9,000 plants per hectare) creates fierce competition and forces the roots to plunge downwards into the volcanic soil in search of water and nutrients. The extreme weather conditions and severe diurnal shifts (an average of 16°C between day and night) result in wines of great phenolic profile, complexity and longevity.

Tracotanza Vino Rosso comprises 85% Nerello Mascalese; 10% Nerello Cappuccio and the remainder a field blend of Alicante, Minella and local grapes from the Contrada Crasa, Montedolce on Etna-north. Soils are typically volcanic. The vineyards range between 750-900 m asl, the vines being up to 80 years old. Fermentation in tank is spontaneous (maceration is 8 days) and the wine is aged for a further twelve months in tank. The wine is bottled without filtration or fining with a total sulphur of 22 mg/l. Energetic youthful red, incisive, lively tannic and very fresh profile, with delicate scents of small red berries and spices.

Kaos is 85% Nerello Mascalese and 15% Nerello Cappuccio from the Contrada Marchesa, Passopisciaro Etna-north, alberello vines. Grapes are harvested in three passes – underripe, ripe and over-ripe. They are macerated separately accordingly. After a natural ambient ferment, the wine ages in 5000-litre chestnut botti for twelve months and is also bottled without fining or filtration.

The wine is smoky with earthy minerality and red cherry and plum on the nose, also throwing out hints of fresh raspberries and even floral notes of rose & violet. Great acidity with a tannic structure and a lingering finish.

Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio are both indigenous to Etna. Nerello Mascalese is often referred to as the older or more serious sibling with Cappuccio being sidelined a bit. They are a perfect team – both are late-ripening, high in tannic and acid (a requirement for ageing). Mascalese has thicker skins (thus more tannin) and tends toward the darker end of the fruit spectrum while Cappuccio tends to be a little more intensely perfumed and higher in acidity.

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| 2021 | ATTIA BIANCO | W |
| 2021 | KAOS BIANCO 5.0 | Or |
| 2021 | TRACOTANZA VINO ROSSO ~ Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio, Alicante, Minella | R |
| 2020 | ATTIA ROSSO | R |
| 2019 | VILLA PETROSO DI SANTO SPIRITO ROSSO ~ Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio | R |
| 2017/20 | KAOS ROSSO ~ Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio | R |



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I VIGNERI, SALVO FOTI, Etna, Sicilia – Organic

A native of the city of Catania, Salvo studied oenology and began his career in 1981 as a technical and agrarian advisor to some noted estates in eastern Sicily. He continues that work today for estates such as Gulfi, Benanti and ViniBiondi, all of whose wines are universally recognized as among the best in Sicily. But it is still working with and for someone else. Salvo

wanted his own project to really make a wine that sings.

Salvo is the leader of the natural wine movement in this volcanic corner of Sicily. While extreme in some respects (racking and bottling under a lunar cycle), he is a pure spirit of natural viniculture and if you want to understand Sicilian winemaking in the Etna DOC, start with Salvo Foti.

Foti is the organizer and leader of the I Vigneri project, named after a Vintner's Guild founded in 1435 to align the small vineyards in Sicily around the cultivation of the alberello bush vine.

Five hundred plus years later, the intent of the project is the same.

The vines are concentrated at 700 metres altitude on the north side of the volcano near the town of Calderara. Here, the climate is more like the north of Italy than Sicily, winters are harsh and cold, the summers are hot and dry and there can be extreme fluctuations between night and day temperatures. The soils are broken, or decomposed lava stone of varying depth mixed with sand. Many of the vines are rehabilitated old vines, some over 100 years-old, planted at 10,000 plants per hectare in albarelo, the only system Salvo considers for producing great fruit under the climatic conditions of Etna. All of these factors allow for work only by hand or mule in the vineyards. Because these vines are so old, there is great diversity within the vineyard and different strains of each of the varieties appear. The grapes are the autochthonous Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio with Alicante (Grenache) and a smattering of vines referred to as Francisi, because their variety and provenance are unknown. There is a system of replanting using only massale selection with cuttings from the older vines while maintaining the diversity of plants. Replanting is done in the older vineyards because some of the old vines die, but there are also new, adjacent parcels being planted.

No fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides are used. The grapes are harvested by hand at the end of September until mid-October. Fermentations are done in open vats, without the use of yeast inoculation, enzymes or thermal control (the nights by this time of year are quite cold). Racking and bottling are done under lunar cycle. The wines are bottled with little or no filtration. The wine is fermented in open topped stone containers cut into the volcanic rock.

The wines are like a rustic cheese or dinner at a local inn in some corner of Italy. Like strong country fare, just pulled from the ground, spiced to bring out natural strengths in taste and strong by nature.

I Vigneri (pure Nerello Mascalese) is a pure delight, tonic, juicy and driven, floral and cherry with some fruit sweetness on the nose, coupled with Etna's distinctive spice and some gentle tobacco notes. This is wine of the place...as unencumbered and as representative and as local as it gets. Vinupetra (wine of stone) is a blend of Nerellos and some Francisci from centenarian vines, 70% destemmed grapes, the rest whole, fermented at ambient temperature for a long time. Like the I Vigneri it has great energy, an amalgam of smoky fruit, stone-crunch and bristling acidity.

Aurora comes from Milo, in Caselle (Etna east), at 800 m above sea level. The native and special vines are 90% Carricante and 10% Minnella. The vineyard is extended about 1.5 Ha. Plant density and spacing is 1.1m x 1.1 m, traditional goblet training [single vines supported by chestnut posts for each plant], meaning 8,000 vines per hectare. Harvesting and cultivation are carried out by hand. Very fine, subtle, and closed. Minerally and almost a little flinty. Citric and slightly mouth-watering, a little chalky and waxy. Tight, green peach and lemon flavours. Fantastic ageworthy stuff that will take on more weight and depth with a couple of years in bottle.

Vigna di Milo is an Etna Superiore wine produced from the Carricante grape in cru vineyard at 950m above sea level. Having a pale-yellow colour, this wine develops aromas reminiscent of ripe apricot and orange blossom, sweet almonds and delicate incense. Fresh yet complex with a wild mixture of sea, volcano, altitude, citrus and flowers. That the wine embraces these contradictory flavours and textures, and moves back and forth between them, signifies that it is a living wine. Vinudilice is a rosé wine, produced in the Bosco vineyard which nestles within vast holly oak (Quercus Ilex) woods in the district of Agro Bronte (Etna North), 1300m above sea level. The local grape varieties are Alicante, Grecanico, Minnella and other minor varieties. The 0.35-hectare vineyard is more than a century old.

These wines are sui generis and confirm the Etna terroir as a treasure trove of wonderful old vineyards. If the sweetest rose has a thorn, then the greatest wine seems to have a volcano!

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| 2022 | VIGNA AURORA CARRICANTE | W |
| 2020 | VIGNA DI MILO CARRICANTE | W |
| 2022 | PRIMAVERA BIANCO | W |
| 2022 | SICILIA ROSSO I VIGNERI | R |
| 2021 | VINUPETRA ROSSO | R |
| 2022 | PALMENTO E ANFORA ROSSO | R |
| 2022 | RADICA ROSSO | R |
| 2021 | VINUDILICE ROSATO | Ro |

COS, GIUSTO OCCHIPINTI, VITTORIA, Sicilia – Organic & biodynamic methods

The south-eastern province of Ragusa, around the town of Vittoria, is home to the revived Cerasuolo di Vittoria, a red wine made from 60 percent Nero d'Avola and 40 percent Frappato. The Italian government has just granted it DOCG status (the strictest appellation in Italy), which makes Cerasuolo di Vittoria the first Sicilian wine to enjoy this prestigious designation. (Bottlings from the current 2005 harvest will reflect the new status.) Yet little more than 20 years ago, the wine was in steep decline, one of the many southern victims of Italy's controversial law prohibiting the addition of sugar to wine to increase alcohol content, still enforced today. "Cerasuolo was hardly produced, because buyers did not want the wine in and of itself, but only the must from over-mature nero d'Avola to add strength to their wines, the price of which was based on sugar content," explains leading producer Giusto Occhipinti, who started the COS winery with two classmates back in the early 1980s. On a shoestring budget, the three friends vinified the grapes from their parents' vineyards. They even bought Angelo Gaja's used French barrels back in 1983 to age the wine. By the late 1980s, they started buying new barriques and felt the influence of California's Napa Valley. Other winemakers in the area were impressed with the results and also began making Cerasuolo di Vittoria, using the two local varieties instead of selling the grape juice from overripe Nero d'Avola. "Then we took a huge step back," Occhipinti recalls. "We tried some of our earliest bottlings, those matured in used barriques, and we were shocked at the difference. With its mineral notes and earthy sensations, the wine was so much more interesting than the later vintages matured in new oak with sensations of vanilla and toast. Just as everyone else in the mid-1990s invested in new French barriques, we began recycling ours. Since then, the journey has taken them away from oak to cement and finally into amphora in order to obtain the most aromatic expression of the wines. He also notes that COS does not use selected yeasts and has never used chemicals in the vineyards. "Our goal isn't to make wines that impress wine critics, but to make wine that expresses our great terroir. Here, Nero d'Avola is more elegant than in other regions, and has these great mineral notes from the soil. This is what gives the Cerasuolo di Vittoria its rich fruit, while the Frappato gives the wine its floral components and freshness," Occhipinti says.

The Rami is a blend of Inzolia 50% and Grecanico 50%. Fermented in vat it retains a certain leafy pungency on the nose, but is restrained, with notes of almond and straw, and some of that citrus quality. On the palate it is brisk and decisive, with a concentrated fruit quality that has a real tell-tale Italian bitter almond, or even Campari-like edge, to cool pear and lemon fruit. Where are the clams? Send in the clams. Pithos, (100% Grecanico) is a cuvée where the grapes are macerated with the skins. ra and manages to be both supple and rounded in the mouth but at the same time grippy, spicy and herbal. COS Zibibbo in Pithos. The Pithos in question are amphorae that are buried underground in the cellar and the grape here is Zibibbo, hailing from the Marsala zone of western Sicily. Fermented in traditional method on the grape-skins, with a six-month maceration and then further ageing on the lees in the same terracotta pots, a beautiful wine that is amber-gold in colour with an enchanting perfume of clover honey, jasmine, and apricot blossom, is vibrant and fresh on the palate with a gentle phenolic grip of apple-and-peach-skin, dried spice and honeydew notes mingling. Of the reds the Cerasuolo shows a brilliant ruby red colour and nuances of ruby red. The nose denotes intense, clean, pleasing, and refined aromas which start with hints of black cherry, blackberry and plum followed by aromas of raspberry, blueberry, carob, violet, tobaccoM and vanilla. The mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly tannic attack and pleasing crispness, however balanced by alcohol, good body, and intense flavours. The finish is persistent with flavours of black cherry, plum and blackberry. The Nero di Lupo is unfiltered 100% Nero d'Avola. Fermented in cement and aged for a further 24 months in tank and bottle this has remarkable finesse with rich earthy-leathery fruit flavours balanced by flinty notes. The Pithos Rosso is fermented in Giare which are terracotta amphorae (250l and 400l). The identity of the Frappato is marked on the nose with exuberant expression of violets and raspberry blossom. The mouth is floral, warm and supple, the berry fruit flavours complemented by soft tannins. The pure Frappato has proved extremely popular. The colour is bright red, the nose ebullient with posies of violets, freesia and cherryblossom. The palate is sweet and round, suggestive of raspberries and succulent cherries – the tannins barely evident. In a fanciful way the wine seems to encapsulate the history of Sicily in a way, bringing together the spices and fruits introduced during Arab and Norman invasions and combining it with the local climate... Like all wines of terroir, it transports the spirit to a sense of place.

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| 2022 | RAMI BIANCO ~ Inzolia, Grecanico | W |
| 2022 | PITHOS BIANCO ~ Grecanico | W |
| 2022 | ZIBIBBO IN PITHOS | W |
| 2023 | FRAPPATO | R |
| 2022 | NERO DI LUPO ~ Nero d'Avola | R |
| 2021 | CERASUOLO DI VITTORIA ~ Nero d'Avola, Frappato | R |
| 2019 | CERASUOLO DI VITTORIA – magnum | R |
| 2017 | CERASUOLO DI VITTORIA FONTANE | R |
| 2022 | PITHOS ROSSO ~ Nero d'Avola, Frappato | R |
| NATURALE VERMOUTH | | |
| 2022 | NATURALE VERMOUTH ROSSO | Verm |
| 2022 | NATURALE VERMOUTH ORANGE | Verm |
| 2021 | NATURALE BITTER VINO ROSSO | Verm |

The SP68 is the name of the main road that passes near to Arianna's hometown of Vittoria.....it lies in the far south of Sicily just to the west of Ragusa. It is here that she has been making wine for the past ten years under the tutelage of her uncle, Giusto Occhipinti who owns and runs the famous COS estate.

All the vineyards are worked using biodynamic principles and the work in the cellar is measured...not pushing the wine in any way...letting it find its own space...natural yeasts, no temperature control, no fining, or filtration and minimal SO2 at bottling.

SP 68 Rosso is slightly turbid purple/red in the glass showing aromas of wild cherries, plum and mulberry with just a touch of raspberry lift. There are hints of flowers, leather, smoke, spice and herbs with wafts of liquorice, earth and mandarin rind. In the mouth the initial attack of fruit is awash with wild cherry sheathed in tobacco leaf with supporting fruit flavours of dark plum and blackberry. A very pretty wine on the palate with violet-like floral flicks across the leather and spice backdrop with hints of roasted meats, citrus rind and scattered herbs. It's delicious and lively with a nice, lingering finish set upon a plinth of ripe, fine grained gravelly tannins. Super drinking...it doesn't mind a bit of chilling down also which is a godsend at this time of the year...a bit of time in the fridge is ideal...it tightens up a little and is a joy to drink.

Long known as a blending grape, Frappato, in the hand of Arianna Occhipinti, is an extraordinary wine. Light in colour yet remarkable in complexity with notes of cherry, raspberry and white pepper, this wine shows cool climate characteristics in Sicily. 70% of the Frappato is macerated for two months on its skins, while the other 30% stays on its skins for eight months.

The fluidity, the everchanging character of this wine is truly remarkable. Every time you think you have it pinned down, it throws something else at you. Here you are smelling cherries, and in come the figs, the raisins, before a whiff of fresh-cooked strawberries runs by. Pepper? Or is that smoke? Or maybe dried leaves. Or... no, maybe more blood orange. And then there's that floral character. A little volatile acidity is there, but it gets completely swallowed up by the swirl of aromas that keeps dancing around in the glass. The blend for the SP 68 Bianco is two obscure Sicilian varieties: Zibibbo (a regional name for Muscat of Alexandria) and Albanella. Zibibbo doo-dah. The nose offers notes of white flowers, pink grapefruit, lychee, fresh oregano, and spice. It's a deeply aromatic wine that is surprisingly light on the palate. There's some maceration on the skins, so you'll get a bit of tannin on the finish along with an intriguing olive-y note.

Siccagno is Arianna's top Nero d'Avola: is from organically farmed 35yr vines from sandy chalk soil at 270m. The wine undergoes a 30-day maceration with 22 months in 25hl Slavonian oak barrels. The nose reminds one of leather, liquorice and cloves, the palate is more savoury than fruity, sanguine, and meaty. Arianna describes the wine: "Siccagno is my Nero d'Avola, born from those concentrated grapes which we precisely call Siccagno. Nero relates mostly Sicily – that it is wild, but it is also fresh and elegant, and it is red fruit flavoured. That it has something noble and aristocratic, but it is also melancholic as a poet or a philosopher. That it is passionate, full of warmth and contrasts. The Nero which is the grape of our fathers and unites Sicily from corner to corner and it better gathers the spirit for centuries. A wine which I deeply love and since the first year it has always been with me."

Arianna Occhipinti works in the vineyards, finding an endless source of inspiration through observation. In particular, during the last few years, she has not only been focused on the splendid varieties of Frappato di Vittoria and Nero d'Avola, but also on the soil and on the potential of the various districts or contrade of Vittoria and their particular influence on the final wines.

The vineyards alternate on this game of sand and limestone presenting themselves in the expression of the wines with fresh fruit and silkiness from one side, but also with great acidity and energy on the other. Pettineo, an historic contrada, a term used to refer a small district of the countryside, is located beyond Serra San Bartolo ridge; historically it has always produced very elegant wines thanks to a deep layer of marine sand (50-60 cm), with little presence of limestone rocks on the surface. The Chiusa di Pettineo vines are nearly 60 years old. Originally planted in a head trained or albarelo system, the previous owner then transformed the vines into a trellised system, now with the vines climbing between the trellises into monumental heights. The wines of the Pettineo are usually fruit-driven with silkier tannins yet possessing lively acidity. Bombolieri is situated on a point with high limestone content in the soil, facing the Serra San Bartolo. Here the soils can vary from colours of deep chestnut to white, but the surface layer of sand is decisively lower: only 25 cm. Just below this thin layer one will find solid limestone. In a part of this contrada, you will find more clay-limestone soil, visibly different with more of a presence of white on its surface. It's here, in the Vigna Strada, that this wine is born, floral and straightforward, with highly persistent acidity.

Arianna's wines induce in one a state of tuman (an Indonesian term describing where you find something enjoyable and want to have it again). Fill your booties with these beauties as long as they are relatively small booties.

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| 2023 | SP 68 BIANCO ~ Zibibbo, Albanella | W |
| 2022 | CONTRADA SM | W |
| 2023 | SP 68 ROSSO ~ Nero d'Avola, Frappato | R |
| 2022 | IL FRAPPATO | R |
| 2022 | IL FRAPPATO ~ magnum | R |
| 2021 | SICCAGNO ROSSO ~ Nero d'Avola | R |
| 2021 | CONTRADA BOMBOLIERI | R |
| 2021 | CONTRADA PETTINEO | R |
| 2021 | CONTRADA FOSSA DI LUPO | R |

GREECE

On the breathtaking island of Santorini, the predominant grape is Assyrtiko which produces superb dry and dessert appellation wines. The dry wines are so mineral that when you crush the grapes apparently you get pumice not pomace. After the devastating volcanic explosion, circa 1650 BC, the island was covered with volcanic ash, lava and pumice stone. This catastrophe created the foundation for perfect soil conditions which now help produce the very distinctive wines of Santorini.

Traditional Santorinian dishes might include the fava dip, a salad with cherry tomatoes with the local chloro cheese, the Santorini cucumber, 'Katsouni' and capers, stuffed onions, tomato keftedes (tomato rissoles), and the round fat baby courgettes grown locally. Favourite main courses are dishes of grilled meat, or seafood such as octopus, squid, red snapper and calamari. The fava of Santorini is extremely tasty and is used by the locals in the same way that Italians use pasta. This is basic food which is served in various different ways, depending on the time of year. Summer fava is made with a red sauce with capers and is known as 'married'. Winter fava is sautéed with fried 'kabourma' (smoked pork).

SCLAVOS WINES, LIXOURI, CEPHALONIA, Greece – Organic & Biodynamic (Demeter)

Cephalonia has been known for its wine culture since ancient times. This may be explained by the exceptional island microclimate generated by a combination of the Black Mountain [Ainos] 1628 metres and the nature of the mainly limestone soils giving definition to the local grapes such as Robola, Mavrodafni, Moschato, Vostilidi and Moschatela. The vineyards are mainly on own root systems, and dry farming ensures very small yields of concentrated grapes with high sugars and strong mineral character.

The Sclavos family was a naval family, some of whom emigrated to Odessa in Russia, and traded in the distribution of wheat with their privately-owned commercial boats. In 1860 their grand grandfather [Evrivadias] opened a big winery in the city. After the Russian revolution in 1917 the family returned to Cephalonia, purchased a property of 5 acres in the region of Palli near the hill of Laskarato and planted vines. Two generations later the old vineyards saw the cultivation of the Mavrodafni of Kefallinia and Vostilidi. Biodynamic methods have been employed for 20 years and the vineyard is accredited by the DIO organisation. Methods involve following using an approved calendar for farming practices, the utilisation of biological remedies and preparations, the restoration of balance in the soils to allow root systems to grow and following lunar and cosmic influences.

Vinification always takes place with indigenous yeasts, with nothing added to the wines all of which complete their malolactic fermentation. Maturation takes place for one year in Allier oak barrels. The wines are bottled without filtration or fining and normally no sulphur is added except in the wetter vintages (and even then, only in very small quantities)

Orgion is produced from grapes of the local variety Mavrodaphne of Kefalonia which is cultivated in a traditional way in this zone. The winemaking process includes a long slow period of extraction followed by alcoholic as well as malolactic fermentation, aging for at least one year in French oak barrels made from Allier wood and bottling without undergoing any further processing. The resulting wine is exceptionally rich and deep in colour, with a powerful, complex character, ripe wild-berry flavours and a long finish. The wine's production is limited, and it continues a 300-year-old family tradition.

Idis tou Iliou (Sweetness of the Sun) is produced from the grapes of the long-established, local variety Muscat of Kefalonia which is cultivated in the region of Katogi on the Palliki peninsula. Ripe healthy grapes are spread out under the sun to dehydrate. Due to the high sugar content of the pressed juice, alcoholic fermentation is not completed, resulting in residual sugars. The wine is then aged in French oak barrels and has characteristic aromas of dried fruit and raisins, balanced acidity and a delicately sweet flavour. This dessert wine is produced in limited quantities.

Efranor comes from the grapes of the long-established, local varieties Moscatela and Vostilidi of Kefallinia which is cultivated in the region of Katogi on the Palliki peninsula. This is a dry version. The wine has the intense Moschatela aromas, balanced acidity and a full, long finish. Finely aromatic with citrus fruit and typical roses on the nose. Nice interplay between flowers and savoury characteristics with a touch of phenolics. Interesting blend of Muscat and local Vostilidi. It pairs well with shellfish, fish and fruit.

Vino di Sasso is produced using organic grapes of the local Robola of Kefalonia variety grown within the Robola appellation zone. This unique variety gives top quality white wines with good acidity and delicate aromas of freshly cut fruit. The appellation zone has a special limestone terroir, and its microclimate is influenced by the imposing heights of Mount Ainos. Together, these features make for unique vineyards that give distinctive wines of exceptional quality. To signify the special character of this wine Sclavos called it Vino di Sasso (wine from the stone), first given to it by Lord Napier, a former British High Commissioner.

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|------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 2023 | EFRANOR WHITE ~ Moscatella, Vostilidi | W |
| 2023 | VINO DI SASSO ROBOLA UNFILTERED WHITE | W |
| 2022 | ORGION ROUGE ~ Mavrodaphne | R |

Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles!
 --As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,
 Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
 Lifting the cool-hair'd creepers stealthily,
 The fringes of a southward-facing brow
 Among the Ægean Isles;
 And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
 Freight with amber grapes, and Chian wine,
 Green, bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in brine--
 And knew the intruders on his ancient home

From The Scholar Gypsy – Matthew Arnold

DIMITRIS GEORGAS, MESOGAIA, ATTICA, Greece – Organic certified DIO, Biodynamic practices

Dimitris Georgas is a 4th generation vine grower and winemaker. He took over the family vineyards almost 20 years ago. Since then the vineyards have been certified organic. The 6 ha vineyards are spread throughout the region of Mesogaia (Ancient Greek name Meso =in the middle + Gaia= the land of Attica peninsula (Athens area). Mesogaia is one of the oldest wine regions of Greece, specialising in the indigenous Savatiano white vines, where PGI Attika wines are produced. The dominant features of this dry climate are the gently sloping hills, low rainfall, and temperate climate (located between two seas). More locally, there are big olive trees between the vineyards, as well as fig and almond. Descriptions of viticulture and wines date back to 300 BC. The family vineyard is scattered over twelve small, but discrete parcels on dry clay marls soils. The oldest vines are the dry-farmed Savatiano (50 years +). Biodynamic preparations have been applied in some of the vineyards since 2000.

Retsina is the catch-all term for resinated wines. The tradition originates in the Attica wine region, where the fresh pine resin of the native old pine trees in Attica (Pinus Halapensis) was introduced into the must of the white Savatiano before fermentation. Retsina and non-resinous Savatiano dry wines had a strong century long history, being the key player in the local white wines of Athens between 1850-1980. In this case the grapes are fermented in stainless vats with native yeasts. Before that there is a five-day cold maceration on the skins in tank. The fresh resin, collected from local Aleppo pines in late summer, is added to the fresh must before fermentation and stays there until the first racking (2-3 months).

Premium quality Retsina carries the characteristic balsamic aroma of pine which, however, does not inhibit grape aromas. The imperceptible sense of bitterness leaves a refreshing aftertaste and makes Retsina the ideal companion of the flavourful dishes of traditional Greek cuisine.

There is no barrel ageing. Retsina is best fresh; it takes about a couple of months after bottling to begin to develop the secondary lemony aromas and to soften the tannins. The malolactic occurs in the bottle. No sulphur is added to this wine.

Hazy amber hue, care of the skin contact, aromas of dried lemon, warm apricot skin, roasted spice, dry, warm, spicy sensation in the mouth, hint of balsam, dry honey and a quinine finish.

The wine goes with Greek mezze – small pieces of different foods such as deep-fried fish or meat, feta cheese and Greek salad. The complexity, the pine resin, and the good level of acidity of this wine due to its vinification with traditional wine-making techniques make it a good accompaniment to the richer dishes of Greek cuisine, as especially barbecued and roasted meats.

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|------|---|----|
| 2022 | RETSINA OF MESOGAIA ~ Savatiano | W |
| 2022 | SEIRA #3 RED ~ Merlot, Syrah, Savatiano | R |
| NV | NATURALLY SWEET WINE– 50 cl ~ Savatiano | Sw |

KAMARA WINERY, KIOTSOUKIS FAMILY, THESSALONIKI, Greece – Organic certified BIO Hellas & Biodynamic

What happens when an entire family is passionate for nature? They abandon city life and move to the countryside. This is the story of Kioutsoukis family (Dimitrios, Eleftheria and their children). Dimitrios Kioutsoukis with his family's assistance and inspiration planted 11 hectares of vines (mainly Greek grape varieties: Assyrtiko, Malagousia, Roditis, Xinomavro) in northern Greece near Thessaloniki, an area well known from ancient times for its wines. Dimitrios (chemical engineer- UC Davis winemaking) with his daughter Ria and his sons Athanasius and Tolis carrying on the family tradition, and passionate about permaculture principles, use more than organic methods in viticulture and winemaking. Their main goal is to give birth to versatile wines that express both their philosophy and the terroir. Seeking the real taste of life, they therefore created Kamara, low intervention wines (natural wines). All Kamara pure wines are naturally fermented with indigenous yeasts, have no oenological substances added and are bottled without filtration and no added sulphites.

The climate of the region is mild winters - the minimum temperature during winter is -5° C. February is the coldest month of the year- and dry summers with very high temperatures- the maximum temperature of the summer being 45° C during July which is the hottest month of the year. There is enough rain during the autumn, the winter, and the spring. The average rain in the region is 500mm per year. During the whole year, even during the summer evenings, there is always fresh air passing through this region. Last, the relative humidity of the region during the year is from 35%-in summer- to 90%- in winter when it rains.

Regarding vineyard work the family try to respect nature as much as possible. They only do winter pruning; they do not cut the wild herbs or grass because they believe that great biodiversity in each parcel is necessary for healthy plants which in turn will yield the best quality grapes. They use copper and sulphur just once per year and instead use biodynamic preparations to protect the vineyard from diseases and use homemade compost for fertilising the vineyard.

Shadow Play White is made from 100% manually harvested and destemmed Assyrtiko grapes with two days of skin maceration prior to fermentation in stainless vats with indigenous yeasts. The wine is matured in 10-year-old barrels of 225 and 500L litres, where it does a natural malolactic and is bottled without filtration, fining or any sulphur added. Bright golden colour with a rich, intense nose which evolves in the glass. The primary notes of pear and quince give way to the aromas of sage, achillea, and laurel afterwards. Harmonious in the mouth with a long aftertaste.

Stalisma Dry White is Malagousia 80% and Blanc de Noir Xinomavro 20%. The orientation of the vineyard is eastern. The altitude is 140m above sea level. The soil type for the Malagousia is clay loam and the parcel of Xinomavro is clay sand schist.

Direct pressing for the Blanc de Noir of Xinomavro and maceration, 2 days skin contact prior to fermentation, for the Malagousia. Native yeast fermentation, then ageing in 10 years old 225-litre oak barrels. The wine finishes its malolactic fermentation one week after the end of fermentation. No filtration, no fining, no use of sulphur in vinification. Citrus fruits and bergamot scents, with a nice jasmine nuance and herbal characteristics (yarrow, wild herbs). Notes of almonds, ripe fruits and mandarin. In the finish there is a long-lasting steely note (as a result of Xinomavro), with a diffuse minerality and an amazing sensation of saltiness. Nimbus Ritinitis is 100% Assyrtiko. The skins of Assyrtiko are macerated in stainless steel tanks with the must for 8-10 days at low temperature. After removal of the pomace, the must produced by the free-run juice ferments at 18°- 21° C for 20-30 days. During this fermentation, high quality pine resin from the mountains of Evia is added, following an ancient recipe. Spontaneous alcoholic fermentation takes place with indigenous yeasts, no oenological substances added, followed by spontaneous malolactic fermentation. The wine is racked from the very dense sediments and remains sur-lie on fine lees for three months. No protein stabilization, only tartaric stabilization. Intense nose with emerging aromas of thyme, lavender, oregano, and ginger.

Herbal and vegetal notes on the palate, with an intense expression of bergamot and kumquat along with resin, thyme and eucalyptus. Hints of Chios mastic at finish prove the quality of the pine resin used. Balanced acidity with fruit and herbs apparent in the long-lasting aftertaste.

Pet Nat Rose is Malagousia 40%-Assyrtiko 40%-Xinomavro 20% After stopping primary fermentation, the wine was brought down to a very cool temperature and settled off its primary lees. The next year fermented must of Xinomavro was added to the wine in bottle which provided the sparkle and lees-y feel when it transforms into alcohol and CO2. Not disgorging makes it hazy, creating broader palate weight, pleasing textures, and balance throughout. This special bottling is done entirely by hand. The wine is, unsurprisingly, lively, and brisk with fresh citrus, red fruit, peach, plums, ginger and the snap of cool watermelon to the nose. Flavours of strawberry and yeast are predominant. The crown cap holds in the fizz.

Shadow Play Red is destemmed Xinomavro fermented in stainless vat days with twenty days maceration, then aged in 225 litre used barrels for 14 months. Rich dark red colour, with complex aromas of small red fruits, vanilla, plums, tomato and black olive. Full-bodied with well-integrated tannins and long aftertaste. Game dishes, rib eye, pork on the spit, cuttlefish in wine sauce, beef with barbecue sauce are only some of the dishes which match perfectly with this wine.

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|------|--------------------------|-------|
| 2022 | STALISMA DRY WHITE | W |
| 2023 | SHADOW PLAY WHITE | W |
| 2022 | NIMBUS RITINITIS RETSINA | W |
| 2020 | KERAMOS AMPHORA ORANGE | Or |
| 2022 | PET NAT ROSE | Sp/Ro |
| 2021 | SHADOW PLAY RED | R |
| 2020 | KERAMOS AMPHORA RED | R |

*And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep...
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apples, quince and plum and gourd...
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.
John Keats – The Eve of Saint-Agnes*

MOROCCO

Continued...

In Morocco, it's possible to see the Atlantic and the Mediterranean at the same time.

Tahar Ben Jelloun

VOLUBILIA, DOMAINE DE LA ZOUINA, Meknès

In 2001 Gérard Gribelin and Philippe Gervoson fell in love with Domaine de la Zouina. Struck by the richness of the terroir, the particularity of the soil and the climate, they were certain that they could produce unique results and so they decided to translate their passion and wine-making savoir-faire from Pessac-Leognan to Morocco. Monsieur Gribelin has been running Château de Fieuzal for about thirty years. His son Christophe now runs Zouina. Monsieur Gervoson has been director of Château Larrivet Haut-Brion since 1987
To maximise the efficiency of the vines the work in the vineyard is meticulous. 4000 vines per hectare eliminates stress hydrique and canopy management achieves the best aeration for the vines and reduces the need for phytosanitary products. Quality is further enhanced by voluntary small yields, a green harvest at the beginning of summer and various tris which discard the grapes which do not merit being in the final blend.
Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah are the main varieties for the reds, with Tempranillo and Mourvèdre also planted.

Our two intrepid Bordeaux brethren are exacting in the vinification of the wines and to that end have equipped the winery with the latest in equipment and technology. They enlarged and modernised the winery buildings, equipped the chais with a cold room to preserve the aromatic integrity of the harvest and also installed triage tables, introduced a gravity feeder to prevent crushing and subsequent oxidation of the grapes, not to mention vertical presses and small concrete tanks.

The Gris has the translucent delicacy of a Provençale pink wine. Made from Marselan and Caladoc, it is elegant with good minerality and expression of red fruits. The red wines undergo an élevage of fifteen months. The Volubilia Rouge is distinguished by notes of leather, tobacco and mocha and is smooth and refined on the palate with well-integrated tannins.

The Chardonnay has a warm tropical nose with flavours of custard and dessert apple. Big and attention-grabbing but complex, nonetheless. Sweet apple, quince, and green almonds with a musky finish.

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|------|-----------------------------|----|
| 2023 | VOLUBILIA GRIS | Ro |
| 2023 | EPICURIA CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2021 | VOLUBILIA ROUGE | R |
| 2021 | EPICURIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON | R |

Beshrew me, the tills are still alive with the sound of Musar.
I'll have a Beka'a's dozen toot sweet.

Hochar's cult wine made from Cabernet and Cinsault needs little introduction. Warning to novices: this wine carries considerable sediment and has a volatile nose. That is the nature of the beast. The nose is aromatic, fragrant, warm and mellow and it prepares the palate for fruits of cherries, strawberries and redcurrants. The palate is indeed full of these softer summer red berry fruits and combined with soft tannins, the wine is very well balanced. The Hochar has some Carignan and is characterised by spices and brambly Christmas cake fruits. The Château Musar rosé is deceptive – the colour is bright and a very light pink – almost onion skin in colour, giving the illusion of a delicate, elegant wine. The nose is of peaches, vanilla, strawberries, and fruity apples. It is the palate, however, which shows its true power, round, rich and full. This wine has a touch of silk with almonds. And, finally, the white, bright golden straw colour with a nose of almonds, cashew nuts, hot buttery toast and honey. Rich warm toasty honey flavours on the palate together with fragrant herbs and spiced apples result in a very complex, rich and mellow wine. Grape varieties? Obaideh and Merwah, native to Lebanon, from vineyards high in the mountains (1,200 metres).

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|------|------------------------------------|---|
| 2017 | CHATEAU MUSAR WHITE, BEKA'A VALLEY | W |
| 2019 | HOCHAR PERE & FILS, GASTON HOCHAR | R |
| 2017 | CHATEAU MUSAR RED, BEKA'A VALLEY | R |
| 2000 | CHATEAU MUSAR RED, BEKA'A VALLEY | R |

MERSEL WINES, EDDIE & MICHELLE SHAMI, Lebanon ~ Organic farming

Lebanon is among the oldest regions in wine production in the world. Today, Eddie & Michelle Shami continue this legacy with the same passion that the Phoenicians had centuries ago, exporting quality wines from the "land of the cedars". At Mersel, they wanted to embed their culture into the wines. As Eddie remarks: "Lebanese people are warm and hospitable, they open their hearts and homes and welcome those around them. We wanted to create wines that fit with the Lebanese character, wines that are for everyone to enjoy, and wines that help our local farmers." The name 'Mersel Wine' derives from the region Maksar Mersel, the highest viticultural region in Lebanon, located between the Cedars and Ainata El Arz at an altitude ranging between 2,000m and 2,400m above sea level. They also have vineyards in Ainata in the Bekaa Valley, Dimane and Bcharre in Wadi Qannoubine, and Bousit in Northern Lebanon.

A quick summary of the vineyard regions:

Mersel Location: Northern Beka'a, Ainata-Cedars region

Altitude: 2,200 metres above sea level

Soil: Limestone, clay

Grape Varieties: Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling... *One of the most unique viticulture regions in the world. This terrain was inhabited by cedar and juniper forests and it was a haven for the Nubian Ibex. Geographically, to the east, is the Temple of Baalbek, and to the west, the Cedars of Lebanon, which has the oldest cedar trees in the world.*

The climate is a combination of alpine and continental, with snow-blanketed rigid terrain in winter. Mersel has gravel limestone and clay vineyards on alluvial plains, encircled with juniper trees and the odd cannabis plantations! There is an abundance of sun in summer; cool nights with over 20°C of diurnal temperature variation. It is considered to be the Lebanese Mendoza. But we will forgive it for that.

Wadi Qannoubine

Location: Bsharri district, North Lebanon

Altitude: 1300-1600 metres above sea level

Soil: Sandy, volcanic, limestone

Grape variety: Merwah *Wadi Qannoubine is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Wadi is Arabic for "valley," surrounded by historic villages, it's minutes from ski resorts and the famous Cedars of God. The vineyards have not been tended for years due to war, emigration and land mines. Wadi Qannoubine is a typical Mediterranean alpine region with cool summers and cold winters. It has a maritime climate in the coastal areas with cool night-time breezes that keep natural acids high.*

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|------|-----------------------------|-------|
| 2022 | LEBNAT GOLD | Sp/W |
| 2022 | LEBNAT ROSE | Sp/Ro |
| 2021 | ELEVATE DAW EL AMAR | Or |
| 2002 | PHOENIX SKIN CONTACT MERWAH | Or |
| 2022 | PHOENIX FIELD BLEND | Ro |
| 2023 | RED VELVET | R |
| 2022 | ELEVATE MARINI RED | R |

“Have some wine”, the March Hare said in an encouraging tone. Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. “I don’t see any wine,” she remarked. “There isn’t any”, said the March Hare.

SORRY – NO ENGLISH WINE THIS YEAR!

AND, LO, IT FINALLY CAME TO PASS...

The remains of a Roman vineyard have been found near the site of the old BBC television studios in West London. Contrary to initial supposition they are not bush vines, but media-trained. (Wine News Headlines)

DAVENPORT VINEYARD, LIMNEY FARM, ROTHERFIELD, WILL DAVENPORT, East Sussex – *Organic (certified Soil Association)*

At Davenport Vineyards, Will Davenport has been making wines for 27 years, building from a small start up to a collection of vineyard sites that total 20 acres. The aim is to make wine of the highest quality possible and to make wine that is a true expression of their grape varieties, soil and climate of the vineyards. He believes that the best way to achieve this is by interfering as little as possible and letting nature take its course (with a modicum of guidance of course). The use of organic methods helps to bring the desired results and has the benefit of also minimising their impact on the environment. Copper and sulphur are used to control mildew, along with plant extracts made from seaweed, comfrey and nettles. Made from a blend of six grape varieties (including Bacchus, Ortega, Siegerrebe, Faber and Huxelrebe) grown in the original vineyard plot at Horsmonden, Kent. This wine has been made every year since 1993 and has won many accolades since then. The wine has been likened to a Sauvignon Blanc style and often mistaken for a NZ wine. It is crisp, aromatic and fruit driven with greengage and grapefruit flavours and pronounced hedgerow accents. The sparkling wine comes from Pinot Noir & Auxerrois grapes grown on the slopes of the home Rotherfield vineyard. A wine of rich minerality and great poise.

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|------|---|-------|
| 2022 | LIMNEY VINEYARD “HORSMONDEN” WHITE | W |
| 2019 | DAVENPORT LIMNEY ORGANIC SPARKLING | Sp |
| 2019 | DAVENPORT SPARKLING AUXERROIS | Sp |
| 2017 | DAVENPORT LIMNEY ESTATE BLANC DE BLANCS | Sp |
| 2019 | DAVENPORT SPARKLING ROSE | Sp/Ro |
| 2023 | DAVENPORT PET NAT | Pet |
| 2022 | LIMNEY ESTATE DIAMOND FIELDS PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2022 | LIMNEY ESTATE REDMOORS PINOT NOIR | R |

WOODFINE WINE, RICHARD WOODFINE, Seer Green – *Organic methods*

Woodfine give more than a nod to the heritage of England, its ancient orchards and the iconic, but much forgotten, cider apple and to make sparkling wine and cider in conjunction. Richard experiments, blends and co-ferment apples and grape skins. All in the effort to produce the best, most interesting, and most surprising sparkling wines and cider. Currently, Woodfine make sparkling rosé four ways; all are different and natural but connected by Pinot Noir. There is sparkling rosé, being a classic blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir; a single varietal Pinot Noir, a multi-vintage blend, and a cider fermented on Pinot Noir grape skins. With all of the wines, the juice was left to spontaneously ferment using wild/native yeasts. There are zero additions of sulphites, sugar, fining agents and chemicals. All are then bottled by hand with zero disgorgement or dosage. The home vineyards, located just outside the village of Seer Green in the Chilterns on chalk-based soils are planted to a mixture of vinifera varieties and hybrids including four PIWIs. These latter grapes have never been sprayed. The farm, indeed the project as a whole, is the embodiment of the principles of regenerative farming which involves restoring biodiversity and focusing on soil health.

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|------|---|-------|
| 2022 | INTERCONNECTIONS PART ONE ~ Cider on Pinot skins | Sp/Ro |
| 2022 | INTERCONNECTIONS PART TWO ~ Chardonnay, Pinot sparkling | Sp/Ro |
| MV | INTERCONNECTIONS MV – multi-vintage sparkling | Sp/Ro |

WALGATE WINES, BEN WALGATE, Rye, East Sussex

Walgate Wines (a.k.a Ben Walgate) are committed to producing some of the finest wines in England. Ben is making good on this ambitious pledge. A slow and respectful winemaking process which marries both ancient and modern practices. Wines of place and integrity. From thoughtful and respectful farming, grapes are sourced from a selection of the very best growers in the southeast of England. A focused, quality orientated selection of red, white, and rosé wines in addition to a small and considered amount of traditional method sparkling. With a gentle hand on the tiller, slowly and patiently the wines evolve and settle until they reach the optimum condition for bottling and beyond that, will sit in the cellar until they are ready to be released.

Ben moved from Tillingham to his new premises in Rye in April 2023 – a large warehouse doubling (trebling) as winery, cellar and with a bar area to sit with nibbles and drinks as well as outside space with more seating and space for guest food trucks. He brought his stock with him (mainly the 2022 vintage) and proceeded to purchase winemaking and storage equipment. He has just released his first five wines; a further four are already in bottle and will see the light of day later in the year. In the 2023 vintage, Ben says he will focus on making just five different wines. The presentation is different- simple creamy-white label - embossed on certain cuvees - and bottle tops hand-dipped in different hues of wax to give a point of difference. The wines reflect this – focus and purity is the watchword. It is fair to say that they represent an evolution of five years of work and research, the development of particular style. If I had to characterise them, I would describe them as “sappy and snappy”.

The rosé is a saignée of Pinot Meunier soured from regeneratively farmed vineyards at Tillingham. Whole bunches are bled off the press after 22 hours and the resulting wine is aged in German oak fuder. Outstanding rosé with primary notes of orange and cherry-skin leading into a surprisingly savoury palate with stone fruit character. A real rosé that trades on texture and length. For his reds, Ben practices what is sometimes known as the millefeuille technique: layering of whole bunches and whole berries with buckets of free run juice on top and some carbon dioxide to create a gentle semi-carbo environment. This is an infusive technique – no punchdowns or pumpovers. The wine is pressed after three weeks or so and then is returned to concrete or wooden barrels accordingly.

The Pinot Meunier (supplemented by 20% Pinot Noir) is a delight. It's not an aromatic grape in itself, but this example exhibits some lovely wild strawberry fruit with an additional touch of spice (clove) and pepper. Although light in body, the palate has plenty of grip and drive. There are two Pinot Noirs in the range. The one we currently have is the Pinot Noir Reserve. Ben chooses his three favourite barrels (the others will be the straight Pinot), made from a mixture of Pinot Noir grapes grown in Crouch Valley in Essex and Shotley in Sussex. Another red that manages to be light yet sinewy with chewy red cherry-skins and pippy crunch. Al dente red at its best. This one will age. The other two reds will be worth waiting for. The straight Pinot Noir is silkier and softer in style and less oak imprint. Delicious. And the Cuvee 909 deserves a decants blog in itself. This is a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Gamay and Pinot Meunier, a homage to the Clos des Vignes du Maynes 910 and more than a chip off the old block! A weightless wine in the best sense.

Finally, one fizz and one white for now. The former is a Blanc de Noirs (vintage 2019) 50/50 Pinots Noir & Meunier, pressed to two 4th fill oak barrels where they were fermented with wild yeast and aged on lees for ten months. After thirty months on lees, the wine was disgorged, and dosage was added. It is quite golden with nice toasty--nutty oak notes to round out the flavours of golden apples. Nicely integrated with none of the overly autolytic notes or green acids or excessive fizziness that one sometimes encounters on English sparkling wines. Cuvee M is made from the Germanic varieties from Tillingham, in this case 50% Müller-Thurgau, 20% Ortega, 12% Siegerrebe, 10% Schönbürger & 8% Huxelrebe. After a short cold maceration, the grapes are whole bunch pressed and fermented largely in 500-litre Austrian oak barrels. Aromas of wildflowers, elderflower, meadowsweet, and honeysuckle present, with a suggestion of ripe greengages and plump fig. The palate is light and crisp with a dry finish. Good texture.

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|------|--------------------|----|
| 2019 | BLANC DE NOIRS | Sp |
| 2022 | CUVEE M | W |
| 2022 | ROSE | Ro |
| 2022 | PINOT MEUNIER | R |
| 2022 | PINOT NOIR RESERVE | R |

CHARLIE HERRING WINES, TIM PHILLIPS, LYMINGTON, Hampshire – Organic & Biodynamic methods

Tim Phillips is Charlie Herring Wines. Tim has previously worked in South Africa and Italy and makes incredible ciders and a beer with wild hops. Sparkling wines are released only when Tim judges when they are ready. He is not afraid to experiment. Tim has a small walled Victorian kitchen garden planted to Chard, Sauv and Riesling just outside Lymington. The terroir is great – gravels composed of limestone, flints, and sandstone. He farms organically with BD treatments. He has never released a still wine (not since 2013) because he is a perfectionist and also only has enough grapes for one barrique. The two still wines released recently have comprised Sauv with a touch of Chard in 2018 and a pure Sauvignon in 2017 vintage, the former with a little skin contact, the latter with a more extended maceration (three months). They blew me away with their purity and mineral tension. So surprising!

ANCRE HILL VINEYARDS, RICHARD & JOY MORRIS, Monmouthshire – Biodynamic (certified Demeter)

Ancre Hill Estates, owned by Richard and Joy Morris, comprises two vineyard sites on the edge of Monmouth, Southeast Wales with some 30,000 vines planted on approximately 12 hectares (29.5 acres) and a state-of-the-art, modern winery. The business has evolved from the first plantings in 2006 and 2007 at Ancre Hill, which now extends to about 4 hectares of mature vines. Newton Court Farm was purchased in 2014, the same year as the new winery was built at Ancre Hill, where a further 8 hectares of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay has been planted.

All the land was former grazing pasture – never used for agriculture and the soils are healthy and well nourished. Ancre Hill apply a holistic approach to everything in vineyard and winery and practise conscientious biodynamics. The preps are stirred by hand, in rainwater and sprayed strictly under the correct conditions. Only with this level of detail and personal involvement can biodynamic practices allow the vines to find the balance of life forces necessary for healthy growth and quality of production. The use of sulphur is kept to a minimum with the addition of wild plant tisanes made on the estate. Raw milk is used as a treatment as it contains antiseptic properties and enzymes that act as fungal control and give foliar nutrition to the plant. Insecticides, pesticides, and herbicides are not used at all, with weeds ploughed out from under the vines. A programme of cultivation provides the soil with aeration necessary for the development of a healthy micro-organism population, negating the need for petrochemical fertilisers. Co-plantation and the promotion of wild flora and fauna help maintain the balance of the eco-system and soils. The vineyards look in great condition with the vines showing the virtue of a reasoned and progressive farming techniques.

Soils are sandstone and ancient mudstone. The Ancre Hill vineyard has a vein of limestone running through it, whereas the vineyard over at the farm is sandier. Extensive canopy management is practiced, maximising air flow through the canopy and sun and light exposure to suit the season. This is further assisted by the Geneva Double Curtain trellising system designed for cooler climates.

The remarkable winery building, opened by The Duchess of Cornwall in July 2015, is an extension of the philosophy in the vineyard. Natural materials have been used over synthetic ones wherever possible with the walls constructed from straw bales and a living, green roof, both providing temperature and humidity regulation. Wastewater is treated by a series of ecological pools and plantings which also provide many of the plants used in the tisane treatments in the vineyard. The building has an exceptional thermal performance with internal temperatures operating in an approximate 8 degrees centigrade range whatever the external temperature

The style of wine at Ancre Hill Estates continues to evolve, with small batch fermentations occurring almost entirely in oak barrels and concrete eggs. Fermentations are solely carried out by wild yeasts and bacteria with the avoidance of filtration and fining for the finished wines wherever possible.

The wines, as with the grapes, are fully DEMETER certified, adhering to the strictest production criteria. Working in this way not only creates better wines qualitatively, but wines of greater integrity and sustainability.

Three sparkling wines, an orange and pet nat are produced annually. In clement vintages there is also a Pinot Noir, a Chardonnay and a pale Rosé from Pinot Noir. Each wine undergoes whole bunch pressing on long cycles to produce the best quality free run juice. The base wines are spontaneously fermented with natural yeasts and have an élevage on the lees with regular stirring before spending a minimum of 12 months in Austrian oak, concrete eggs from Burgundy or stainless steel. After tirage the wines may experience a further five years ageing on the lees.

The NV Blanc de Noirs is pure Pinot Noir from two vintages (13 and 14 in this case), fermented in barrels, concrete egg and stainless steel with an élevage of over 12 months for the base wine aged for typically 4 years on lees. This type of lengthy élevage, gives the wine its natural structure. The wine is bottled without dosage. Feather light, apple-skin and brazil nut on the nose, ripe red apple and citrus on the palate, with tension and precision to it. Excellent with a wide range of foods, such as seafood, mushrooms and fruit puddings.

The Sparkling Rosé, 100 % Pinot Noir, is normally a single vintage wine and made in a similar fashion to the above. A beautiful balance of delicate red fruit and brioche notes with luxurious, soft perfumed nose, delicate berries & soft bubbles on palate, layered, some mushroom on back palate, subtle balance of strawberries and texture on the finish. A fine mousse with real zing and energy to it.

The 2020 Chardonnay is whole-bunch pressed, fermented in stainless steel and oak barrel. Aged on gross lees for a minimum of 15 months the wine undergoes natural MLF is bottled without filtration and fining, typically bottled just a small addition of SO₂. A balance between delicateness and power with bright minerality, the aromas and flavours are of light lemon, ripe green apple, wet stone, and white flowers displaying hints of honeysuckle & discreet vanilla.

Whole bunch maceration for 50-days characterises the ebulliently fruit 2020 Pinot Noir. Fermentation finished in oak and stainless for 10 months further ageing on the gross lees. Light but intense – fragrant strawberry and cherries merge with liquorice and sweet spice. On first encounter, the wine reminds one of a Gamay from the Auvergne. As it develops it morphs into something more akin to a Crozes-Hermitage with discernible notes of black olives and herbs.

*Ancre Hill has become renowned for its orange wine called (appropriately) **Orange Wine**. Could this be the only skin contact Albarino made in Wales. We certainly think it could be. The grapes receive 100% whole bunch carbonic maceration for around 35 days. Fermentation finishes in oak and stainless steel with ageing on gross lees for a minimum of 10 months, with natural MLF, no filtration or fining. No sulphur added here either. Deep, savoury, with nectarine, tangerine, and pear fruits, hints of hay & chamomile. Try with pea risotto, pork belly with caramelised apple or runny cheese.*

*Finally, there is the **Pet Nat (NV)**. Made from the Triomphe grape (the first variety planted on the estate), it is made by blending the juice of the new vintage with the previous vintage base wine whilst still fermenting. Primary fermentation finishes in bottle producing a lightly fizzy wine of between 2 and 3 bar pressure. Nothing added to this wine at all. Medium-dark red with sour cherry and blackberry jam nose and slightly herbal/medicinal back-note. Truly the Welsh Lambrusco Rosso with a real sweet & sour character to it and with great freshness.*

| | | |
|------|---|-------|
| NV | PET NAT RED ~ Triomphe, Chardonnay | Sp/R |
| NV | PET NAT PINK ~ Pinot Noir, Chardonnay | Sp/Ro |
| 2022 | ORANGE WINE | Or |
| 2023 | CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2020 | PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2018 | PEFRIOG SPARKLING ~ Pinot Noir (Blanc de Noirs) | Sp |
| NV | BLANC DE NOIRS | Sp |
| 2015 | SPARKLING ROSE | Sp/Ro |

LOST IN A FIELD, TIM WILDMAN, East Sussex

Established by Tim Wildman MW in 2021, Lost in a Field is on a mission to rescue the fast disappearing heritage grape varieties planted in the UK in the last century and to craft them into delicious pét-nat using low intervention winemaking methods. This is our Great British old vine story, seen through the technicolour prism of the heritage varieties planted in the 1960s, 70s and 80s by eccentric amateurs. These early pioneers were hobbyists, Burgundian-style grower-maker vigneron, farming small vine-gardens and making wine in sheds and garages, a grass roots community all but swept away by the modern industry. We embrace this amateur have-a-go ethos and legacy of old heritage vineyards. Tim and his team at Lost in a Field embrace this amateur have-a-go ethos and legacy of old heritage vineyards.

| | | |
|------|----------------|-------|
| 2023 | FROLIC PET NAT | Sp/Ro |
|------|----------------|-------|

NATALIA HARRIS WINE, PHIL HARRIS, East Sussex – Organic (Soil Association)

Certified organic family farm and vineyard near Hastings, Drawing on experience gained in working in Alsace, Galicia and primarily at Davenport for 15+ years, Phil planted a 2ha plot of Ortega, Bacchus, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. He looks to produce wines that reflect the quality the vineyard and the soils. The wines are made at Davenport.

| | | |
|------|----------------|---|
| 2023 | BACCHUS ORTEGA | W |
|------|----------------|---|

CAPREOLUS, BARNEY WILCZACK, Cirencester

When we finally discovered the house on the outskirts of Cirencester, we encountered three figures up to their elbows (literally) in blackberries, arms and faces painted in crimson-purple juice. Individual berries were being painstakingly picked over and sorted, preparatory to being gently crushed.

Barney Wilczak, the brains and passion behind Capreolus, had a former career as a photo-journalist focusing on conservation stories, wherein he supplied non-profit media to conservationists in over 118 countries. He decided to return home, took his interest and knowledge of the natural world, particularly botany, and applied it to distilling, working with natural biological processes. His deep and detailed research and obsessive focus have resulted in the distillation of eaux de vie that must rank as some of the most exquisite and profound to be found anywhere.

Barney began by installing a distillery in the cottage where he grew up and converted a lean-to greenhouse with its frame of timber and Cotswold stone, to house a very special custom copper still.

“Free from chill filtering, recycling of feints and artificial colouring.”

Individual varieties of fruits are only distilled in years where the quality reaches the necessary levels. Timing is the key: harvesting the fruit at optimum ripeness is paramount. Barney is on constant alert and told us that he has had to cut short holidays and return home in order to be present in person to receive the crates of special fruits. Most is supplied by farmers and friends, but some is foraged for (elderberries, for example) – or “scrumped,” as we like to say.

Each ingredient is inspected, and sorted by hand, gently washed, and slowly fermented at cool temperatures to best preserve its aromatics. Yeasts, either wild or alternatively expressive cultivars, are used for the conversion of sugars to create the small yield of alcohol that helps carry and preserve the fragrance in the glass.

Once fermented, the fruits are conveyed to the distillery. Further processing may be required; for example, plums are sieved by hand from their stones. This leaves just a hint of their almond flavour without covering the delicate spice hidden within the flesh. The fruits are handed into the custom copper still (a Czech design). Heated by a naked flame they are protected by a bain marie, thus removing the risk of scorching. The choice of copper rather than cheaper stainless-steel serves two purposes.

A superb conductor of heat, it allows a gradual transition of flavours as they evaporate within the still. Secondly it binds undesirable flavour components to its surface, which is part of the alchemy of distillation. A first distillation concentrates the essence of the fruit to create the “low wines”, a spirit with an abv of 25-30%. After several first distillations, the low wines are combined and re-distilled. Here each flavour comes across in strong bands as the individual molecules’ boiling points are reached. Experience and a sensitive nose are key. The first section, known as the “heads” are highly volatile, undesirable, and are rejected. A rapid change to the “hearts”, where the true beauty of the spirit lies, the goal in distillation. Finally, heavy and fatty, the “tails” are removed. Unlike other distilleries, Capreolus do not recycle either heads or tails. Therefore, despite retaining only a fraction of the alcohol that they start with, they create the highest possible standards.

And, finally, to rest. Whether being aged in barrels or remaining as pure clear spirits, a lengthy sojourn in the “warehouse” allows the development of the spirit and the creation of new aroma compounds, resulting in truly exceptional eaux de vie and gin.

We tasted an apple eau de vie aged in chestnut barrel, a plum version aged in mulberry wood, a delightful perry pear eau de vie from a single tree and another one made from comice pear; a powerful quince; the fabulous aforementioned wild-harvest elderberry, and finally the Garden Swift gin, flavoured with thirty-four botanicals and distilled in batches of 200 bottles. The eaux de vies, of course, taste like the essence of the fruits, but they are more than that, exhibiting an almost cashmere texture or vinosity that one associates with the best skin-contact natural wines. The spirits take on the subtlest hints from their ageing vessels; they acquire fine wood tannins rather than sweet oak flavours. The gin, Garden Swift, is the most exuberant of all, with its fusion of 34 botanicals, some home-grown, others foraged, and includes (notably) organic Sicilian blood oranges. The word “cornucopia” is over-used but merited here!.

| | | |
|------|------------------------------|-----|
| | GARDEN SWIFT GIN | GIN |
| 2022 | FOXWHELP | EdV |
| 2017 | APPLE EDV IN CHESTNUT BARREL | EdV |
| 2018 | THOUSAND TREES APPLE | EdV |
| 2017 | DOYENNE DE COMICE PEAR EDV | EdV |
| 2019 | PERRY PEAR | EdV |
| 2018 | SIEGERREBE | EdV |
| 2020 | QUINCE | EdV |
| 2022 | APRICOT | EdV |
| 2019 | BLACKCURRANT | EdV |
| 2020 | RASPBERRY | EdV |
| 2020 | GOOSEBERRY | EdV |

HOXTON HILL BREWERY, London

The Byrensters have had a charmless life when it comes to sourcing the suitable suds. In the History of an Unusual Wine Company in 10.5 Chapters I described our search for a fabulous Basque beer called Ackerbelz, which turned out to be less than enchanting when it made the long journey to London. It became Acker-binendstaffbeer. Next came an ale-and-hearty number from Italy called Pivak in unfeasibly large bottles that was far too serious for its own good, an artisanal number from the Loire with exploding bottles and a flirtation with a micro-brewery in South London which started inauspiciously when a sample bottle opened on a train between Oxford and London redecorated the entire carriage and its inhabitants.

*Nevertheless, thirsty reader, we persisted, and proudly announce our latest (and hopefully final) venture into the world of hopping madness. **Hoxton Hill** is a collaboration/mash-up between the London Beer Lab's Bruno and Karl, and Les Caves de Pyrene with three core lines to start with.*

We begin at the end with Fin Lager. The Hoxton Fin was a style of haircut popular in the Hoxton and Shoreditch areas between 2000 and 2004 comprising a mohawk with short hair to either side (David Beckham was one such person who sported a Hoxton Fin around this time).

Fin is made from 95% Extra Pale malted barley, 5% Carapils (lightly toasted malted barley), Magnum hops for bitterness and German Hallertau Hersbrucker for classic German flavours. It is fermented with W34/70 Weiherstephan lager yeast, a signature yeast strain from the longest continuously operating brewery in the world and iconic Bavarian brewer.

Fin is a crisp and very easy drinking German style lager, lightly sweet with subtle malty and fruity notes.

Duel X Pale Ale is based on the fact that in 1598 the poet and playwright Ben Johnson fought and killed a fellow actor in a duel on Hoxton Fields. He was tried at the Old Bailey for murder but escaped the death sentence as he could read from the Latin Bible which impressed the jury. Sounds like a modern politician. Today Hoxton is better known for partnerships and collaborations rather than deathly duels and this beer pays homage to Hoxton's contemporary identity. Magnum hops for bitterness, Simcoe, Citra and Mosaic hops for flavour and aroma.

These are three of the most popular American hops with notes of mango, blackcurrant, papaya, strawberry, citrus and stone fruits.

Fermented with an American Pale Ale yeast. The Pale is a easy-drinking, full flavour, juicy session pale ale bursting with tropical fruit characters from the aforementioned trio of highly popular American hops.

Table Beer is a combo Maris Otter Pale Malted Barley (60%), Malted Oats (20%), Malted Wheat (20%) with Magnum hops for bitterness, Mosaic and Cryo Ekuanot hops for flavour and aroma. Mosaic and Ekuanot are two of the most popular American hops with tropical, citrus and stone fruit notes. Cryo hops are hops processed at ultra-low temperatures to capture and concentrate all the essential oils and other beneficial hop characters. This is a full-flavoured, full-bodied, ultra-smooth low ABV beer with intense fruity and hoppy characters.

The canal on the front label is Regent's Canal, built in the 1800s it used to carry food, timber and coal through Hoxton. These days it is largely used for leisure and is an ideal location to spend summer nights sipping beers with friends whilst watching the canal boats drift by.

The three beers come in 33 cl bottle format (with cans in the offering) with the lager also in 30 litre kegs. Our advice: Hop to it!

DUEL X PALE ALE – 330ml can

Pale

FIN LAGER– 330ml can

Lager

KANPAI SAKE, Peckham Prefecture

KANPAI is extremely proud to be the UK's first sake brewery, crafting modern British sake using traditional Japanese techniques in London, since 2016. Welcome to the sake revolution! Brewed like a beer, enjoyed like a wine. KANPAI means "cheers" in Japanese.

They focus on hand-crafted traditional brewing methods, aligning as close as possible to the ethos of the "natural wine" world. Fermented from rice, their sake is free from sulphites and preservatives, naturally gluten-free and vegan. All their sake is made lovingly by hand from start to finish on site in south London. They use the very best Japanese ingredients, custom equipment, and love; their goal is to allow the natural characteristics of each ingredient to shine through. KANPAI is experimental at heart and ongoing exploration forms a huge part of their motivation to brew sake - launching one-off limited edition and seasonal styles alongside their core range sake.

SORA "SKY" HONJOZO SAKE

SAKE

KUMO "CLOUDY" NIGORI JUNMAI SAKE

SAKE

KAZE "WIND" JUNMAI GINJO SAKE

SAKE

HANA "FLOWER" PLUM SAKE

SAKE

TSUKI "MOON" JUNMAI GENSHU SAKE

SAKE

LITTLE POMONA CIDERY AND ORCHARD, JAMES & SUSANNA FORBES, Herefordshire

We are delighted to announce that we will be distributing the naturally-made English ciders of Little Pomona Cidery & Orchard, a project set up by Susanna and James Forbes in 2014, with the first products launched onto the market in 2017. The cidery and orchard with its 120 trees of four classic cider apple varieties, is in Thornbury, North Herefordshire, on a five-acre piece of land, below an ancient hill fort overlooking the Malvern Hills. Inspired by the tastes and vision of notable producers, their quest became to work with the best possible fruit using natural methods to fashion ciders and perries with true flavours and with the character and structure to match with food. Little Pomona Orchard & Cidery is the name of the project, Pomona being the Roman goddess of fruit trees and the orchard.

Table Cider is a blend of Browns Apple (67.5%) from Throne Farm in Weobley, Dabinett from the Home Orchard (17.5%), and an orchard blend containing Yarlington Mill, Michelin and Dabinett (15% total) from Oldfields Farm, Tenbury Wells. The Browns Apple was fermented wild in steel, racked close to the end of fermentation and blended with a component of wild fermented Dabinett. Part of this blend was run into a single ex-rum barrel and left to mature for 4 months. The orchard blend was pressed and fermented together in steel. In May 2020 the components were brought together with the addition of yeast and sugar, bottled and left to complete a second fermentation without disgorging. It reflects the sheer joyous drinkability of great cider, its natural affinity with food and its ability to capture the essence of each harvest in every glass. With its juicy fruit, gentle sparkle, supple tannins and modest alcohol, Table Cider makes for happy company in any conversation or meal.

Late spring releases:

Table Perry comes from Hendre Huffcap & Thorn varieties, both from Tedney Farm, Worcestershire. Both varieties were carefully hand sorted and washed before milling and macerating inside the press for 36 hours, then pressed into tank where the juice fermented spontaneously before being bottled as a Pét Nat. As is sometimes the way with Perry, despite the best efforts, the bottles precipitated quite heavy tannins, and so it was decided to disgorge “à la volée” or dirty disgorging. All natural, no filtering, no fining and no SO₂. Bright and very attractive nose of ripe stone fruit, honey and blossom. It’s super juicy, lemons and peach, more honey, a little spice, soft tannins and a touch of florality, with just the right amount of RS to balance the acids. The little touch sugars left over from fermentation makes this perfect with a wide range of spicy hot food.

Ghost Perry is made from Longbois, Faussett & Antricotin varieties (Throne Farm, Weobley), hand-picked in late October. Made from the second pressing of three different French perry pears, this a piquette of sorts. Or as Susannah and James call it Perrykin! The pomace was re-hydrated with spring water, left for 24 hours and repressed directly into two barrels, both of which still contained the lees from some fermented damson juice. This spontaneously fermented without any additions before bottling with a light conditioning. It was bottled on March 7th. 2021. Unfiltered. No SO₂. In its gorgeous, pale, translucent pink, it truly does look supernatural, the very ghost of the pears and damsons that went before it. It pours with a lively sparkle that carries creamy strawberry ice cream aromatics straight to the olfactory bulb! In the mouth it’s bright and fresh with damsons and blackberry, although rendered more as watercolour than gouache, while hitting all the high notes in the refreshment chorus! Crush with maximum prejudice.

Hard Rain Hopped contains Egremont Russet (Cotswold Orchards, Worcestershire), hand-picked mid-October. Made from the second pressing of apples – a piquette or small cider or ciderkin if you will. Pomace was re-hydrated with spring water, left for 36 hours and repressed directly into tank, then fermented wild with later additions of both cider and cider lees to enhance flavours and mouthfeel. Close to the end of the primary fermentation the liquid was racked and then infused with both Cascade and Bramling Cross hops grown on the farm where Little Pomona is based. This maceration lasted 10 days before the ciderkin was racked away from the hops, sent it to bottle and lightly conditioned. Bottled: Feb 5th. 2021. Unfiltered. No SO₂. This is a super refreshed beer/cider hybrid. Cascade hops bring with them plenty of citrus, whilst the Bramling Cross lend it a leafy note and subtle berry fruits. The Egremont Russet, strong of personality, the very essence of appleyness, marries well with the hops and overall it becomes basically a bone dry, fresh and racy shandy! This re-creation of ciderkin, an old drink of agriculture, is designed to slake a thirst and is best matched with one.

Hard Rain Quince comes from Ellis Bitter (Home Orchard) apples and Vranja and Meeches Prolific quinces from Dragon Orchard, Putley. Both are harvested in mid-October. Made from the second pressing of apples and quince, in other words, a piquette, small cider or ciderkin. They pressed apples and the quince together, then re-hydrated the pomace with spring water, leaving it for 36 hours before repressing into tank, straight on top of the lees from a previous Discovery apple ferment (see Disco Nouveau). This was left to spontaneously ferment and was subsequently bottled as a Pet Nat. Quince always brings with it huge freshness as well as tropical fruit flavours and aromatics. This is basically alcoholic Lilt, fresh and lemony, with hints of pineapple and mango and spring blossom.

Glad to be Plaid is a cider made from Harry Masters Jersey (Broome Farm), Ellis Bitter (Home Orchard), Ashton Bitter (Broome Farm), Browns Apple (Throne Farm, Weobley). The Ellis and Ashton Bitter were pressed together, fermented wild in tank before being racked into 10 individual ex spirit casks, including rum, cognac, scotch whisky and bourbon. The Browns Apple and Harry Masters Jersey were fermented separately in tank before being brought together into third use French oak (ex-Tuscany) and one solitary ex cognac barrel. Glad to be Plaid brings together a single bourbon barrel and that long cognac barrel together into bottle, a full 18 months after harvest.

Bottled March 24th. 2021. Unfiltered. No SO₂. Glad to be Plaid is the happy result of a blending session in the company of cider legend and podcaster, Martyn Goodwin Sharman. “Ostensibly to find Art of Darkness 2019, which we very much did (!), we also stumbled across this two-barrel combo”. This cider is insanely aromatic with an energy on the palate that almost defies logic. Bursting with aromas of the tropical fruit and heady barrel perfume, it’s intense in the mouth: green citrus, mango, peach, sweet spice and exotic flowers. The tannins have been finely polished over time, and all of its elements linger long. This is a food matching dream. Supple, complex, juicy, fresh, perfumed and fruit driven yet with restraint and modest alcohol.

| | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|-------|
| | TABLE CIDER – 7.3% - 75 cl | Cider |
| 2020 | TABLE PERRY – 6.7% - 75 CL | Perry |
| 2021 | THRONE FARM PERRY | Perry |
| 2020 | THE OLD MAN & THE BEE– 8.1% - 75 cl | Cider |
| 2019 | GLAD TO BE PLAID – 7.8% - 75 cl | Cider |
| 2019 | DEAD FLOWERS | Cider |
| 2019 | HARVEST CIDER | Cider |
| NV | BRUT ZERO | Cider |
| NV | BRUT ROSE | Cider |
| 2020 | WADING IN | Cider |
| 2021 | BRIGHT LIGHTS | Cider |
| 2023 | DISCO NOUVEAU PET NAT | Cider |



Orange is commonly associated with amusement, the unconventional, extroverts, warmth, fire, energy, activity, danger, taste and aroma. Mythological paintings traditionally showed Bacchus, the god of wine, ritual madness and ecstasy, dressed in orange. Many orange wines are a potent pleasing cocktail of wild aromatics, warm energy and mucho mirth.

Georgia is one of the birthplaces of wine culture and wild vines – *Vitis Vinifera Silvestris* are still widely distributed across the country. Archaeologists and historians have discovered evidence and material artefacts including seven-thousand-year-old grape seeds and antique vessels (pruning knives, stone presses etc.) as well as written testimony of foreign chroniclers and travellers. According to a poem by Apollonius Rhodius, the Argonauts, having arrived at the capital Colchis, saw twining vines at the entrance to the king's palace and a fountain of wine in the shade of the trees. That Homer, Strabon and Procopius of Caesaria used to mention it in their works leads wine historians to surmise that it was the Transcaucasus, especially Georgia, which was the native land of the first known cultured grape varieties and that it was also from here that the vine spread to many European countries. Xenophon in the 5th century recalled it thus: "That Caucasian tribe who lived in the Black Sea coast (and who) prepared strong wine."

Wine's name itself is of Georgian origin "Gvino" and October, harvest month, is named "Gvinobistve" (the month of wine). Mosaics attest to the influence of the Georgian wine god "Aguna". The cult of grapevine and wine forms part of the Georgian psyche – present from spiritual and religious symbolism to the more earthbound aspects of life. In the first part of the IV century St. Nino arrived in Georgia bringing the word of Christianity with an upheld cross made in the shape of an intertwined grapevine arbour. Georgians venerate the vine and its product, and wherever wine is served, a toast is voiced and big-hearted, misty-eyed oratory issues forth.

Wine as evidenced from the Georgian folklore and history is used for solemn or mournful ritual, in copious quantities and rarely, if ever, diluted. The French traveller, Chardin, wrote in the 17th century, that there was "no other country in the world in which wine was so good and drunk so amply, as in Georgia."

There was a moment of hush as Stalin's barber cleared away the topsoil and scraped off the clay. He paused like a priest about to confer the sacraments. Only the lid remained. He stood and, so as to underline the drama of the occasion, trod deliberately around its circumference. I edged closer and willed him to take the final step.

As the lid came away, a raspberry haze rose from the ground and was swept away on the breeze. A crimson mirror reflected the scudding clouds – 400 litres of fresh young wine.

The barber took his ladle and scooped out the first glass and handed it to me. I raised it to my mouth and drank. It was a moment of magical intensity. "It's Saperavi," he said, referring to the grape, which in Georgian means pigment. It was densely red and cool and stained my lips like blood.

Georgia and its vineyards had taken over a corner of my mind.

Rob Parsons – BBC's From Our Own Correspondent



*Georgia, Georgia,
The whole day through
Just an old sweet song
Keeps Georgia on my mind*

GEORGIAN GASTRONOMY

Georgian cuisine uses familiar products but due to varying proportions of its obligatory recurrent ingredients such as walnut, aromatic herbs, garlic, vinegar, red pepper, pomegranate grains, barberries and other spices combined with the traditional secrets of the chef's art the common products acquire a special taste and aroma, which make Georgian cuisine very popular and unique. Georgian national cuisine is notable for an abundance of all possible kinds of meat, fish and vegetables, various sorts of cheese, pickles and distinctive pungent seasonings.

A hypothetical guest invited to the hypothetical Georgian table is first of all offered the golden-brown *khachapuri* which is a thin pie filled with mildly salted cheese; then he is asked to try *lobio* (ripened from fresh green beans) which in every family is cooked according to a household recipe; stewed chicken in a garlic sauce; small river fish "tsotskhali" cooked when it is still alive; sheat-fish in vinegar with finely chopped fennel; *lori*, a sort of ham; *muzhuzhi*, boiled and vinegared pig's trotters; cheese "*sulguni*" roasted in butter, pickled aubergines and green tomatoes which are filled with the walnut paste seasoned with vinegar, pomegranate seeds and aromatic herbs; the vegetable dish "pkhali" made of finely chopped beet leaves or of spinach mixed with the walnut paste, pomegranate seeds and various spices. In East Georgia you will be offered wheaten bread baked on the walls of "tone", which is a large cylinder-like clay oven, resembling a jar, while in West Georgia you will be treated to hot maize scones (*Mchadi*) baked on clay frying-pans "ketsi".

Soup fiends will be enchanted by the fiery rice and mutton soup "*kharcho*", the tender chicken soup "chikhirtma" with eggs whipped in vinegar and the transparent light meat broth flavoured with garlic, parsley and fennel.

Experienced voluptuaries and Anthony Bourdain will not be able to resist the savoury *chizhi-pizhi*, pieces of liver and spleen roasted in butter and whipped eggs; crisp chicken "*tabaka*" served with the pungent sourish sauce "*satsivi*". Other specialities include the melt-in-the-mouth sturgeon grilled on a spit; the chicken sauce "*chakhokhbili*" in a hot tomato and dressing; the Kakhetian dish "*chakapuli*" made of young lamb in a slightly sourish juice of damson, herbs and onion; and roasted small sausages "*kupati*" stuffed with finely chopped pork, beef and mutton mixed with red pepper and barberries.

Everyone in Georgia is fond of "*Khashi*", a broth cooked from beef entrails (legs, stomach, udder, pieces of head, bones) and lavishly seasoned with garlic. There is a quote to the effect that "the onion soup in Paris and the *khashi* soup in Tbilisi serve the same purpose. They are eaten by the same people- by hard workers to make themselves stronger and by revellers to cure a hangover". And another saying which holds: "Everyone who saws, transports, builds, sweeps the neighbouring streets, makes shoes, digs ditches eats *khashi* in the morning".

Still on a meaty theme there are legion devotees of *Khinkali*, a sort of strongly peppered mutton dumpling and a favourite dish with the mountain dwellers of Georgia. Like everywhere in the Caucasus, *mevadi* (*shashlik*) is very popular in Georgia. Depending on a season, it is made with pork or mutton.

The Georgian table is conducted in accordance with the ancient ritual. The head of the table, "*tamada*", is elected by the host. The tamada must be a man of humour with a capacity for verbal improvisation and the wisdom of a philosopher. (Presumably many philosophers are born in their cups). If there are many guests at the table, he appoints assistants, known as "*tolumbashis*". The tamada's toasts follow one another in a specific and never-violated order. The guest is obliged to listen attentively to each toast and appreciate the beauty of rhetorical style as well as the purport of the words. It is not allowed to interrupt the tamada when he is saying the toast. The tamada's assistants and other guests may only add something to the toast or develop its ideas. If you wish to say a toast, you must by all means have the tamada's consent or else you will find yourself in an awkward position. This table ritual does not put restraints on the guests but maintains discipline at the table. The feast proceeds among jokes and is accompanied by a dance competition, table songs and music, quotations and aphorisms from the works of poets and writers.

SHOTA LAGAZIDZE, ZEMO ALVANI, KAKHETI REGION, Georgia – Organic

Founded in 2013, Lagazi is a family wine cellar located in village Zemo Alvani where wine is made according to Georgian traditional method – in qvevri. In the Lagazi family wine cellar guests are acquainted with traditional methods of winemaking in qvevri, offered natural wine made from rare local grape varieties, and offered lunch with traditional Georgian dishes. Lagazi is a member of the Natural Wine Association. The wines are characterised by lush warm fruit and spice that envelops the tongue.

All you needed to know about Qvevri but were afraid to ask

Kvevri? Qvevri? Which is it?

We are spelling it “Qvevri”. There was much discussion on this; a few German importers prefer the Kv rather than Qv but I have had the Travel channel CNN, BBC and Jancis Robinson’s upcoming books on varietals and wine atlas all use the Qv spelling which the Georgian wine producers are using, so Qvevri.

The word “Qvevri” – does it literally mean amphora or does it derive from something else?

No, it doesn’t mean amphora. Amphorae were often used for transportation, or storage above ground – they often had handles and were not permanent. Qvevri is a Georgian vessel dating back over 8,000 years predating Greco-Roman traditions of winemaking. A qvevri was totally buried in the ground and not used for transportation, it was used for fermentation and storage of wine, and, being totally immersed in the earth gave it naturally stable temperatures, advantageous for both fermentation and storage. It is a vessel unique to Georgia (oldest examples date back 8,000 years) although similar interpretations are found throughout the ancient Near East and more recently, (2,000-3,000 years ago) in Italy, Spain and Portugal. The vessels used in western Europe culture are normally above ground or partially buried. Qvevri usually have a beeswax lining inside and a lime encasement outside. The few European producers that have borrowed this technology from Georgia – such as Josko Gravner – still call the vessel “Amphora” (or Anfor) on their labels, which bothers the Georgians. They feel it sounds like a Roman or Greek cultural attribute whereas this is much older and indeed derives from Georgia. The Friuli/Slovenian producers, including Gravner, bought qvevris in Georgia and learned their open-fermentation, extended skin maceration techniques here, so we hope over time to convince them to call the vessels qvevri rather than amphora!

Where are the qvevris made? And by whom? Is this a widely spread artisan skill in Georgia?

There are about five good qvevri producers, but they are all living in poverty and the craft is in danger of dying out. We are currently trying to solicit funding to help build a school for a new generation of qvevri craftsman to be taught the skills. They are mostly in Vardisubani village in Kakheti and Shrosha in Imereti region. UNESCO is considering adding the qvevri method to their world heritage list. If this happens it will be easier to rally support for the protection of the vessel and its name.

What are they made of exactly? Is there a special glaze?

It is pure terra cotta, baked red clay, built-coil method, but the quality of the clay and water used is as important as firing techniques. The vessels are usually between 100 and 4,000 litres in volume although some have been discovered that are between 8-10,000 litres. Small qvevris are good for fermentation, bigger better for storage. No glaze is used.

What is the customary winemaking process once the grapes are brought to the winery?

Slightly crushed grapes, stems and all, goes into the qvevri, whereupon alcoholic fermentation begins naturally in the next three days and continues for 2-4 weeks at which point the cap falls. Punch-down happens usually about twice a day during alcoholic fermentation; once the cap falls we remove the reds from the skins and stems, and leave the whites on the skins and stems, place a stone lid over the top which continues to allow small amounts of oxygen in. Malolactic usually starts spontaneously quite soon afterwards, say in the next month – in 5 vintages we have never had it not happen. In spring, when the earth starts to warm up, we usually open the fermentation qvevri and move the wine into freshly-cleaned qvevri for storage until bottling – or bottle right away.

How are the qvevris buried in the ground? And where? Are they sealed? If so – with what?

The qvevris are buried in deep holes with earth and sand packed in tightly on all sides. Ideally, they are in a building in the vineyard, or nearby. They are sealed inside with hot beeswax and the lid of the qvevri – after malolactic – is sealed with wet clay coiled around the top and then a heavy stone placed over it.

How does the vigneron know when to unearth them?

The qvevris themselves are permanent unless moved for reinstallation, while the wine is usually racked when the temperature in the earth starts to warm up, at which time it can be bottled or moved into a newly-cleaned qvevri.

How are the qvevris cleaned?

There are many different means such as used cherry-bark scrubbers as well as various other “old-school” tools, but if you put powdered lime rock with clean water it starts to heat up to a high temperature searing the inside of the qvevri and cleaning any small amount of bacteria that might be stuck in the pores. After this, we pump in fresh water and pump out the old water until pristine.

How many times are the qvevris used?

For many centuries – our oldest ones date back to mid-19th century, for example.

How would you say that the process of fermenting and ageing in qvevris affects the wine – compared to stainless steel or wood, for example?

Qvevri are porous and so closer in style to old barrels than stainless steel. The clay has pores and that takes us to the earth, but the earth is porous as well. Despite that, the wine in qvevri is subject to relatively minimal amounts of oxygen if well sealed (although they do receive some). In addition to breathing they are surrounded by a constant temperature on all sides allowing for slow gradual fermentation and relatively stable storage conditions. The technique of prolonged skin contact in the case of the whites makes the most obvious difference in terms of a strongly amber-coloured result and adds the tannins, polyphenols and a particular earthy body to the wines.

What proportion of growers (very roughly) are still using qvevris in Georgia?

Almost all families have a house in the country where there are qvevri, but due to intense labour involved in cleaning and maintaining them, many have resorted to making their home brew in plastic barrels or stainless steel. “Professionally” about 20 producers utilise qvevris, while maybe some 1 million families have them in their village homes of which probably 100,000 still use them.

What else should we know about qvevri winemaking?

That this tradition only works if you have very healthy grapes and a good strong yeast population. If you intervene too much in the vineyard or cellar you will likely get stuck fermentation or other problems, but if the grapes are in great condition and you don’t let them ripen “too much” - pick, say, at between 22 and 24 brix – then nature does the rest for you.

What makes Georgian wine so interesting and individual is a combination of the nature of the qvevri itself and the age-old technique in using it allied to the unique grape varieties, the prolonged maceration on skins, and the special growing regions with their various terroirs.

“They could out-eat us, out-drink us, out-dance us, out-sing us. They had the fierce gaiety of the Italians, and the physical energy of the Burgundians. Everything they did was done with flair...nothing can break their individuality or their spirit.” John Steinbeck on Georgia and Georgians in *A Russian Journal*, 1948.



To fully understand the wine of the qvevri you have to be in the qvevri

MARINA'S WINE, VILLAGE CHARDHAKI, KARTLI, Georgia – Organic

Marina Kurtanidze chose Mtsvane grape because she loved the wines that came from and they were also able to buy wines from healthy, organically farmed vineyards. In this process she has had the help of her husband, Iago, friends, and encouragement from fellow qvevri producers. Georgia has a very tight-knit wine community, vine growers and wine producers are being nurtured to grow, both in their outlook and in their businesses. Winemaking in Georgia may have an 8,000-year heritage but it still feels like something done on a wing and very many prayers! The grapes – skins, stems and pips (the mother) are left in the big terracotta clay qvevri buried in the earth for six months, wherein they undergo their primary and malolactic fermentations. The vigneron can't monitor the wine during this lengthy gestation period, so after the primary fermentation is completed, the qvevri is sealed and the wine is left to tick over and receive its nourishment from the "mother". Many Georgians will say that the opening of the qvevri is like giving birth to the wine, literally putting it on its feet. The Mtsvane is slightly more come-hither than the Kakhetian Rkatsiteli and more al dente (if that's a wine term!) than the Chinuri grape which flourishes in the Kartli region in central-eastern Georgian. Marina's version is simply gorgeous. The salmon-pink colour is inviting, the nose speaks of so many things including roasted apricots, crystallised citrus even grilled mushrooms and the palate encompasses tea, sake and a pink grapefruit tangerine-tang. Like the best Georgian wines, it possesses earthiness and real umami flavours balanced by energetic acidity and fine-grained tannins. Texture is an important dimension in wine, but it requires fluidity to bring all the components into relief. This wine has that fluidity. The rose is more of a light red, a blend of Chinuri and Tavkveri.

2022 TAVKVERI CHINURI BLEND

Ro

SISTER'S WINE, JANE OKRO, Kakheti – Organic

Jane Okruashvili is the sister and business partner of John. A trained political scientist, Jane committed herself to winemaking after deciding that she wanted to reconnect with her cultural heritage and preserve/promote the traditions of her community. The Okruashvilis have 7 hectares in different places in the Alazani Valley below. They work with eight varieties; Tsolikouri, Tsitska, Tavkaveri, Kisi, Kakhetian Mtsvane, Rkatsiteli, Saperavi and Budeshuri Saperavi but are also planting more varieties. All wines are made in their 12 qvevri at the house plus two other cellars totalling 20 qvevri in all. Kisi is a grape particularly suited to skin maceration (this one has seven months on skins with stems) and is deep amber in colour with powerful tannins. The Tavkveri rose (from free run juice) is strikingly peppery. The ferment is whole cluster and the wine is aged for eighteen months in 500-litre qvevri.

2020 TAVKVERI ROSE

Ro

JOHN OKRO, KAKHETI REGION, Georgia – Organic

'Joni' Okro is one of the most respected natural winemakers in Kakheti, Eastern Georgia, where he concentrates on traditional long skin contact amber wines and increasingly a small range of delicious pet nats. His Kakhetian wines are sourced from cool high-altitude vineyards instead of the warmer plains his wines retain freshness and vitality and have concentration levels rarely seen. He also works with grapes from Kartli and Imereti. His whites and amber wines are based on local grape varieties such as Rkatsiteli, KakhuriMtsvan e and Tsolikouli, which all spend between 1,5 and 6 months in Qvevri The reds, Saperavi and Tavkveri, spend only one month in qvevri. Besides still wine John also produces 5 different Pet Nats and the Georgian grape-liquor called Chacha. John also owns a restaurant in Signagi overlooking the Caucasus mountains, where you can eat Kakhetian food and drink. John's Rkatsiteli comes from a vineyard at nearly 1000m above sea level in Sighnaghi, Kakheti in Eastern Georgia. It spends six months on skins with 50% of brown, mature stems before racking and spends 18 months in qvevri before bottling. Soft, burnished gold, the wine is aromatic and truly unique, with notes of piquant spices and paprika emerging over the browned pineapple and honeyed walnut aromas often associated with Rkatsiteli. The palate is savoury yet tart, medium bodied, and quite delightful with high-toned cranberry, peeled starfruit, and a tropical acidity. The Saperavi comes from an organic vineyard in Manavi, also in Kakheti (500 metres above sea level). Saperavi Budeshuri is a type of Saperavi with white flesh and more aromatic intensity. This red wine spends 15 days on skins with no stems and just over a year in qvevri. All John's wines are completely natural – no sulphur is used.

2021 ZVARI RKATSITELI

Or

2021 SAPERAVI BUDE

R

IAGO BITARISHVILI, VILLAGE CHARDHAKHI, KARTLI REGION, Georgia – Organic

“...We arrive at his ramshackle home/winery. The garden is abundant with fruiting trees and vegetables and outside the small, rather patched together house (which, as far as I can tell, is directly above the winery) is a covered terrace where a long table is being set for what is clearly going to be another Georgian feast. A very small boy darts about with handfuls of wine glasses.

We move from the heat of the afternoon into the relative cool of part of the winery. Which is a rather overly grand way of referring to a tiny room with a deep concrete bath in one corner. This, of course, is where the grapes come to be crushed underfoot in a process which is never quite as much fun as those who have never done this might think. They do around 2 tons at a time and crush about 8 tons in all in a typical vintage.

Almost every single family in Georgia makes wine in qvevri but under the Soviet regime, it became illegal to bottle and sell, so

Iago did not start to do this till 2003. He has always worked organically here and has always been passionate about preserving the local traditions, never being even slightly seduced by modern professional techniques. He is, therefore, a bona fide wine maker although that is a complete contradiction in terms as in Georgia, it is believed that nature and the great clay jugs make the wine. Man is just a facilitator; moving things around and making sure that everything has exactly what it needs to function happily and healthily. Iago works with only one variety – Chinuri – although he makes two versions of it; one with skin contact and one without. It is only the wine made without which is pressed by foot. With the skin contact wine, there is only gentle crushing before the whole bunches are surrendered to the clay. His skin contact white goes into qvevri for 3 – 6 months.

Iago's non-skin contact white is left to nestle in the earth for 2 years before bottling although it is transferred from one qvevri to another during that time. We move to his bottling room, which is a bright, white tiled space with a contraption for bottling by hand. Just beyond, lies the room of the qvevris. Sunk into the stone floor, the perfectly round O's of the entrances gape widely. The yeasts here are strong and busy; starting their work almost immediately the grapes are crushed – usually in mid October. Once fermentation is well under way, the cap is broken up at least twice a day to let the gases escape. Failure to do so would result in temperatures rising to the point where the wine gets 'burnt' or, in really horrible cases, would stop the fermentation altogether. And a fermentation which stops does not start again easily.

When fermentation is finished, the vessels are filled to the brim while Iago waits for the secondary, malolactic fermentation to begin. Around December, a large flint stone or a piece of glass is used to cover up the entrance which is then sealed with wet clay and covered in damp sand.

He crouches down and begins to move the sand with both a trowel and a sturdy brush. While he does this, he talks to us. He has, he says, some new Qvevri but also those which are 300 years old. He explains that the opening of one is always a special and noteworthy occasion, and the official opener person is tasked not only with getting rid of sand and lifting stones etc; but also with saying the name of the person or occasion which it is being opened for. Some buy a Qvevri for their child at birth, to be opened at the wedding.

In Georgia it seems, little to do with the drinking of wine is allowed to proceed without some flourish which officially marks the occasion. I approve heartily. Too much of modern life is allowed to rush by without comment or any attempt to make some magic. The atmosphere is opaque with anticipation. Iago says: “Say a prayer for me. I hope it is good.”

We do not speak. With a scraping sound, the flint stone is lifted from the entrance. Iago fills his glass from the liquid which glistens darkly in the neck and then holds it up to the light so that we can see the shimmer. It is perfectly cloudless.

He raises it to his lips and drains every last drop. Then it is our turn. Glasses are handed around and I retreat into a corner to taste. The wine is remarkable. A very pleasing viscosity held in check by a lean, mineral element. There is also definitely something akin to roughly hewn stone about it. I can't explain exactly why, but these are the images that spring to mind while it is in my mouth, along again with flavours of honeyed spice, which is definitely a feature of much from here.

“And now” says Iago “please come outside to my yard where we will taste my skin contact wine”. The table which was being set with glasses and cutlery when we arrived is now crowded with plates of food. It is mere hours since lunch and not too long till dinner but apparently, this is for us. John confirms that Georgian hospitality means that the concept of having guests who will stay only a short while to taste wine is unthinkable; no matter how vociferously the serving of anything else is protested. What can we do? We must sit down and eat. We taste the skin contact white. Not surprisingly, this is very much a version of the other white, only in stereo. With extra layers. So far, I have yet to taste a skin contact white against a more conventional version without preferring the skin contact example. It is strange in a way as my tastes usually run to the restrained, almost austere and skin contact white are not that.

For me, the good examples bristle with life and the textures – heavy damask, cashmere, corduroy (the latter being the texture I encountered most on these whites in Georgia) – are a whole experience in themselves.

We must leave but not before a final speech from Iago. “I believe that everything natural is always better than anything artificial. This is a part of truth and reality. When you do this, it is an expression of your faith. It is not a marketing gimmick. And then it doesn't matter how many people tell you that you should do it differently. You still do it your own way””.

2022 IAGO CHINURI

Or

2022 IAGO PET NAT

PHEASANT'S TEARS, VILLAGE SIGHNAGHI, KAKHETI REGION, Georgia – Organic certified

Pheasant's Tears is owned by three individuals in equal shares: John Wurdeman: Wine Tourism/ Idea Person/ Public Voice/ Sales; Gela Patalashvili: Vinedresser/ Winemaker and Georgian Wine Legacy: A small Swedish importer of wine set up to facilitate small sales in the EU.

Pheasant's Tears estate vineyard plantings flow down the slopes of the eastern Georgian Kiziqi province overlooking the Alazani Valley and snow-capped Caucasus Mountains. The site itself is located near the village of Tibaani in the shadow of the 6th century monastery of St. Stephen. The terroir here is special, with long summer sunlight of over 14 hours a day and evenings cooled by the breeze from the gorge. The soil is composed of limestone, chalk and dark clay on the surface, whilst a metre deep lies a sandy loam mixed with gravel, providing excellent drainage for the vines' root systems. Gela, and Malkhaz grew up in a farming family learning from their grandparents and parents how to grow grapes and make wine in qvevri. In 2007 they approached John to help with investment and to be a bridge to the outside world to enable the wines to reach more wine lovers that wanted an authentic Georgian wine, they were saddened, that there were too many big wineries, with winemakers detached from the land and from Georgian traditions. They saw an 8,000-year-old tradition with hundreds of autochthonous varieties under the threat of becoming internationalised and homogenised.

Gela's desire is to preserve the traditional winemaking techniques that have made Georgia a home for viticulture since 6,000 BC. A combination of high-quality soil and diligent vineyard care helps achieve the quality of fruit necessary to create these traditional but elegant wines combined with the commitment to organic principles (which started with the purchase of the Saperavi vineyards in 2007 which has subsequently been certified), are essential practices both protect the land from misuse and harsh chemicals and also to help develop the rich terroir that is reflected in each of the wines. The variety of soils include those from Tibaani: brown carbonate, and stony with limestone mixed in; Bodbiskhevi, black carbonate soil over sand; Manavi: yellow sand with pink quartz and Kartli/ Mukhrani which features mainly limestone and brown carbonate with sand found at 30 cm beneath the surface.

Pheasant's Tears are also committed to seeking out rare indigenous varieties and bringing them to market. Georgia has over 500 species of grape, many limited to tiny micro-regions at specific elevations and most unfamiliar even to the knowledgeable Georgian wine consumer. This rich heritage is in danger of being lost entirely, relegated to DNA databases and laboratory experiments. Qvevri were the first vessels ever to be used for wine fermentation, with archaeological finds dating back to 6000 BC. Qvevri are clay vessels lined with beeswax and completely buried under the ground where the temperature stays even throughout the year, allowing the wines to ferment in the natural coolness of the earth. Pheasant's Tears' qvevris vary in age but some date back to the mid-19th century. The cellar is built in the vineyard itself to minimize the damage to the grapes in transportation, allowing harvesting and process before the heat of the day takes effect. In accordance with Georgian traditional winemaking methods, the ripest of stems are added to the grape skins, juice and pits, for both reds and whites. The maceration time depends on varietal and the size of the qvevris and varies between 3 weeks and 6 months. The Rkatsiteli is from thirty-year-old vines, fermented naturally for thirty days with wild yeasts in clay Georgian pots buried underground. The wine is neither filtered nor fined and only a touch of sulphur is added at bottling. Golden amber in the glass with a nose of wild honey, but dry, and unexpectedly, full-bodied in the mouth with background notes of walnut and apricot. Rkatsiteli will stand up well with roasted chicken or more exotic fowl like duck or quail. As the great wine connoisseur, Dolph Lundgren, says PT Rkatsiteli is "the strangest, toughest, most ass-kickin', car blowin' up wines of all." A tiny amount of Mtsvane from old vines is also made – it undergoes an identical vinification regime and is suitably amber. Rich on the nose with creamy vanilla and exotic spices this dry white delivers toasted almonds and apples with echoes of dry sherry. Mtsvane will work well with chicken, grilled tuna and vegetable dishes.

As for the Saperavi – this popular red is so dark in colour that it's called black in Georgian and varies greatly according to the terroir in which it's grown. Pheasant's Tears estate Saperavi is a bold, earthy, dry red with flavours of black currant and toasted almond with an elegant, natural tannic structure. Shavkapito, a royal red once enjoyed by Georgian kings, offers a nose rich with smoky leather and tobacco plus a hint of anise and fills the palate with plum and cherry with a hint of liquorice in the smooth finish. Serve Shavkapito with roasted or grilled lamb or beef as well as game birds. The pheasant is a bird believed to have originated in Georgia. The Latin is Phasianus colchicus colchicus, Colhida is an ancient name for Georgia. In the region of Kizikh there is an old saying that only the finest of wines can compel a pheasant to cry tears of joy.

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| 2022 | RKATSITELI TIBAANI | W |
| 2022 | RKATSITELI BAKURTSIKHE | Or |
| 2022 | KISI | Or |
| 2020 | VARDISPERI ~ 3 weeks skin maceration, no stems | Or |
| 2021 | DANAKHARULI GORULI MTSVANE | W |
| 2021 | SAPERAVI ~ 10 days on skins, no stems | R |
| 2021 | MADLIERI RED BLEND 10 days on skins, no stems | R |
| 2022 | CHKHAVERI RED | R |

RAMAZ NIKOLADZE, NAKHSHIRGELE VILLAGE, IMERETI, Georgia – Organic

Nikoladzebis Marani was founded in 2007 by Ramaz Nikoladze on the base of his ancestors' vineyard and typical Imeretian cellar in Nakhshirgele. There are two white Georgian grape varieties planted in the vineyard; Tsitska and Tsolikouri. Natural winemaking methods are used in both the cellars and the vineyards. The Tsolikouri comes from his uncle's vineyard in Lechkhumi region on the edge of the Caucasus in NW Georgia. No skin contact, no stems, this is a racy white. Tsitska is from old vines in his own vineyard just by the marani.

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| 2022 | TSOLIKOURI ORKHVI | W |
| 2022 | SOLIKOURI SKIN CONTACT | Or |
| 2022 | TSITSKA | W |

DIDIMI MAGLAKELIDZE, VILLAGE DIMI, IMERETI, Georgia – Organic

Didimi Maghlakelidze, Ramaz Nikoladze's uncle, lives in Dimi village on the southern side of the wide Rioni River plain south of Kutaisi, close to the large town, Baghdati. Didimi was a professional driver but always made wine as well. His Krakhuma often has a little Tsolikouri blended into it and is a wonderfully distinctive wine. The vines are trained in traditional pergola, the grapes are destemmed and pressed gently in a basket press, then fermented naturally with their own yeasts in qvevri and aged in qvevri also for a further six months. No filtration, no sulphur added. In its youth this wine shows waxy citrus aromas and flavours, but fills out after a year or so, exhibiting notes of apricot and honey.

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| 2022 | KRAKHUNA | W |
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IBIRELI, ZURAB TOPURIDZE, GURIA & KAKHETI, Georgia – Organic

Zurab has been involved in vineyard farming and making natural wines from childhood when he used to help his granddad. He was 13 years old when he made his first natural wine on his own. His winery is in the village of Dablatsikhe (English translation "Lower Castle"), which is located in Chokhatauri municipality of Guria region. Guria region is located in the western part of Georgia, bordered by the Black Sea subtropical coastal lowlands to the west and the mountains in the east. The region is rich in cultural traditions and natural beauty, famous for its polyphonic music, humorous people, and used to be well-known for its delicious rose-hued wines. When Zurab got married to Tamar to a native of Dablatsikhe, he bought small house in the village and sufficient land for viticulture and started planting and reinstating the variety that his grandfather loved so much. This was Chkhaveri, a rare late-ripening variety, native to Guria region, making rosé-style wines. He makes natural wines in underground qvevris with a total capacity of around 13 tonnes (22 terracotta vessels in total). The vineyard itself is four hectares, planted on the terraced slopes of River Supsa valley, on the reddish-brown clay over lime with lots of magnesium and iron in the soil. The rosé is macerated for six months on skins and seeds and aged five months in qvevri. The Saperavi is from an organic vineyard in Kakheti on lime-rich soils. The wine undergoes two weeks of maceration (including the stems) and is fermented naturally with its own yeasts before ageing in underground qvevri for seven months. The appropriately named Golden Blend is a blend of 25% Rkatsiteli, 25% Mtsvane, 25% Kisi, 25% Khikhvi fermented and aged for seven months (with skins and stems) in qvevri.

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| 2022 | GOLDEN BLEND OF 4 | Or |
| 2022 | CECILIA AMBER | Or |
| 2022 | MTSVANE FOR MARIAM | Or |
| 2022 | MTSVIVANI | Or |
| 2022 | SAPERAVI | R |

MARIAM GUNIAVA, SIMONETI VILLAGE, IMERETI, Georgia – Organic

Mariam Guniava Wine cellar is in western Georgia, Imereti. This is a family wine cellar, established three years ago. In the previous century there were old qvevris in the family and wine was made in it for many years but all that stopped till recently. She started making qvevri wine again. Her vineyard is in village of Simoneti, 6 kilometres away from my wine cellar. Area of vineyard is 1 hectare. They employ organic methods. Mariam uses local Imeretian vine varieties: Tsitska, Tsolikouri & Krakhuna. She uses qvevri for making wine with the natural, traditional method with the wine staying in Qvevri for 9-10 months.

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| 2021 | TSITSKA | W |
| 2021 | KRAKHUNA TSITSKA TSOLIKOURI | W |
| 2022 | ALADASTURI | R |

ARCHIL GUNIAVA, KVALITI VILLAGE, IMERETI, Georgia – Organic

Archil Guniava Wine Cellar and vineyard is located in Zestaphoni, Kvaliti Village, at the family home, where generations have lived. Vines are planted across 1.5 hectares of vineyards. This location provides excellent soil structure and a conducive climate for grapes. The vineyard plot is planted to many grape varieties: Tsolikouri, Tsitska, Krakhuna, Otskhanuri Sapere, Dzelshavi, Dondghlabi and Mgaloblishvili, the latter two being very rare and whose reputation Archil is dedicated to restoring. Everything is fermented in old qvevris buried in the marani (cellar). Natural winemaking methods are naturally employed with native ferments, and nothing added; normally the wines would be made Imeretian-style with approximately 15% maceration on skins, but in the lighter 2019 vintage they were made without skins (bar the Dondghlabi). The climate in this part of Imereti is called subtropical, warm rather than hot, and quite humid in the summer. The soils are clay over limestone, this latter feature giving the wines their freshness and vitality. Organic farming methods are practised. Grapes are harvested by hand, destemmed, and crushed into the beeswax-lined qvevri. Ferments are ambient and take around two weeks to complete. All wines undergo natural malolactic fermentation and are bottled without filtration, fining or sulphur added.

We begin with the very rare **Dondghlabi**. Despite the fact that the grapes spend four months macerating on their skins (and nine months in qvevri in total), the resulting wine is still light gold in colour and light on its feet with aromas of wild herbs and grapefruit. Archil remarks: “Dondghlabi is an old Imeretian variety of grape, very common 60-70 years ago, but now on the verge of extinction. My ancestors loved this wine so much that I decided to recover it. 2019's Dondghlabi is the first vintage for me. I only have 400 bottles of it. It is considered as one of the lightest wines. Skin contact is 100% for 4 months, but it's still light, with different varietal aromas.” In a country overflowing with ancient grape varieties, **Krakhuna** is one of the oldest. Indigenous to Imereti in the west of the country, grown in and around the villages of Svir, Obcha and Dimi, ‘Krakhuna’ means ‘crisp’ in the local dialect. It's an appropriate nickname for this high-acid grape, which winemakers often describe as ‘crunchy’ in texture. Given the humid conditions of west Georgia, it can be challenging to grow with its naturally thin skins which make it susceptible to rot and mildew. As a consequence, Krakhuna produces only moderate yields, and the grapes must necessarily be harvested by hand and sorted. Archil's version offers notes of apricots, ripe citrus, vanilla with honeyed tones and lovely acidity to balance. In upper and central Imereti, **Tsitska** is principally used to make sought after sparkling wines. Typical of the numerous indigenous grape varieties, Tsitska is confusingly known by several other names depending on where it is grown. If you come across Shanti or Tsitsko, you still have Tsitska. In the villages of central Imereti, it is also called Male Tsitska. In foreign ampelographical works (Viala and Vermoreli, Guioni, Piula and Goete), Tsitska is also mentioned and briefly described under the name Tsitska da Chanti. The only thing you need to know about Tsitska is that it's delicious. This version is plush with aromas of yellow fruits such as quince, melon and apple with a honeyed top note too. Again, a lovely nervy acidity keeps the wines fresh and tangy. Archil's **Tsitska-Tsolikouri-Krakhuna** (60-20-20) is another wine that majors on freshness and purity of fruit. Citrus and fresh cut apple to the fore, background hints of dry honey and herbs. A particularly versatile food wine, it goes equally well with chicken, beef or cheese. **Mgaloblishvili** is an old red grape variety indigenous to Imereti. Its name – “Mgaloblishvili” is connected to the famous 19th century Georgian ampelographer with the same surname. Throughout the 19th century and till halfway through the 20th, the Mgaloblishvili vine was one of the most widespread varieties in Imereti region, but soon fell out of favour. Archil recalls that his family owned a 100 + year-old Mgaloblishvili vineyard, which was eventually replanted with other vine varieties. Then, during the era of partial prohibition, when selling wine became illegal for farmers and all grapes went state wine factories, there was no demand for Imeretian red grapes, which was the main reason for this and a whole host of other autochthonous varieties becoming virtually extinct. Archil and the older generation of vigneron, however, always remembered the high quality of this vine variety and a few years ago he decided to re-establish this vine. After a lengthy search he found it in a state nursery, took cuttings, and replanted it in his vineyard. Now he has 700 plants yielding grapes – and a further 300 about to come on stream. Nino is Archil's daughter. She assumed responsibility to plant and take care of these particular vines (with father's help!) and to make the wines. The first vintage was four years ago – a grand total of 60 bottles. This year they will make 1000 bottles. They are the only producers of this wine in Georgia. The grapes are destemmed and spend nine days on skins in qvevri. The wine is naturally made, and nothing added as with Archil's other wines. It is such a pretty wine, almost rosé in colour with appealing aromas of flowers, red fruits, and pepper. Grape genealogy suggests **Otskhanuri Sapere** is a transitional variety between a cultivated and a wild vine. Grown throughout the Imereti region of western Georgia, Otskhanuri Sapere ripens in mid to late October. Like Saperavi, this is a teinturier grape, producing wines with a deep, opaque ruby colour. In their youth, the wines are grippy and structured with high tannins and acidity. Exhibiting flavours of forest fruits, red berries, and herbs, these wines have great aging potential. Otskhanuri Sapere is considered Imereti's best red grape variety. Archil used to try to make a wine using only the Otskhanuri Sapere. He discovered that (for him) the resulting wine was too strong, so now blends the Otskhanuri Sapere with Tsolikouri, with the proportion being 30/70. Firstly, he presses the Tsolikouri and adds it to a qvevri. Then, in November, he harvests the Otskhanuri Sapere, presses the grapes and adds the juice and cha-cha to the qvevri. According to Archil, even with the Tsolikouri fermented, it is not a problem to add the Otskhanuri Sapere. The maceration lasts for one month. To finish the wine, he continues to use the same winemaking process that he uses for the other qvevri wines. Even with the Tsolikouri making up the balance, this is a more structured wine with aromas and flavours of blackberry, cherry, dark berries.

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|------|---------------------------------|----|
| 2021 | TSITSKA | W |
| 2021 | KRAKHUNA | W |
| 2021 | TSOLIKOURI | W |
| 2021 | TSITSKA – TSOLIKOURI - KRAKHUNA | W |
| 2021 | DONDGHLABI | Or |
| 2021 | OKSKHANURI SAPERE | R |

IGAVI WINES, VINTNERS AND VAGABONDS, AIDAN RAFTERY, IMERETI, VILLAGE ZEINDARI, Georgia – Organic

Aidan Raftery began making wine in 2013 with a label called Vin du Patron, produced in the garage of his home in Melbourne, Australia. He had just opened Persillade, the first solely natural wine bar in Melbourne, and the wine label was an extension of the offering. This project continued until 2017 when he sold his restaurant and moved into wine importing. He first visited Georgia in that year too and fell completely in love with the country, its people, culture, and of course, the wines, so much so that he decided to move there in 2019, purchasing a house and vineyard in Western Georgia in a small village called Zeindari.

His wine label is called Igavi which in Georgian means a fable or folk story. The name was inspired by a story he was told when he first visited Georgia which goes as follows: When young soldiers would go off to battle, they would take a cutting from their family vineyard and tuck it under their armour next to their heart, so that if they were killed their family's vine would grow from their dead body. This tale is illustrated by different artists for each cuvée, but each one is their individual interpretation of that story. Imereti, where one of Aidan's Tsolikouri vineyards is located (and his Aladasturi one), is a very diverse region in western Georgia with dramatically different climatic conditions in all the different sub-regions, but its hallmark is that it is subtropical; being warm and humid throughout. All his vineyards are farmed organically. Soils are turned in the spring, the rows between the vines are heavily (wild) grassed and mown twice – once in the middle of summer and once before harvest.

Tsolikouri Imereti is an equal parts blend of two iterations of this grape: Tsolikouri Melqo and Tsolikouri Bazaleti which are grown in a very sheltered site surrounded by forest on all sides and sitting in a small gully.

The grapes in this case were manually harvested, whole-cluster, straight-pressed into 500-litre stainless steel tank and fermented with native yeasts before ageing nine months on full solids in the same tank (no racking) and the wine is bottled without filtration, fining or the addition of sulphur. A very cool and wet vintage gave a lower alcohol expression of this vineyard, yet the wine retains all the hallmarks of this site albeit viewed through a more delicate lens. The two types of Tsolikouri are very different. Melqo when ripe is a deep burnished gold colour, while Bazaleti retains its blue green appearance even when ripe. The two are co-planted together, the Melqo component has much higher sugar than the Bazaleti, both are harvested when the two are in balance and harmony with one another. Light and bright in appearance with aromas of green pear, fresh quince, lime leaf, a little flesh in the mid-palate but tightened and lengthened by the acid drive. Tsolikouri

The Aladasturi vineyard is on an exposed north-east facing site on a hill receiving sun throughout the day, it's very windy at the same time giving great ripening potential with lower disease pressure. The soils here are sandy-clay with limestone, and the vines are 30-40 years old. Destemmed, whole-berries are macerated in plastic open fermenters of 1000 litres for ten days and undergo wild ferment before maturing for a further 9 months on full solids (no racking) in 530-litre qvevri. A light nervy red with very fine and gentle tannins, perfumed, spicy, the whole gamut of red berries with white pepper and hints of iris. Not dissimilar in style to Pineau d'Aunis.

The Aladasturi rosé comes from the same vineyard. The grapes in this case are whole-cluster straight-pressed into 300-litre stainless tanks where they remain for nine months on lees. 20 ppm of sulphites are added in the spring. Very pale in colour, more Vin Gris or Blanc de Noir in appearance, this rosé exhibits subtle reduction, notes of white cherry and pink grapefruit, and is glassy, angular, and energetic. An exposed sunny hill site in Lechkhumi provides near perfect growing conditions for Aidan's Orbeluri Ojaleshi. The west-facing vineyard is 760 metres above sea level on clay-limestone soils.

One of Georgia's oldest and noblest varieties, Ojaleshi, means "growing on a tree" in the Megrelian dialect of Georgian (ja=tree). It was the dominant variety in the mountainous district of Samegrelo in north-western Georgia, it was trained as a maghlari vine up persimmon or alder trees. Ojaleshi was widely cultivated in this manner throughout Guria's central and upper mountain villages before the arrival of fungal diseases and phylloxera in the late 19th and early 20th centuries destroyed vineyards. Current plantings are trained lower to the ground, as in Guyot simple or double, which lowers yields but produces higher-quality fruit. Ojaleshi performs best on the limestone soils. Destemmed whole-berries are macerated for 12 days in plastic open-top fermenters, ferment with indigenous yeasts, age without racking in 555-litre qvevri, and are bottled without filtration or fining and just 20 ppm of sulphites are added in the spring. This version certainly reflects the vintage being extremely delicate, weightless and gentle, very aromatic, with suggestions of blueberry with spent church incense, violet and gun smoke.

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|---------|--------------------|---|
| 2022 | TSOLIKOURI IMERETI | W |
| 2022 | ALADASTURI RED | R |
| 2021/22 | ORBELURI OJALESHI | R |
| 2022 | CHKHAVERI VANI | R |
| 2022 | MGALOBlishvili | R |

MAMUKA CHELDIDZE, RACHA, Georgia – Organic

This family winery is located in the beautiful Racha, Ambrolauri district of Georgia. The cellar was built in 1932, the old buildings are made of stone and lime. It is characterized by a dry and cool environment, which is one of the conditions for making quality wine. The vineyards are located on the left and right terraces of the beautiful Rion valley, in an ecologically clean environment, in the village of Khvanchkara and Ambrolauri district. The soil is clay-limestone, which has a positive effect on the quality of the grapes, their taste and sugar content. The cellar produces three types of wine: Tsolikouri grapes and Rachuli Tetra and special wines made from Alexandropol-Mujuretuli grapes, which are only in the Khvanchkara micro zone. The winery is a member of the Georgian Natural Wine Association.

| | | |
|------|---------------------------|----|
| 2019 | TETRA | Or |
| 2020 | TSOLIKOURI | Or |
| 2020 | DZELSHAVI | R |
| 2020 | ALESSANDROULI-MUDJURETULI | R |

HUNGARY

HETSZOLO, TOKAJI, Hungary – Organic (certified Oka-Hungaria)

The undisputed king of Hungarian vineyards, Mount Tokaj is located to the north of the country, 200 km east of Budapest. This legendary location produces exceptional wines, protected since 1772 by the first appellation of origin awarded in the entire world.

The Royal Imperial Estate of Tokaj-Hétszölő owns beautiful land and cracking vines on the southern slopes of Mount Tokaj since 1502. No surprise, then, that it has attracted the attention of the greats of the wine world for over 5 centuries!

The creation of the estate owes nothing to chance: the Garai family simply selected the best 7 parcels of the land in the region, hence the name - Hét Szolo means "7 parcels of vineyard" in Hungarian. Thence followed a series of prestigious owners, including Gaspar Karoli, translator of the Bible into Hungarian, Gabor Bethlen, prince of Transylvania and the Princes Rakoczi, a grand aristocratic family. The Habsburg royal family finally took possession of the vineyard and Tokaj-Hétszolo became an Imperial Estate in 1711. It was to remain the property of the Austro-Hungarian Crown for almost two centuries. Following a turbulent 20th Century, the Tokaj-Hétszölő Estate became one of the Michel Reybier vineyards in 2009, joining Cos d'Estournel, Saint-Estèphe Grand Cru classé, Château-Marbuzet and Goulée Médoc in their portfolio.

The terroir is special. The volcanic rock here is covered by a particularly thick layer of loess, and the directly south-facing side of the hill benefits from optimum levels of sunshine. The parcels overlook the misty valley where the Rivers Tisza and Bodrog meet, and enjoy the perfect microclimate for botrytis cinerea, which produces the much-prized noble rot.

Ecological responsibility is at the forefront of the winery's objectives. There wasn't any agriculture at Hétszölő between the 1950's and 1990 - in fact throughout the era of massive agrochemical use of Soviet regime. When the vineyards were replanted in 1991 sustainability was put to the fore. To make organic culture more official, Hétszölő began the conversion process for organic certification in 2009 with the label of Hungária Ökogarancia, an official organic certifier in Hungary.

Today all the 55 hectares of vineyards of the estate are cultivated strictly in organic way. Minuscule amounts of copper and sulphur are employed. Instead of systemic chemicals they use more natural products like orange oil, baking powder and other substances. No artificial fertilizers, nor herbicides, are used and natural pest management is practised using predatory insects.

Soil management is done by means of composting and diverse cover crop. Ecological islands have been established next to vine parcels to increase biodiversity. Allied to these changes is a move towards more natural wine making, using indigenous yeasts and spontaneous fermentation.

The dry wine is 100% Furmint from the south facing Nagyszőlő & Hétszölő single vineyards on thick loess soil with more complex volcanic subsoil. Yields are around 35 hl/ha, and the wine is fermented and aged for five months in stainless tanks with weekly batonnage. The nose is quite reserved and a touch balsamic, but the palate is striking with lime, pear and green apple notes. Elegant acidity and minerality. The wine benefits from not being served too cold.

Late Harvest is an important category nowadays for Tokaj. At Hétszölő they mostly use shrivelled berries with no botrytis, the aim being to keep the wine fresh and fruity and easy to drink. This version comprised Furmint 70% + Hárslevelű 30% from low-yielding vines (25hl/ha) and like the dry wine is fermented in tank. On the nose we find citrus, elderflower, linden blossom and fresh tropical fruit notes. The same fruit comes through on the palate along with minerality and lovely balancing acidity.

2008 is considered one of the greatest post-war vintages for Aszu wine. After a very hot and wet summer the September rains brought a good botrytis infection. With a very strict selection, high quality 'aszú' berries were harvested from many parcels. The wine ferments very slowly in new Hungarian oak barrels and is aged in same for two and a half years, before going into bottle for further maturation.

The 5 putts has a shiny golden colour with orange tints. The complex nose offers notes of apricots, tangerine and galia melon accompanied by nuts. Rich, full-flavoured palate with dried fruits, walnut, a hint of caramel and vanilla. The high sugar levels (around 150 g/l residual) and waxy botrytis texture are balanced by the crisp acidity (over 10 grams/l). The wine is an obvious companion for foie gras or even spicy oriental food and goes particularly well with creamy, nutty, or fruity desserts, and blue cheese.

| | | |
|------|-----------------------------|----|
| 2021 | TOKAJI DRY FURMINT | W |
| 2018 | TOKAJI FURMINT SELECTION | W |
| 2021 | TOKAJI LATE HARVEST – 50 cl | Sw |
| 2010 | TOKAJI 5 PUTTS ASZU – 50 cl | Sw |

A German wine label is one of the things life's too short for, a daunting testimony to that peculiar nation's love of detail and organization.

Kingsley Amis – *Everyday Drinking*

WEINGUT LOUIS GUNTRUM, Rheinhessen

The family roots go back until 1648, to the small village of Wörrstadt in Rheinhessen. Ever since, the Louis Guntrum family has been growing grapes and making wine. The 8th generation, Louis Jean George Guntrum, built today's Estate building in 1923 – it offers a beautiful and spacious environment to produce some of the finest wines from Germany, but also impresses with its stunning location directly adjacent to the Rhine. Today, the estate is owned and managed by the 11th generation, Louis

Dry Riesling comes exclusively from traditional vineyards in the heartland of Rheinhessen – the steep vineyards along the Rhein in Nierstein and Oppenheim. An artistic blend of grapes from Nierstein (red slate) and Oppenheim (chalky loam), thus blending the fragrance and delicacy of Nierstein wines with the power and structure of Oppenheim wines. Sustainable farming and grape growing with limited yields through reduced pruning, green harvest and hand selected grape picking. The Riesling is fermented at only 10°C in stainless steel. No addition of sugar, water, acidity or any other additives. Extended time on the lees until early bottling. Natural fermentation, dried cultured yeasts added only towards the end of fermentation to ensure dryness. Delicate fragrance of white peaches, apricot and juicy pears. The classical Riesling in expression and elegance. 100% cute Riesling at a price miniaturised in a great shrinking ray The style is off-dry with rounded fruity citrus flavours. There's pineapple, a touch of the sherbet dib-dabs and a good, clean finish. It's a wine that says like Harold Skimpole: I'm just a child, you know. Take me as I am. Unlike Harold Skimpole it's an honest number.

2022

RIESLING

W

WEINGUT DB SCHMITT, BIANKA & DANIEL SCHMITT, Florsheim-Dalsheim – Biodynamic (certified Demeter)

The Schmitt winery has been in the family for over 230 years with Bianka and Daniel working their 16 hectares for the last decade. They work in full biodynamics which they learned from legendary Alsace vigneron Patrick Meyer and are one of only 80 producers in Germany to be Demeter-certified. (2012 was their first vintage with full certification.) The Rheinhessen is the largest wine growing region in Germany and is largely associated with bulk production. Though in recent years the region's reputation has begun to shift as a new generation of young, talented growers are working organically in the vineyard, reducing yields and realizing the excellent, undervalued terroir they possess. The focus is being switched away from hybrids and towards Riesling, Sylvaner, Weissburgunder and Chardonnay and a variety of reds with Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder) particularly favoured. The vineyards here are spread across various plots in Flörsheim-Dalsheim, Monsheim and Kriegsheim.

Bianka is from Hungary, Daniel is German. They met in 2012 when she was cellar hand in his parent's winery. Together they have taken over the family winery and are producing excellent natural wines made without additions. Farming biodynamically is essential to their desire to make natural wines, as are long ambient fermentations (in used barrels), variable skin maceration, lees ageing, minimal handling and bottling without filtration or added sulphur. They are never afraid to experiment, making over a dozen wines. Frei Körper Kultur is a great introduction to Bianka and Daniel's wines. A blend of Scheurebe, Pinot Blanc and Huxelrebe on skins blended with directly pressed Pinot Gris and Ortega, it is aged in fibreglass tanks and filled in a one litre bottle. Golden-yellow in colour, it has aromas of orchard fruits, wild herbs and white spice. Very drinkable indeed. Riesling M undergoes five days maceration and is aged for one year in small used barriques. A beautifully reserved wine, with aromas and flavours of wild apple and rhubarb, and a mellow, almost buttery finish. Zöld is Sylvaner fermented four weeks on skins, aged in 1200-litre barrels. No sulphur added. Golden with a hint of amber, textural mouthfeel.

Initially, the wine shows a slightly dried yellow-fruit characteristic combined with a touch of bitterness. Enough acidity to provide counter-balancing freshness. Tannins are indeed present and imbue the wine with a pleasing bitterness. Like all of Bianka and Daniel's wines, this wine becomes rounder and harmonious the longer it is open for. Rot Natur is an intensely purple blend of Pinot Noir, Sankt Laurent, Merlot and Portugieser from vines grown variously on limestone, sandstone and clay. Spontaneous fermentation in old oak with indigenous yeasts in 4,500 litre oak barrels and aged in the same. Amazing nose of black olives, blackberries, thyme and pepper with chalky tannins – almost Rhône-like. Finally, Erdreich is Scheurebe & Gelber Muskateller from vines on limestone, sandstone, and loess with a four-week spontaneous fermentation on skins in oak with indigenous yeasts, before ageing 14 months in 1,200 litre barrels. This very fine natural wine is aromatically seductive with the Muskateller providing the floral foreground, but it also has flavours of golden orchard fruit, lees-spice and a whiff of sherry.

2022

FREI KORPER KULTUR WEISS

W

2023

RIESLING ALEXANDERHOF

W

2021

FREI KORPER KULTUR WEISS ~ 20-litre key keg

W

2021

ZOLD ~ Sylvaner

W

2020

RIESLING M

Or

2021

WILD PONY

Or

2020

FREI KORPER KULTUR ROT ~ 1 litre

R

Ring for your valet – bid him quickly bring
 Some hock and soda-water, then you'll know
 A pleasure worthy Xerxes the great king;
 For not the blest sherbet, sublimed with snow,
 Nor the first sparkle of the desert spring,
 Nor Burgundy in all its sunset glow,
 After long travel, ennui, love or slaughter,
 Vie with that draught of hock and soda-water

Don Juan – Lord Byron

So, if you fancy a mock-heroic spritzer to pacify the pounding headache and you can't put your hands on some fine Rhein(gau), substitute some Mosel-Saar-Ruwer to restore an inner sense of *Rühe*.

WEINGUT KNAUSS, Württemberg – Organic

Winemaking was only a hobby for earlier generations of the family, but Andi Knauss knew for a long time that he wanted to become a vigneron. Having trained in Austria, where Andi learned how to work organically in the vineyard, he took over the reins at Weingut Knauss in 2004 and now makes wines from over a hundred different plots in Strumpfelbach. Many different types of limestone and marl (schilfsandstein, kieselsandstein, stubensandstein) layered on top of one another, and changing with the altitude which ranges from 300-400 metres above sea level. Vineyard land is expensive here, but Andi has worked hard to build up the estate parcel by parcel, sometimes just a row at a time, totalling 15ha across multiple plots in the hills around the river Rems. Hand harvested fruit with direct pressing followed by ambient ferment in stainless steel with native yeasts. The wine is then aged for 8 months in stainless steel and 3000 litre barrels. No filtration or fining and minimal sulphur added.

| | | |
|---------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 2022 | RIESLING TROCKEN – 20 litre key keg | W |
| 2023 | RIESLING TROCKEN | W |
| 2022 | RIESLING SCHNAIT | W |
| 2022 | PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2019/21 | TROLLINGER STRUMPFELBACH | R |

MARTO WINES, MARTIN WOERNER, Rheinhessen – Organic

After studying in Geisenheim, Martin gained experience with Matassa and Gut Oggau. He now manages 3 hectares in Flonheim. Weiss comes from a co-planted organically farmed cover cropped vineyard, vines up to 60 years old. Soil is sandstone, yields are low. The blend is 20% Mueller Thurgau, 20% Faberrebe, 20% Bacchus, 15% Wuerzer 15% Riesling 15% Silvaner and 10% Scheurebe. All grapes are harvested together and co-fermented, Whole bunch with two weeks of skin contact in stainless vat with Indigenous yeast and then transferred to be aged in old foudre barrels of between 1250l – 2500l. There it undergoes a full malolactic before being bottled without fining, filtering or any sulphur. Cloudy with amber hints, aromatic yellow-golden fruit with mouth-filling spice from skin maceration and gentle barrel ageing. Thrilling stuff! The Riesling is as taut as taut can be. All about the attention to tension. Dry honey, yellow plum, apple – lovely balance of acidity to keep the wine long and fresh in the mouth. Al Dente is blend of Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, from vines that are hand-harvested early from vines grown on sandstone soils. The spontaneously fermenting juice macerates for two weeks before full fermentation and aging in big old oak barrels for 10 months atop the lees. There is no racking. Unfined, unfiltered with no additional SO2.

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|---------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 2023 | CRAZY CRAZY ~ ancestral method | Sp/Or |
| 2022 | WEISS | Or |
| 2022 | RIESLING | W |
| 2022 | PINOT GRIS | W |
| 2020/21 | MANNA ROT | R |
| 2022 | PINOT NOIR | R |

Racy
 Incisive
 Exquisite
 Scintillating
 Lively
 Invigorating
 Nectareous
 Glissading

Where's Austria?

David Hasselhoff, Baywatch star, when told he has five gold albums as a singer in Austria

WEINGUT MATTHIAS WARNUNG, Kamptal – Organic (not certified)

Matthias grew up in a small, family-owned winery situated in the Kamptal. During his time in South Africa and Southern France, inspired by his teachers Craig Hawkins of Lammershoek and Tom Lubbe of Matassa his passion for natural wines grew steadily. Back home in the village of Etsdorf he started to produce wines the way he liked it – as if he would make them just for himself. Now he processes the grapes of one hectare for his unique wines. The small vineyards, all situated around Etsdorf consist mainly of old and well adapted vines. The vineyard is the place where it all starts for Matthias therefore he invests a lot of time in caring for them. Gradually organic principles are implemented in the cultivation. All wines are fermented spontaneously in small barrels. After malolactic fermentation and two years on the lees they are bottled. Just a minimum of sulphur is added to the unfiltered wines. The focus is on Grüner Veltliner but Riesling and Zweigelt also play important roles.

The rose is handpicked, whole bunch pressed for 8 hours, straight into barrel without settling, spontaneously fermented, malolactic fermentation, two years on its full lees, just a minimum of sulphur added two weeks before bottling. The whites are whole bunched pressed by foot with time spent on the skins. The Zweigelt is also whole bunch and naturally fermented.

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|------|------------------------------|---|
| 2022 | POTATO LAND GRUNER VELTLINER | W |
| NV | BASIS GRUNER VELTLINER | W |
| 2021 | ESPERE GRUNER VELTLINER | W |
| 2021 | FELdstUCK CHARDONNAY | W |
| NV | BASIS ZWIEGELT | R |

WEINGUT ALLRAM (AWM), Kamptal – Organic (not certified)

The AWM brand is a collaboration of three winemakers, who wants to support the community between winegrowers. The

AWM wines are a result of bringing different philosophies together. So instead of creating a difference between the natural wine society and the classic wine society As they say: "We use the positive aspects of both approaches and create wines to bring people – TOGETHER. We want to give MAFIA a new meaning, which stands for family and cooperation.

In the future we want to hand over the brand to people who support the same IDEA." They use organic practices in the vineyard and promote biodiversity in all their vineyards. The aim is to farm in natural equilibrium and to have healthy grapes. They decided not to apply to be organic certified as they don't want to be guided by political decisions and restrictions. They don't use any kind of herbicide, pesticide or chemical fertilizers and apply sustainable practices, using organic compost to ensure a healthy soil and allow wildflowers to grow between the rows. The wines are produced with low interventions and with indigenous yeast and at the end of the winemaking process we only add minimal amount of sulphur.

There is a noticeable dynamic tension in the Kamptal between the hot, Pannonian basin in the east and the cool Waldviertel to the north-west, and this touch of freshness can also be felt in the wines. The contrast between the heat of the day and the substantially lower night-time temperatures imparts great aromatic finesse and vibrant acidity to the grapes.

For the Dolce all grapes are hand-picked (Grüner Veltliner): direct pressed with some whole bunch (Müller Thurgau) macerated for seven days in open top tanks and then aged in stainless on the fine lees for one years. Karambolage is a rosé made from 85% Grüner Veltliner and 15% Zweigelt, Really fine, elegant and structured pale pink wine. Finally the winningly named Fruit of the Doom which is 100% Zweigelt, two weeks on skins fermenting in open vats with 25% stems added, before ageing on lees for one year in stainless tanks.

| | | |
|----|-----------------------|----|
| NV | DOLCE UND DIE JAPANER | W |
| NV | KARAMBLOGE | Ro |
| NV | FRUIT OF THE DOOM | R |

FUCHS UND HASE, ARNDORFER & JURTSCHITSCH, Kamptal – Organic

Martin & Anna Arndorfer and Alwin & Stefanie Jurtschitsch are good friends from the neighbouring villages of Strass and Langenlois. They spend lots of time together tasting in their cellars and philosophising about wine with beer in hand. One day they decided to do a joint project and so Fuchs und Hase was born. Fuchs und Hase means “fox and hare” after an Austrian saying: “Where fox and hare say good night...” – meaning a very remote place mainly surrounded by forest.

In order to make high end cool climate Pet Nat they had to find the most appropriate vineyards, which turned out to be naturally cooler sites at high altitude (they were seeking natural acidity and low alcohol). They selected some small parcels from each of the family vineyards, and, as it happened these sites were all near forests. Hence “Fuchs und Hase” They produced six different wines in 2015 by using different grapes from the Kamptal region. In every single wine the grapes began fermentation on the skins together and were bottled whilst still fermenting. The natural bubbles remain captured in the bottle. Fermented with native yeast, no additions, no sulphur, unfiltered – a pure and handcrafted expression of Austrian pétillant naturel

Volume 4 is Muller-Thurgau (70%) and Gruner Veltliner (30%), the former grown on primary rock soils on very cold vineyard called Merschein in Strass. The Gruner comes from Loiserberg in Langenlois. All the grapes are hand-picked and then fermented on skins for 12 days, in whole bunches, mostly free run, before bottling with latent residual sugar.

When the secondary fermentation is finished, there is a natural tartaric stabilisation. After inverting the bottles for a couple of days they do manual disgorgement in order to remove the heavy solids. The wine has no filtration, fining or sulphur added.

Volume 1 is Muller-Thurgau, Gruner Veltliner and Sauvignon. Made in the same fashion but with the volume turned down.

The rosé meanwhile is a blend of Zweigelt and Cabernet Sauvignon. The bubbles are soft, and the wine is extremely juicy.

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| 2022 | FUCHS UND HASE VOL 2 ~ Gruner & Muskateller | W/Sp |
| 2021 | FUCHS UND HASE VOL 4 ~ Muller-Thurgau, Gruner | W/Sp |
| 2022 | FUCHS UND HASE ROSE | Ro/Sp |

WEINGUT MARTIN & ANNA ARNDORFER, Kamptal – Organic certified Lacon

The Arndorfer watchword is origin. Martin & Anna also believe that the role of the vigneron is crucial – artisanship thus is the combination of creativity, sensitivity, and personality. “Origin for us though is restricted to the vineyard and the vines.

The vines soak up the vigour of the soil and their surroundings and give the grapes their unmistakable character based on their origin. Even though we do not feel bound by tradition, we want to emphasise that the influence of the vineyard is crucial to our philosophy. We are convinced that it is impossible to make two wines exactly the same if the grapes come from different vineyards, regions or countries.”

We think that the most important part of the vineyard is life and balance. Both things are very closely connected with our soils and the work/management we do with the soil. There are lot of little animals and partly very big mycelium in the soil which help the vine to get water and nutrients, but they need their “home” and food. So in our viticulture we try to provide them what they need so they will provide our vines what they need... if we assault our vines (fertilizer and herbicide) we will not have life and balance in our soil.

They have created different ranges to capture various distinctive yet essential truths behind their vineyards and the grape varieties. We begin with Vorgeschmack (Foretaste), a symbiosis of the two star grapes of the Kamptal. Martin and Anna describe the wine as the beginning of a friendly talk, the prelude to a meal and the gateway to simple pleasure. A blend of 80% Grüner and 20% Riesling with the former from clay on loess soils raised in old barrels, whilst the Riesling is from old vines on primary rock but with an early pick to preserve freshness this fruity and floral white is then fermented in stainless steel. Indigenous yeast ferments are used for all the wines. The wine is balanced, the Riesling give a little aromatic zip to the solidity of the Grüner. Strasser Weinberge is the next range, comprising a Grüner and a Riesling. These wines are, in effect, vineyard reserves from the best vineyards in Strass. The Gruner is based on grapes selected from three vineyards: Strasser Gaisberg, Wechselberg and Hasel, each producing grapes which are totally different in style and taste as a result of their diverse soils and microclimates. Thus, the final blend “reflects the whole village of Strass in all its complexity and variety”. The Riesling is from Gaisberg and Wechselberg on those primary rock soils that confer mineral tones as well as finesse and elegance to the final wine.

Certain vineyards are singled out for special treatment. The lesser-seen Roter Veltiner grows in a plot planted in 1979 on the south-western slopes of the Zobinger Gaisberg. Although the variety itself possesses low acidity, a combination of old vines and mineral soils (these being on primary rock) gives lovely textural depth to the wine. Notes of mandarin and honey are unveiled as the wine warms in the glass. Grenzenlos is also a single vineyard, this time from the Strasser Wechselberg, their oldest Grüner vineyard, planted in 1959 on clay soils with gravel and chalk. After five years ageing in stainless steel the wine spends another six months in bottle to relax. This is notably elegant and shows the personality of the grape variety in its most naked form. The upbringing of the wine runs counter to the Arndorfers belief that Grüner prefers a gentle sojourn in oak barrels.

Die Leidenschaft, Martin & Anna’s passion line, pushes the boundaries that bit further. The wines are fermented and matured in small barrels without stirring. The Grüner, for example is spicy and herbal, the stunning Riesling from the cru vineyards with its honeyed golden plum fruit has to be sipped slowly and appreciated.

Finally, there is the natural range which reflects the playful side of the vigneron’s nature. Here one tastes a Müller-Thurgau Per Se from old vines grown on primary rock, an aromatic skin-fermented (for 12 days) orange-tinged wine made without filtration or sulphur in stainless barrels. Its companion is a truly wild Grüner (also called Per Se) with 14 days on skins and aged in old barrels with 16 months on the lees. A medicinal wine with notes of wild herbs and fennel.

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| 2023 | GRUNER VELTLINER HANDCRAFTED | W |
| 2023 | GRUNER VELTLINER – 20 LITRE KEY KEG | W |
| 2022 | GRUNER VELTLINER NATURTRAUB | W |
| 2022 | VORGESCHMACK WHITE | W |
| 2022 | GRUNER VELTLINER STRASSER WEINBERGE | W |
| 2022 | RIESLING HANDCRAFTED | W |
| 2022 | RIESLING STRASSER WEINBERGE | W |
| 2023 | SCHLEHE AMBER | Or |
| 2022 | VORGESCHMACK RED ~ Zweigelt, Pinot Noir | R |

WEINGUT ANDREAS TSCHEPPE, Steirerland – Biodynamic (organic certified)

Andreas is one of a group of five winemakers who work in the same spirit, the others being Franz Strohmeier, his brother Ewald, Sepp Muster & Roland Tauss. Together they form “Schmecke das Leben.” Andreas has beautiful vineyards bursting with life – you can feel the energy with the riot of plants, herbs and flowers growing amongst the vines. The vines are trained up and down slopes, but also unusually for this region, on terraces across the slopes (making harvesting a bit easier!). Various grapes are cheek-by-jowl: Sauvignon, which ripens later, Chardonnay (known locally as Morillon) Gelbermuskateller (Moscato Giallo) a delightful floral alternative. Produced in tiny quantities, Goldmuskateller, however, is the gold standard with a shimmering array of honey, grapefruit and warm spice. Andreas Tscheppe’s version of this, called Butterfly, is a wonderfully exotic and hedonistic wine.). Salamander is the name of the Chardonnay. Without the cushion of new oak, it displays gentle flavours of waxy citrus, pollen and toasted oatmeal. The Sauvignon has magnificent depth and tension; it is from the cooler of the vineyards enjoying a long growing season and then undergoes its slow fermentation and élevage in large barrels. The wine seems to have a tannic dimension and a brilliant bitter lemon quality with flavours that go on and on. Finally, to the Stagbeetle (the creature that is the motif of the winery), a blend of Sauvignon and Chardonnay fermented on skins in a big barrel buried deep underground. This amber wine has a dense structure but opens up to reveal both floral and peachy fruit flavours. Tscheppe’s wines are notable for their effortless minerality and relaxed energy. As for the skin contact Schwalbenschwanz from Goldenmuskateller vines brought back from Alto-Adige even Andreas’s friends think this is a crazy wine. For me this was the vinous equivalent of the sweetmeats that Edmund was given by The White Witch when he arrived in Narnia. Exotic, intoxicatingly aromatic, gold to send the senses spinning with pleasure. Segelfalter is 100% Gelber (Yellow) Muskateller. Superbly aromatic yet wild and herbal, with firm-fleshed yellow-leaning-into-gold fruit flavours and bitter quinine notes. Schwalbenschwanz is an astonishing wine made in tiny quantities (and not every year either). 100% Golden Muskateller, this amber-hued wine spends three weeks on the grape skins in big barrels. The result is fabulously complex – bitter orange, flints, shells and smoke, wild herbs, dry spice and crunchy tannins. Needs carafeing

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| 2022 | SALAMANDER ~ Chardonnay | W |
| 2022 | GREEN DRAGONFLY – Sauvignon | W |
| 2022 | BLUE DRAGONFLY ~ Sauvignon | W |
| 2022 | SEGELFALTER – Gelber Muskateller | W |
| 2022 | STAGBEETLE ~ Sauvignon, Chardonnay | Or |
| 2022 | SCHWALBENSCHWANZ ~ Goldmuskateller | Or |

WEINGUT SEPP MUSTER, Steirerland – Biodynamic (certified Demeter)

Sepp and Maria Muster live in a beautiful house at the end of a windy road not far from the small town of Schlossberg. We're in the southern part of Styria and the hills and woods of Slovenia are easily visible from the road that carves through the vines.

The vineyards themselves, at a typical altitude of 450-470 m, are notably rocky with clay and silt soils dominating their steep, hand-worked slopes. The character of the wines stems from this unique location, situated in this "318inerea" microclimate with the influence of the Koralpe (the nearby high mountain plateau region), with its cool nights and winds being mainly responsible for the character of the wines.

The vines grow on lime soil, composed of solid clay silt, known here as "Opok" which results in warm "dense" wines with intense varietal aroma character. The vines look wild and primitive with their single wire trellising, a reflection of the original method of vine training developed by Sepp's ancestors' they rise high along chestnut wood posts and branch out at approximately 1.80 metres height. The one-year canes hang down from the wire as if bending towards the earth. This practice was developed to promote a harvest of physiologically-ripe grapes, the idea being that the energy of the vines goes not into creating a canopy of leaves but into the very fabric of the grapes themselves.

Sepp echoes the simple mantra that he does not wish to fashion his wines to any specific style, but rather allow them time and space to reach their own individual potential, referenced through terroir, soil character and vintage. It's the classic hands-on, hands-off approach, emphasising awareness of tradition and the need for observation, seeking healthy vines to yield healthy grapes, and then allowing the wine to make itself in the cellar with the minimum of fuss. As he says with a smile when we enter the barrel room: "I don't come in here very often."

The chief preoccupation, as with Franz, Andreas & Ewald, is to build soil and vine vitality by using biodynamic practices. For Sepp this involves the dynamising and spreading of plant, mineral and animal substances and working according to the Maria Thun calendar. Cluster thinning is partly naturally generated, partly done by hand, the goal to produce small berries, highly aromatic grape material as the basis for full character and complex wines.

The wines represent the overall character of their immediate surroundings. This involves the singularity of the vines, soil, microclimate, people and vineyard location as well as the specific vintage and results in individual, fine and multiple-layered (complex) wines, which over the years, alter in their aromatic structure.

The cellaring process is where nature meets time. Spontaneous fermentation (with natural wild yeasts) in large format barrels, no temperature control, naturally occurring malolactic fermentation, nothing added, nothing taken away. The wine is aged (up to two years) to obtain the optimal maturity and harmony of the various flavours.

Sepp makes wines in different styles, but they share the same natural spirit. Vom Opok wines are from hand-harvested grapes grown on clay/silt soils towards the bottom of the steep slopes. The wines themselves are fruity with soft mineral character and lively acidic fruit. Sauvignon, Morillon, Welschriesling, Zweigelt, Gelbermuskateller, a white and a red blend and even a Schilcher provide a fantastic and fairly-priced introduction to the wines from this region.

Sgaminegg comes from the best vineyard of the estate with pure Opok soil, the sparsely-foliaged vines yielding tiny grape clusters (15-20 hl/ha). The winds from the Koralpe play their influence here directly. Sauvignon and Morillon are matured in wooden barrels, blended and bottled after 22 months. The wine has a cool, austere feel as if the very limestone rocks had fermented slowly with the grape juice and released their stony essence into the wine.

Finally, Sepp makes two orange wines where the juice is fermented with the skins – and partly with the stems. These skins and stems contain colour pigments, tannins and phenols, which impart the "orange" colour. This can vary according to variety and year from a rich yellow, also pink, to a vibrant orange. The texture is concise, compact, rich in tannin, aromatic and complex.

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| 2020 | OPOK ~ Gelber Muskateller, Welschriesling, Sauvignon, Chardonnay | W |
| 2020 | GELBER MUSKATELLER | W |
| 2019 | GRAF ~ Sauvignon | W |
| 2019 | ERDE ~ Sauvignon, Chardonnay | Or |
| 2017 | GRAFIN ~ Sauvignon | Or |
| 2019/20 | GRAF MORILLON ~ Chardonnay | W |
| 2021 | ROSE VOM OPOK | Ro |
| 2018/20 | ZWEIGELT VOM OPOK | R |
| 2017 | GRAF ZWEIGELT | R |

THE BURGENLAND

WEINGUT JUDITH BECK, GOLS, Burgenland – Organic & Biodynamic – certified Respekt

Judith Beck's winery is run as a family business. Since 1976 the area under vine increased from 5 to 15 ha. Most of the vineyards are situated at the Wagram of the Parndorfer Plate, the most important site of the region. And from 2007 Judith has produced wines in accordance with biodynamic principles. The winery is housed in an impressive airy new building in the middle of the vineyards from Gols. Now the emphasis is on refining the style whilst capturing the potential of the grapes.

Judith is passionate about the traditional red wine varieties: Blaufränkisch and St. Laurent. She makes the most articulate versions of the latter variety that we tasted on our visit, one called Bambule! which explores the wild side of the grape. Judith is an impressively calm, thoughtful person and that sense of relaxation seems to transmit itself into her wines, which possess a lightness of touch not always apparent in this region.

As mentioned, the focus is on the vine growing. Biodynamics is an art of healing which takes advantage of the holistic curativeness of nature. It aims at strengthening the natural resistance of the plant. Pest and disease control are mainly affected in a prophylactic manner. "We encourage the formation of humus, as a basis of healthy soils, by regularly applying cattle manure which we prepare ourselves and by cultivating grass between the rows. Herbal teas (such as stinging nettle, chamomile, field horsetail ...) and biodynamic field sprays such as horn manure and horn silica are used under the consideration of moon rhythms; their purpose being to strengthen resistance and further the physiological ripeness of grapes."

The aim is to produce authentic wines with an individual aroma profile while at the same time maintaining healthy soil and vines. Part of this is also the absence of yeasts. Fermentation of the red wines starts spontaneously (without the help of selected yeasts) in stainless steel tanks or in open wooden casks. Part of the red wine matures in large wooden barrels (1000 to 2000 litres). Judith uses barrels made of third generation acacia wood. This larger format accentuates the clear fruit of Zweigelt and Blaufränkisch; and thus is the ideal vessel. "We believe that wine needs to breathe in order to develop thoroughly; that's the reason why we do not use stainless steel tanks for maturation at all." St. Laurent, Pinot Noir, Blaufränkisch Altenberg, Cuvées Pannobile and Judith are matured in classic barriques and 500-litre-barrels as the denser, more structured wines seem to benefit from ageing in small oak barrels. The barrels are meant to support and enhance the characteristics of the wine; the wood influence should however hardly be perceptible, and the fruit of the wine should always remain in the foreground. These latter reds mature for between fifteen and twenty-four months in the cellar until the flavours harmonise.

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| 2022 | WEISSBURGUNDER | W |
| 2023 | TRAMINER | Or |
| 2022 | NEUBURGER BAMBULE! | W |
| 2022 | ZWEIGELT | R |
| 2022 | BLAUFRANKISCH | R |
| 2022 | BECK INK | R |
| 2022 | BECK INK ~ 20 litre key keg | R |
| 2022 | HUNNY BUNNY | R |
| 2023 | PINK | Ro |

ANDERT WEIN, PAMHAGEN, Burgenland – Biodynamic (certified Demeter)

Michael Andert was born into a large family and grew up on a farm with mixed agriculture, livestock and viticulture and learned to respect his family, his animals and the associated work. Today, as winemaker, this respect has deepened even more. “We think we found the right way in the biodynamic economy to press the grapes into sustainable and valuable wines. We respect the earthly and cosmic influences on our wines, our soil and also we respect the influence of the seasons on our wines.”

Biodynamic farming started in 2003 with Demeter certificate awarded in 2007. The 11 vineyard parcels are spread over 11 plots. The climate is Pannonian (cold winter-hot and dry summer), the lake (Neusiedlersee) on the west side and the Waasen on the east side give an influence of warm humid air in the summer months. The surface soil is black earth (20-40cm) with changing rough-texture, whilst the undersoil is loamy sand with gravel

We were taken to the small plot of vines that comprise the Gemischter Sotz, a field blend of various white grapes. The location of the vineyard is in itself unremarkable, being a flat piece of land that was once under water (the marshes around here were drained some time ago) although some of the boggy, low-lying areas still host an extraordinary variety of birds. This small vineyard is humming with life. They have installed a box in a lone tree at one end of the row of vines for falcons to nest in. Herbs and grasses grow bountifully– spring onions, wild garlic, oregano and countless other herbs, edible (as it turns out) flowers and weeds. The Andert barrel cellar is a no-tech affair. There is no electricity, so tasting is done by candle light. You could put the “bottling line” in your back pocket. These are not technical wines. I was very much taken with the whites.

All the wines are made in a similar natural fashion with varying amounts of skin contact and maturation in old barriques and 500-litre barrels. Manual harvest, destemmed grapes, fermented in open-topped containers, a maceration 5-11 days (Pamhogna – 11 days for Rulander) before pressing. Ferments are with indigenous yeast and are ambient (the garage door is opened or closed). The wine matures gently in 225 l and 500 l oak barrel and the goes through a natural malo, a light filtration, no fining – with sulphur only added at bottling

Gemischter Sotz is a melange of co-fermented Neuburger, Grüner Veltliner, Malvazia, Muskat Ottonel, Sylvaner. It's fresh and aromatic with a friendly streak of acidity. The Pamhogna white is 55% Rulander (Pinot Gris), 40% Neuburger and 5% Weissburgunder. This wine has an intense golden-yellow colour and a lovely herbal fragrance. It requires carafeing before all the elements harmonise – from the exotic white pear and pineapple fruit aromas to the refreshing acid and fine structure conferred by a gentle clasp of tannin. The Rulander takes us to Princic country, possessing an exquisite salmon colour with amber highlights. The nose is (sweet)meaty and a little bit smoky, the palate is smooth and almost velvety with suggestions of pink grapefruit, yet also salty with a bitter almond note on the finish.

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| 2021 | GEMISCHTER SOTZ | Or |
| 2021 | PAMHOGNA WEISS ~ Rulander, Neuburger, Weissburgunder | Or |
| 2020 | GRUNER VELTLINER ANADJUCKA | Or |
| 2020 | PM – on allocation | Or |
| 2020 | RULANDER | Or |

WERMUTLICH, PETER JURANITSCH ANDERT, PAMHAGEN, Burgenland – Biodynamic

This is the brainchild of Thomas Juranitsch -sommelier of Palais Coburg (Vienna's three star Michelin) Hubert Peter – who has his own project called Barrikade and Michael Andert – of Andert-Wein. They came together to make three different vermouths (we have two of them) – white, rose and red.

All are from Zweigelt grapes – the white is pressed, the other two have varying amounts of skin contact. All the grapes are biodynamically grown in the Andert vineyard. The rose was muted with schnapps (to give a touch of sweetness). The white and red are topped with schnapps, the spirit made from their own wine and yeasts, distilled by a friend of Andert's in Pamhagen. The herbs and botanicals are from the vineyard and garden in Lerchenfeld and these include wormwood, chamomile, lemon pepper, juniper, cinnamon, marjoram...

The white is orange tinged in colour, superbly vinous and quite delicious with a classic hint of bitterness. The rose is a lovely balance of sweet cherry fruit flavours and some nice freshness in the finish.

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| WERMUTLICH WEISS | W |
| WERMUTLICH ROSE | Ro |

A swift topographical, historico-cultural, vinological summary of Slovenia, a small but vital country situated in southern Central Europe located at the crossroads of main European cultural and trade routes, bordered by Italy to the west, Austria to the north, Hungary to the northeast, Croatia to the south and southeast, and the Adriatic Sea to the southwest.

Four major European geographic regions meet in Slovenia: the Alps, the Dinarides, the Pannonian Plain, and the Mediterranean. The Alps - including the Julian Alps, the Kamnik-Savinja Alps and the Karavanke chain, as well as the Pohorje massif—dominate Northern Slovenia along its long border with Austria. Slovenia's Adriatic coastline stretches approximately 47 km from Italy to Croatia.

The term Karst topogray refers to that of southwestern Slovenia's Karst Plateau, a limestone region of underground rivers, gorges, and caves, between Ljubljana and the Mediterranean. On the Pannonian plain to the East and Northeast, toward the Croatian and Hungarian borders, the landscape is essentially flat. However, the majority of Slovenian terrain is hilly or mountainous.

According to historical record, the beginnings of viticulture and winemaking in the area of modern-day Slovenia can be traced all back to ancient Noricum, the predecessor of Carinthia. Evidence of this is inscribed in the stones laid in Roman times featuring the vine, the wine vessel and two panthers (2nd century) above the main entrance to the Cathedral of Holy Lady (*Gospa Sveta*). The Celts in all likelihood grew vines and produced their own wines. When the Romans advanced into the area of modern-day Slovenia, viticulture methods changed, and vines and wine production methods were introduced. “*Vinum Pucinum*”, which grew on the rocky hills (*»pečine«* in Slovenian) east of Aquileia, was mentioned in the Roman annals. The situla (an ornamental Early Iron Age drinking vessel) from the village of Vače (5th century BC) denotes an ancient (and social) wine culture. The long and rich history of viticulture resulted in a wide collection of local Slovenian vines, mostly white ones. In his Austrian verse chronicle, Ottokar names some varieties of Slovenian wines namely Teran (*terran*), Vipavec (*win von Wippach*), Rebula (*reinwal*), Pinela (*pinol*), wine from Milje (*muglaere*) and wine from Brda (*ecke*).

In Slovenia, many vineyards are located along slopes or hillsides in terraced rows. Historically vines were trained in a pergola style that optimizes fruit yields. However, the emphasis on higher quality wine production has encouraged more vineyards to switch to a Guyot style of vine training. The steep terrain of most vineyards encourages the using of manual harvesting over mechanical. There are four main regions - Vipava Valley; the border area of Collio (Goriska Brda); the Karso/Istria bit near Trieste and finally the Slovenian part of Styria near the town of Maribor. Climate is warm and Med in the SW, cooler, wetter and more continental in the NE. Interestingly, Gravner has his best vines in Slovenia; I could see his Ribolla vineyard from my room and equally many Slovenian producers have vines in Italian Collio!

The main grapes planted in the Collio region are Rebula (from which the highest quality wines are made), Tocai/Jakot, Malvazija, Sauvignon and Cabernet and Merlot. In Styria, it is Renski Riesling, Laski Riesling (Welschriesling), Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

MLECNIK, VALTER & KLEMEN MLECNIK, Slovenia– Organic

The Mlecnik farm is situated on western side of Vipava valley. They have planted Chardonnay, Rebula, Sauvignonasse (ex-Tokai Friulano), Istrian Malvasia, Pinela and Merlot on their 9 hectares of vines, from which they produce an average total of 12.000 bottles a year. They have introduced a training method and pruning techniques adapted to low yields which improves the natural resistance of the vines to diseases and pests. In the winery maceration is without control and fermentation is spontaneous. For white varieties skin contact is between 3-5 days and for reds approximately 2 weeks. Maturation of the wine takes place in classical big oak barrels, and then after bottling, the wine rests for a minimum of two more years. Grapes for the wines come exclusively from their own vineyards which are cultivated organically (Mlecnik has been certified organic since 2005). The whole process from cultivation of grapes to the bottled wine is subject to the respect of all natural processes, which means that genuine, natural wine has always been a product of human's culture and his understanding of life. White wines produced this way have acquired the epithet 'orange', but for Mlecnik this is merely a renaissance of a tradition of making white wines until modern farming methods and prescriptive oenology.

Ana Cuvée is named after Valter's grandmother Ana. Ana Cuvée 2012 is a blend of white varieties (first edition was the harvest 2007) since they started bottling wine in 1989. It is a blend of Chardonnay, Malvasia, Sauvignonasse and Rebula. Wine macerates (skin contact) for 3 to 4 days without temperature control. After pressing in a small traditional manual basket press, the wine was transferred into big oak barrels of different dimensions (500 to 3000 litres). The wine was bottled two years after the harvest. Except for the minimal addition of sulphur and a few traditional interventions like racking and filling the barrels, there was no other method or substance used or added while making the wine. Ana Cuvée harks back to a time when white wine was always a blend of three regional varieties – Furlanski tokaj (now Sauvignonasse), Rebula and Malvasia. Today, in addition to these varieties they also add Chardonnay.

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| 2016 | CUVEE | Or |
| 2017 | REBULA | Or |
| 2017 | CHARDONNAY | Or |

BURJA, PRIMOŽ LAVRENCIC, Vipava, Slovenia– Biodynamic certified Demeter

Strongly believing in respecting local grape varieties, Burja Estate winemaker Primož Lavrencic bought a 60-year-old Malvasia vineyard in the Vipava Valley along the northern Adriatic coast some years ago. Today he produces Zelen, Pokalca (Schioppettino), Refošk (Refosco), Rebula (Ribolla Gialla), Malvazija (Malvasia d'Istria), Laški rizling (Italian Riesling, Welschriesling), Modra frankinja (Blafränkisch) wines, ensuring that the principals of organic and biodynamic production are followed. Lavrencic works with nature to encourage character and authenticity in his wines, always looking for spontaneous fermentation and diversity. The soil in Primož's vineyards has developed slowly on over fifty million years old flysch marlstone and sandstone. These rocks, rich with calcium carbonate, formed in the sea in the Eocene Epoch, more specifically during the Cuisian Stage. Fine-grained marlstone, containing more or less cemented rock fragments, sized only a few hundredths of a millimetre, makes heavy soil which retains moisture longer and more easily. According to location and natural geographic features, the Vipava Valley is transitional, squeezed between the Trnovo Plateau on the North and Karst on the South. Its openness to the west brings the influence of the Mediterranean climate. The climate of the Vipava Valley is sub-Mediterranean, with hot dry summers and mild winters. It is a mixture of Alpine, Mediterranean and Continental climates. The Vipava Valley is also the windiest part of Slovenia, the gusts of its famous wind – bora (burja) can reach up to 240 kph. Microflora are an important part of each vineyard's identity. The work in the vineyards, which are treated according to the principles of biological and biodynamic production, is always in the spotlight. Primož is getting to know the details of soil and climate diversity for individual locations and uses this information to adjust different varieties and vineyard cultivation. Primož controls the temperature and oxidation in the wine cellar, encouraging the rest and tries work in synergy with the vine, wine and nature, including stimulating spontaneous fermentation, which ensures the contact between grape skin and must also with the white wines. The diversity of yeast strains contributes to the complexity of the wine and provides original expression of each vineyard. The Zelen comes from a young vineyard called Golavna on flysch soils (a sandwich of sandstone, marl, breccia and conglomerate). Whole berries are macerated for eight days in tulip-shaped concrete eggs. Fermentation is spontaneous and malolactic takes place naturally. The wine is straightforward and has a Muscadet-like saline quality. The Reddo is playing with the idea of former red wine varieties in the Vipava Valley, which were once in minority, for home consumption only. Pokalca (Schioppettino) 50%, Modra frankinja (Blafränkisch) 30%, Refošk (Refosco) 20% blend here to brilliant effect. Young vineyards, from 4 to 6 years old. Aged for two years in large barrels (10 to 15 hl) and 225 l barrique barrels. Super-elegant with aromatic notes of red and dark currants encased in delicate oak, and a fine seam of acidity running through it. Bela is a field blend of Laški Rizling, Rebula, Malvazija and other oddments from an old vineyard, naturally fermented and aged in foudres. Fantastic wine with dense leesy texture and mouthfilling dried fruit and moderate tannins from seven days of skin contact.

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| 2022 | PETIT BURJA ZELEN | W |
| 2020/21 | BURJA BELA ~ Laški Rizling, Rebula, Malvazija | W |
| 2020 | BURJA REDDO ~ Schioppettino, Blafränkisch, Refosco | R |
| 2022 | ROZA ~ Pinot Grigio | Ro |

NANDO, ANDREJ KRISTANIC, Brda, Slovenia– Organic (practising)

NANDO farm is located in Plesivo, Brda in the Primorska region, bordering with the Friuli-Collio region of Italy. Of the 5.5 hectares, 60% are located in Italian Collio and 40% in Brda. The favourable Mediterranean micro-climate is mixed with warm sea air arriving from the Adriatic Sea in the south, and cooler temperatures from the Julian Alps located north of the farm. This unique climate is very well suited for white wines. The vineyards are terraced at an altitude of 100m to 200m, and planted with local (indigenous) Rebula, Tokaj, and Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The vines range from 9 to 40 years, with yields of 4000 to 6000 kg. per hectare. The vineyards are planted in a poor soil of marl or "ponka" as it's known in the local Slovenian dialect. To protect against disease, copper and sulphur treatments are used sparingly. Chemical agents are not used. The soil is planted with grass, and the harvest is manual with grapes harvested in full maturity from September to October. Spontaneous fermentation without the addition of selected yeasts, sulphur and other chemicals. Minimal amount of SO₂ are added only at bottling. Andrej Kristančič, owner of Nando Winery, has been making wines on his family's farm for nearly 25 years. He studied winemaking in high school, allowing him to expand on his personal style while continuing the family tradition started by his grandfather, Nando. Andrej has a low interventionist style, combined with a true farmer's knowledge, humility, and dedication to tradition marked with his own personal expression of winemaking. The Blue Label wines are fermented with their own yeasts in stainless tanks after a very brief maceration on skins. Malvazija is the most inviting and mineral fresh of the three wines; the Jakot (Friulano) the most floral and delicious and the Rebula is the most textural with a pronounced character of wild bitter herbs. Its Black Label counterpart is fermented 5-6 weeks on skins and aged for a lengthy period in used barrels. Beautiful bronze colour, powerful yet integrated tannins, this is a profound infusion of a wine.

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|---------|-----------------------|----|
| 2022 | JAKOT BLUE LABEL | W |
| 2022 | REBULA BLUE LABEL | W |
| 2021/22 | MALVAZIJA BLUE LABEL | W |
| 2020 | RE-JANTAR BLACK LABEL | Or |
| 2020 | MA-JANTAR BLACK LABEL | Or |

TRAJNOSTNO KMETOVANJE ZORJAN, POHORJE, STAJERKSA, Slovenia– Biodynamic (Certified Demeter)

Zorjan family continues the tradition of farming in this area. Their ancestors farmed traditionally, without the use of modern methods of farming and thus preserved the immense richness of the soil. This was a great advantage, because it maintained the long-term vitality of the soil. The family inherited the 7-hectare farm from their parents in 1980 and decided to move towards even more organic production. In 1995, Zorjan chose to vinify in amphoras and here began the the new journey of living with nature. Years of experimenting and surveys brought them to biodynamic farming, which has now become a way of life. In 2014, they decided to include their farm for Demeter certification.

The farm lies on the southern slopes of Pohorje, where there is a strong bond with Žiče monastery. Žiče monastery is an important part of European culture and history and is intimately connected with the place and people. More than a thousand years old history of the Carthusians ended in 1782, when Emperor Joseph II, in the spirit of enlightenment reforms in Europe, ordained to close down leading Carthusian monasteries which had large estates. Thus, vineyards spread out over Pohorje region from Slovenske Konjice to Maribor, where they also had stocked cellars for storing wine and residing. After the closure of the monastery, the clergy sold its land and buildings. Zorjan's ancestors bought a little land and a small cellar for wine storage, an original part of which is still preserved. The rich tradition of viticulture binds this family to continue production of natural wines with a spirit, body and soul.

Life in the embrace of Pohorje forests is exceptional. Pohorje is composed of igneous rocks, which are covered only by a very thin layer of fertile soil; therefore, there is a lot of forest. In clearings, there is a thicker layer of fertile soil, where fields, vineyards and secluded farms spread out. There is always a gentle wind blowing, whispering the eternal song of life.

Bozidar focuses on reanimating the fertility of the soils each year, by ensuring that there is a range of biodynamic preparations, which are used to create composts and sprays. The cycle of continual decomposition and restoring of life is observed and encouraged. The location of the farm is exceptional, the soils rich in minerals, such as tonalite rock, which retains moisture throughout the year, the unique green marble Čizlakit, white marble, which was already used by the Romans in this area, as well as traces of gold and other elements that all contribute to the character of the wines. Today Bozidar cultivates 4 hectares of vineyard in addition to 3 hectares of high stem orchards. The circuit is completed with mini sheep, which live all year-round in the vineyards. The carefully harvested grapes are always macerated, according to biodynamic principles, so life continues. One-half of the harvest of grapes is placed in amphorae, which are buried under the open sky. Cosmic forces turn grapes through the winter into wine and thus give a uniquely living wine, where the man with his ego is just a mere observer. “Ever since I was a child, I dreamed about making wine without a cellar or a press. Now, I always dream beautiful dreams, which are brought to me by tasting the spirit of my wine. The second half of our wine is kept in used oak barrels with a minimum quantity of sulfur”.

Biodynamic – one farm approach prevails. Preps 500, 501 and 508 are sprayed in the vineyard whilst other homeopathic remedies are used. Composting is done with manure from own animals.

Cuve is Laški Rizling 70%, Renski Rizling 30%. Grapes are harvested by hand, then destemmed before going into 70% barrel and 30% amphora – Laski into barrel, Renski into amphora. The length of maceration on skins depends on vintage and grape.

The Dolium is 100% whole cluster Muskat Ottonel with the whole fruit going into the amphora (juice, skins and stems) for six months. The wine is then decanted off the marc and then remains in amphora for another six months, until the next harvest, when it is transferred into wooden barrels for yet another 12 months. This is a sensational amber/orange wine, at once hedonistic yet with a powerful deep-rooted sense of place. A living wine that changes by the minute.

The grapes for the Renski and Laski Rizlings are destemmed and macerated in open “bucket” (škaf) as it is important that a lot of oxygen is involved in the process of maceration. When maceration is finished, everything goes to the press but just to drain it, without pressing anything! What is left from grapes goes to make brandy.

Renski has a beautiful bronze colour and the merest suggestion of golden peach. Like all the Zorjan wines there is an earthiness, a rich textural component, and leesy spice. The longer it is exposed to air the more focused it becomes. Laski (the same grape as Welschriesling or Riesling Italico) is less aromatic and a tad more herbal but has great intensity and length. Vivid aromas of ripe citrus fruits, spiced apples and plums. The palate is well-structured, taking only a gentle influence from the skin maceration, with beautiful fruit supported by subtle herbal/earthy characters. Persistent, mineral finish

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| 2017 | DOLIUM CUVE ~ Renski Rizling, Laski Rizling | Or |
| 2016 | LASKI RIZLING | Or |
| 2017 | DOLIUM RENSKI RIZLING | Or |
| 2017 | DOLIUM WHITE ~ Muskat Ottonel | Or |

PIQUENTUM, DIMITRI BRECEVIC, ISTRIA, Croatia – Organic

Originally built in 1928, converted into war shelter in the early 90s, and now a winery, this is a tale of a son of a Frenchwoman and an Istrian father, growing native Croatian grapes in an old Mussolini-era concrete water tank. Born in French Basque Country (Jurançon) in the foothills of the Pyrenees, Dimitri Brečević studied oenology in France and then worked at *Domaine de Chevalier* in addition to working harvests in Australia, New Zealand, Bordeaux, and Burgundy. In 2004 he decided to invest himself in his father's homeland of Istria near the town of Buzet. The name "Piquentum" is the ancient Roman word for the beautiful hilltop town of Buzet. Dimitri's arrival falls right in line with the region's long history of Romans, Goths, Franks, and Bavarians. The Republic of Venice even had a solid 500+ year run. And although briefly a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the World Wars, it was briefly once again a Province of Italy until 1947 when Yugoslavia was created, and Italy ceded the territory. Istria is also the largest peninsula in the Adriatic, Croatia's westernmost region, and borders both Italy and Slovenia. With only about 1750 square miles, over 280 miles are coastline with 35% covered with oak and pine forests. Indigenous grapes like *Malvazija Istarska* and *Teran* coupled with the mineral rich white and red karst soil all seem to echo the salinity of this pristine coastline and the pungency of its truffle-ridden interior.

The climate, red and white soils, everything in Istria is perfect for quality viticulture. Istria is the northern edge of Mediterranean, and in the winter, it can be very cold when the strong *bura* wind comes from the north. In September, when usually vintage takes place, it is chilly during the night, and this helps to maintain nice acidity and aromas in the grapes. The most significant white grape is the Istrian *Malvasia*, which occupies approximately two thirds of the entire grapevine plantations extending over this area. The most typical red grapes are *Teran*, and its curious relative – *Refošk* (more about these below). With currently 4.5 ha of vineyards: *Malvasia* 60%, *Teran* 20%, *Refoško* 20%, Dimitri's goal is to keep competition high, work the land by hand, and get roots penetrating deeper and deeper into the alternating ferrous-rich red and white *flysch* soils that define Istrian *terroir*.

Grapes are handpicked and then slowly pressed into tank without temperature control. Since the winery is a converted concrete water tank, the temperature is a constant 10-11°C all year long. Whilst this is perfect for ageing, it is often too cold to get a native fermentation started. Using fans to draw in the warmer outside air to around 14°C, all of Dimitri's wines complete a wild ferment without the use of added yeast, bacteria, enzymes, or any additives. After a long and slow fermentation without stalling fermentation or cold soaks, the wines are bottled unfiltered with just enough sulphur.

In contrast to the iron rich red soil of *Terzolo*, *Štoka*, and *Coronica*, the grapes for the *Malvazija Blanc* are planted in the predominately *flysch*-rich white soil unique to Istria. The wine was then fermented in stainless steel after 6-8 days on the skins resulting in a wonderfully fine-grained texture and straw yellow colour. The *Motovun Teran* is destemmed, undergoes a 2-4 weeks spontaneous fermentation and natural malolactic fermentation, is aged in wood (barriques) from 14 to 18 months and bottled without filtration. This wine has the remarkable ability to be incredibly fragrant and coat the inside of the glass like syrup, while still being a light bodied, low alcohol wine with acidity built for the *Istrski pršut* (Istrian Prosciutto) that hangs from the ceiling of the winery. Primary and malolactic fermentation are completely with native yeasts. While *Teran* is in the *Refoško* (& *Refošk*) family, it differs in that it has slightly higher acidity and pronounced iron and sanguine flavours. Historically, *Teran* was given to woman after childbirth to combat anaemia due to the rich iron content. A great pairing with *charcuterie*, oily cured fish, fish stews, and blood sausage.

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|------|---------------------|----|
| 2022 | MALVAZIJA | W |
| 2016 | COLOMBERA MALVAZIJA | Or |
| 2021 | CRNO ~ Teran | R |
| 2021 | REFOSK | R |

Here is Dimitri Brecevic's take on Teran and Refosk:

Regarding Teran and Refosk it is complicated because Slovenians and Croatians don't agree... In Slovenia, Teran and Refosk are the same variety, but change name according to the terroir. On "terra rossa" they call it Teran, on other soils it is known as Refosk...

In Istria we consider that we have two different varieties, regardless of the soil. Now, it is complicated by the fact that there are a lot of different clones of Teran and also of Refosk, and that some of them are really similar... But the two most common in Istria "Istarski Teran" (324inerea teran) and "Refošk crvena peteljka" (refosco pedonculo rosso), are completely different and you can taste that in my wines.

The Teran has low alcohol, high acidity, spicy aromas, and distinctive peppery notes. The grape is sensitive in the vineyard, both to strong sun (burn) and also to humidity (botrytis). Refosk (pedonculo rosso), conversely, often has high alcohol, low acidity, displaying fruity and chocolate aromas. Easier to cultivate, but sensitive to oidium.

Finally, it seems that the most popular Refosk in Slovenija is "Refošk zelena peteljka" (refosco pedonculo verde), which also has pronounced acidity... (in other words, similar to our Teran.!!!)

What's bred in the bone...

"I will go on the slightest errand now to the Antipodes that you can devise to send me on, said Benedick who ranked it as unpleasant a task as plucking out a hair from the Great Cham's beard or exchanging a word with Beatrice. Our delightful errand in particular question was to seek out evidence of life in the currently hibernating New Zealand wine industry..."

This is what I wrote a few years: it is no longer true. It is important to bear in mind that while New Zealand is still comparatively in its infancy as a wine producing country the wine industry is both dynamic and self-questioning. The vines are still very young and the resulting wines, although they can exhibit an exhilarating freshness of fruit, rarely have the finesse and complexity associated with terroir. This is changing; low yields and marginal climates keep the wines honest. The choice of grape varieties is important: New Zealand has coasted on its ludicrously over-inflated reputation for Sauvignon. To be taken seriously, however, you have to master the red grape varieties, and we now judge New Zealand especially in relation to other countries in its holy quest for the Pinot grail.

Of all the regions in New Zealand Martinborough is producing the most world-class wines per producer at present, although quantities are small and prices are scary. Here be great Pinot Noir and good Chardonnay. Hawkes Bay works well for the Cabernet blends and the surprisingly rarely planted Syrah. Central Otago has laid claim to Pinot Noir and possibly Riesling and Pinot Gris. Marlborough (the biggest area of production) is already renowned for the ubiquitous Sauvignon and other grape varieties are showing promise. Waipara's (Canterbury) superb Burgundian terroir make it ideal for world-class Pinot and Chardonnay. One criticism that might currently be levelled at New Zealand wines is their tendency towards imbalance. Quite a lot of Pinot stew is still brewed: alcoholic, with green tannins and over extracted. Chardonnay can be hot and heavy and taste of melted oak girders, Riesling will often resemble fruit loops and, on a bad day, the Sauvignon can be mean enough to give your nostrils a gooseberry enema. Much work to be done therefore, but no doubting the potential of the wines and the overall standard is very high.

From Science Today – 01/04/2012 – “High-Flying Sauvignon”

It had to happen and so it did. In the wake of the hugely successful Cloudy Bay locator, Les Caves de Pyrène, a small company based in Guildford, has teamed up with top scientists and winery technicians to come up with a technological solution to keep tabs on their New Zealand brands in order to determine precisely where and when they were selling. Christened the “Pinot Pinpointer” they devised a system using the latest GPS smart technology wherein micro-chips could be implanted in the cork (or stielvin lining) before bottling; these chips contain complex digital information and emit a periodic signal which can be uploaded via satellite and downloaded instantly onto a website giving literally up-to-the-minute information regarding the sales history and whereabouts of every single bottle of that particular wine in the world. The transmission signal, incidentally, is only “active” until the cork is pulled. New smartphone technology means that you can now “Wap-Sauv” to locate and track down a bottle of your favourite Marlborough tippie and an inbuilt Sat-Sauv-Nav device will enable you to calculate the quickest route between two bottles. Initial teething problems have included certain difficulties tracking Riesling (the signals to the satellite are boosted by the alcoholic content of the wine) and the more ethereal nature of the grape variety has resulted in signal interference from Talk Radio stations and low flying aircraft. A spokesman for Les Caves de Pyrène commented: “The Pinot Pinpointer is the ultimate no-brainer for the wine trade”.

Terrible tragedy in the South Seas. Three million people trapped alive.

Apocryphal Headline, New Zealand Listener 1979

On the subject of sparkling wine Cloudy Bay have released the new deluxe brand “Thesaurus”, as they have run out of superlatives to promote their own products.

Wine News Headlines

We've revamped our selection from New Zealand with some biodynamic offerings. *Sato* is a new name in Central Otago. The 2009 vintage was their maiden voyage and a fine wine,,and since then we have worked with their Pinots, Riesling, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris. Now the Satos have bought a parcel of land which they have planted and are farming biodynamically.

Alex Craighead is making the most authentic natural NZ wines in his small winery in Nelson on the South Island. The Kindeli wines with their exotic colourful labels have wonderful verve. Usually made in tank with some whole bunch/carbonic influence, they are exuberantly fruity. The Don wines express the quality of the terroir. Now, we are working with the lovely terroir-driven estate Chardonnays and Pinots.

Te Whare Ra (voted NZ winery of the year in 2014) is our newbie Marlborough estate. Anna and Jason Flowerday have dedicated themselves to making hand-crafted wines at all levels. Most of the fruit is estate and organically farmed. Excellent Sauvignon with lees-contact and a touch of barrel work has more mouthfeel and complexity than the run-of-the-mill Marlborough Savvy, textural Pinot Gris has warmth and spice in abundance. The Riesling D is dry but beautifully balanced. Pinot Noir is well-knit and fruit-driven with a modicum of oak.

“If it would not look too much like showing off, I would tell the reader where New Zealand is.” *Mark Twain*

When asked his opinion of New Zealand: “I find it hard to say, because when I was there it seemed to be shut.”

- *Sir Clement Freud*

SATO ESTATE, YOSHIAKI & KYOKO SATO, Central Otago – Biodynamic methods

Sato Wines was established by Yoshiaki & Kyoko Sato, as a small project in 2009. Based in New Zealand since 2006 they have also worked in traditional winegrowing countries in the last several years, having had experience working with natural winegrowers in France and learning from them forms the core of their winemaking style.

Yoshiaki & Kyoko believe grape vines need to be grown in organic ways – preferably in biodynamic ways. They believe grapes should be simply transformed to wine, with minimum intervention by human hands, chemicals or additives in order to protect the natural microbiological balance in the vineyard and winemaking process, so that the real character of the terroir where the grape vines grow is truly and purely expressed in the wine.

Sato Wines does not have its own vineyard. They purchase grapes from reliable local organic or biodynamic growers in Central Otago that they form long lasting relationships with. Sato produces a dry mineral Riesling and two tiers of Pinot Noir in which demand always outstrips supply.

The Chardonnay is whole bunch pressed slowly with no settling (though the wine was racked), no additions, fermentation starts naturally in older barrels and the wine is kept on lees for 14 months. Bottled with around 15ppm SO₂. This wine was actually made by Kyoko, Yoshi's wife, under his watchful eye. Complex bouquet of toast, honeyed oatmeal, stone fruit and blanched nuts. A natural kind of vibe, oxidative richness; close your eyes and you could be in Jura. Glorious to drink, but not in the usual framework of linear elegance expected from en vogue chardonnay producers; an almost almond milk texture but with a bolt of long, tight acidity lending a steely line through the texture of the wine. Precise stone fruit and citrus flavours – pristine, squeaky fruit from cool climate Otago an anchor. Absolutely refreshing and delicious. Complex.

Entirely natural wine with just 10ppm of sulfur (about a tenth of most wines). The fruit is carefully selected and juice stays in contact with the skins for 3 months. The wine is allowed to slowly macerate in a pretty oxidative environment with very gentle pigeage for light extraction. This is an unusually aromatic wine showing cherry skin, spice, some menthol and rose petal notes. The palate has rich in texture and has some notable tannin grip. Savoury, oxidative notes contrast the vibrancy of the cherry skin fruit and floral components...almost as if a Pinot Gris rose had been aged in a fino sherry cask (if you can imagine that!) Complex and esoteric.

Sourced from specific blocks of the organically certified “Pisa Terrace” Vineyard. Hand-picked and sorted Abel (DRC) and 115 clone Pinot Noir. Wild ferment, open tops, hand / foot plunged. Nothing added or taken away, no fining / filtration just a tiny addition of sulfur at bottling after 18 months in French oak only 10% new. This Pinot shows fragrant purple flowers, lilac and orange blossom. Subtle spice characters, and delicate wild thyme. The palate is very fine and elegant, tannins and just a whisper with the vibrant acidity playing most of the structural role. Focused, elegant and honest.

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| 2022 | SATO RIESLING | W |
| 2022 | SATO RIESLING L'ATYPIQUE | Or |
| 2020 | LA FERME DE SATO SCHISTEUX CHENIN | W |
| 2020 | LA FERME DE SATO LE CHANTE DU VENT CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2020 | LA FERME DE SATO SUR UN NAGE PINOT NOIR | R |

Q: How many wine experts does it take to twist a screwcap on a bottle?

A: Three. One to boom about cork, another to bellyache about stelvins, and a third to have closure on the whole experience.

TE WHARE RA, ANNA & JASON FLOWERDAY, Marlborough – Organic Biogro

Te Whare Ra (TWR), pronounced Te Faré Rha (House of the Sun), is the oldest little winery & vineyard in Marlborough, being first established in 1979 in the sub-region of Renwick. Since 2003 it has been owned and operated by two vigneron – Anna & Jason Flowerday. She's an Aussie from South Australia and he's a Kiwi from Marlborough. Both have wine in their veins literally & metaphorically, and after years of working for other people, they decided to make the leap to doing their own thing.

Anna and Jason firmly believe that biodiversity is the key to maintaining a good vineyard. They plant between the vines and plough alternate rows. To combat pests, they use natural methods such as buckwheat, and fertilize the vineyard using their own home-made composts and manure. In the cellar they practice a hands-off approach as they seek to express the nature of their individual vineyards and sites. The TWR wines are truly hand-made. Everything is hand-picked, hand-sorted and the attention to detail is meticulous. Anna and Jason are dedicated to making delicious authentic wines that showcase the very best of Marlborough not the mass-produced version. "Wines made with cowsh#t not bullsh#t" is their winning maxim.

65% of the grapes for the TWR Sauvignon come from the Awatere Valley and 35% from Renwick. The vineyards are certified organic. Awatere differs from Renwick, having warmer days and cooler nights. All the grapes are hand-harvested and once pressed a large proportion goes to large neutral French oak barrels for the fermentation with a little stainless action for the remainder. This Sauvignon is very elegant and finely proportioned with very good depth of pure gooseberry and passionfruit aromas along with notes of fresh herbs and snow peas. Taut and concentrated, showing mineral elements, the mouth possesses a stylish juiciness with fresh, racy acidity, the wine flowing briskly along a refined phenolic line. A long-ripening season, low yields, a lengthy period on the lees, wood-ageing – proper, pukka (not pucker) Sauvignon!

The fruit for the Riesling D comes from the TWR 'Home Block' in Renwick, vines originally planted in 1979 on clay-loam soils over stones on a dry riverbed. The grapes are hand-picked and hand-sorted. A portion of the wine is whole bunch pressed and fermented slowly at low temperatures in stainless-steel. The nose is refined with very good depth and intensity of pure lime fruit entwined with white florals and a subtle layering of thirst-quenching savoury minerals. The palate is thirst-quenchingly dry with crisp, racy acidity. Flavours of apples emerge and carry with the limes and minerals to a long, elegantly proportioned finish. The D stands for dry by the way.

The Pinot Gris hand-picked and hand-sorted, some parcels given skin contact and the fruit is fermented in stainless-steel tank with 20% in seasoned French oak. The barrel portion undergoing batonnage, and all of the wine is aged on lees. The nose is softly full with delicate and intricate aromas of white stone-fruits, lifted florals, hints of pears and honeysuckle, and a very fine mineral edge. The palate is elegant in proportion with fine phenolic textures providing good linearity. This Pinot Gris has good energy and a balance of richness and freshness.

Toru means three in Māori and this is a blend of three aromatics – Gewurz, Riesling and Pinot Gris. From the stony loam over gravel soil in the home vineyard in Renwick, these varieties are co-fermented in stainless steel tanks with variable amounts of skin contact to confer texture to the aromatics. Mango, citrus and white florals on the nose. Soft peach, creamy texture and a long finish.

The Pinot Noir comes from the TWR 'Home Block' (8 clones) and the 'Rawiri' vineyard in the Omaka Valley (4 clones), all hand-picked and hand-sorted, generally destemmed and fermented with a small portion of whole bunches in open-topped fermenters, the wine spending 14 days on skins post ferment and aged for 11 months in 30% new French oak. Finely concentrated core of dark raspberry and dark-red cherry fruit entwined with subtle herb and mineral nuances, and suggestions of nutty oak. Medium-bodied, the palate is elegantly proportioned with rounded but intensely packed heart of dark raspberry and cherry fruit melded with red florals and subtle herb and mineral nuances.

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| 2023 | TE WHARE RA SAUVIGNON | W |
| 2020 | TE WHARE RA RIESLING D | W |
| 2022 | TE WHARE RA PINOT GRIS | W |
| 2022 | TE WHARE RA TORU WHITE BLEND ~ Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer | W |
| 2020 | TE WHARE RA SV5182 GEWURZTRAMINER | W |
| 2021 | TE WHARE RA SV5182 RIESLING M | W |
| 2018 | TE WHARE RA PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2020 | TE WHARE RA SYRAH | R |

CLOS HENRI, HENRI BOURGEOIS, Marlborough – Organic- certified Biogro, biodynamic practices

Clos Henri is a 96-hectare property purchased in March 2001. The natural, unspoiled land that Clos Henri sits upon drew the attention and admiration of the Bourgeois family who have been farming in Sancerre for ten generations. Historically a sheep station, the virgin land was untouched by the cut of a plough, fertilizers or much human interference.

It was this pristine healthy soil that convinced Jean-Marie Bourgeois and his family that this vineyard would be unequalled in the area, and to start their art, passion and tradition anew in Marlborough. With every intention of maintaining the bio-friendly status of the land, the Bourgeois undertook a lengthy process of reviving the soil by planting nutrient rich legumes and crops to adjust the slight nutrient deficiencies their vines would need prior to the first plantings in August 2001. Planting only six hectares a year, the Clos Henri property will take 12 years to fully transform from farm to vineyard.

The site is unique in that it consists of several soil types – gravels and clays as well as sloping land and hillsides. The gravel is found in Renwick: it's this that contributes to the fame of the region's Sauvignon. The result of ancient rivers this type of soil provides wines with elegance and crispness. The second kind of soil is found in Broadbridge, a greyish-brown clay with ochre tints (indicating a high iron content), appropriate to the cultivation of Pinot Noir. Wines produced here are round with complex aromas and good length. The final soil in Clos Henri, a kind of yellow-grey clay, is to be found on the very steep slopes of Wither where the vines enjoy excellent exposure to the sun. All these soils have only been used for pasture and never exposed to insecticides, herbicides or any other form of chemical treatments. The Bourgeois family are committed to maintain the local biodiversity.

The Sauvignon is matured on the fine lees, and, to conserve the delicious citrus flavours, the wine does not undergo malolactic fermentation. So, Sancerre or Marlborough Sauvignon? Well, it has stunning aromatic complexity and harmonious mineral and fruit nuances as well as a purity and freshness that suggests good ageing potential. It combines gentle passion fruit and citrus blossom characters unusual in New Zealand Sauvignon blanc, with more leanness of texture and complex intensity in the citrus to passion fruit spectrum.

The Pinot Noir is made from hand-harvested grapes. Following a three-week maceration in stainless steel tanks, the wine is fermented in small half-tonne open fermenters with gentle hand plunging to enhance optimum colour and tannin extraction and subsequently matured in French barrels with only 30 % new oak and a light filtration prior to bottling. The style again is French; the primary fruit is suggestive of mocha and red berries, there's fruit concentration and roundness and delightfully harmonious tannins. It has texture and contours as they might say in France.

The Petit Clos wines are excellent mini-mes. These are the younger vines of Clos Henri, made from similarly low yields. Stainless steel all the way for the Sauvignon, whilst the Pinot is aged in 9% new oak (very precise). The former tends towards the grapefruit and tangerine with a hint of lees for structural support, whilst the Pinot has vibrant red fruit and a subtle smokiness.

Ste. Solange is the name of the Marlborough church the Bourgeois family found to relocate to the vineyard site to act as cellar door and office. It has since become both Clos Henri's logo and undisputed heart. This small country church originally from the village of Ward, some 50kms south of Blenheim, was deconsecrated and put up for sale in 2001 by its parishioners. Built in the early 1920's from a New Zealand native timber, Rimu, the chapel was lovingly well kept and survived its move to the vineyard over both the Awatere River and the Wither Hills.

The Bourgeois named the chapel "Ste. Solange" after their patron saint of the vineyards and in the memory of Henri Bourgeois's wife, Solange Bourgeois. Ste. Solange also acts as a tie to the Bourgeois' domaine in France and the logo by which it is recognized in Sancerre – the image of the pointed spire of the church in Chavignol, the village in which the estate is located.

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| 2022 | CLOS SAUVIGNON ESTATE SAUVIGNON ORGANIC | W |
| 2022 | CLOS HENRI OTIRA SINGLE VINEYARD SAUVIGNON ORGANIC | W |
| 2021 | CLOS HENRI ESTATE PINOT NOIR ORGANIC | R |
| 2021 | CLOS HENRI WAIMUNGA PINOT NOIR ORGANIC | R |

RUAKANA, Marlborough

| | | |
|------|-------------------|---|
| 2022 | RUAKANA SAUVIGNON | W |
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SELECTION MASSALE, DAN GILLETT, Marlborough ~ Organic methods

Selection Massale is run by Dan Gillett, founder of New Zealand's foremost organic and natural wine distribution company, Wine Diamonds. Started in 2022, with fruit sourced from various organic vineyards across New Zealand and Australia, Dan set out to produce consistently delicious, well made, organic wines that best represent variety, region, and vineyard. "Selection Massale" is the French term used to describe the traditional method of vineyard propagation and involves selecting particular vines within an established vineyard and using this as the genetic stock to plant a new one. Before the widespread use of single clone planting, it was not uncommon for considerable genetic diversity to exist within an old vineyard. Protecting this diversity is the reason that the process continues today. All vineyards have a unique character, and thus Selection Massale was born; a selection of unique wines from unique vineyards from around New Zealand and Australia.

The Chardonnay fruit was sourced across the Brawn, Kennedy Road and Orchard Vineyards in Wairau Valley, Marlborough, New Zealand. Soils are mostly ancient alluvial riverbed with wind-blown loess and some clay. Massale selection of clones Mendoza, 95 and 6.

Manual harvest from each vineyard over two weeks, the grapes were kept whole bunch and pressed directly into (French) oak – 225L barriques and 500L puncheons, approx. 5% new. Ambient, wild fermentation followed by maturation in same vessels with time spent on lees. The wines are racked off fine lees, blended, and left to settle/mature in stainless steel. A rich, textural Chardonnay with great concentration. A brilliant, pale lemon colour. Aromas of vanilla, toasted chestnut, and sea spray on the finish. The palate has tension and concentration of citrus (sweet lemon curd, key lime) while the lees ageing contributes to mouthfeel and persistence of flavour with a moderated oak influence.

The Pinot Gris was sourced from the Giffords Creek vineyard in the lower Wairau Valley in Marlborough, New Zealand. The vineyard is BioGro-certified organic and the soils there are mostly ancient alluvial riverbed with wind-blown loess. From a mass selection of clones. Fruit was destemmed and whole-bunch pressed into stainless steel, whereupon it underwent a cold fermentation on fine lees to retain purity of fruit and give the wine its overall 'focus'. Light gold in colour, brimming with citrus, stone fruit and just a hint of toasted almond, the palate of this Pinot Gris is light, dry and refreshing but the flavours are concentrated, and the finish is saline and persistent. Overall, the wine is balanced and nuanced.

The Pinot Noir was sourced entirely from the Quartz Reef Vineyard in Bendigo, Central Otago, New Zealand, certified both organic (BioGro #5569) and biodynamic (Demeter #150). Soils are ancient alluvial riverbed, heavy in schist and quartz. The fruit was hand harvested in four separate passages from the steep slopes of the hillside vineyard in Bendigo a over two weeks. period. 50% whole cluster fermented with the fruit macerated in stainless steel tanks for three weeks with gentle cap management. The wine is matured in a 50-50 combination of aged French oak barriques and stainless steel and is bottled unfiltered and unfined. Brilliant, crimson red in appearance. Sweet, ripe red berry fruits with a softened palate owing to maturation in both aged French oak and stainless steel. Supple mouthfeel with plush, dense fruit weight, revealing many layers and a depth of flavour. Youthful and approachable now, though will gain complexity

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| 2023 | SELECTION MASSALE PINOT GRIS | W |
| 2022 | SELECTION MASSALE CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2023 | SELECTION MASSALE PINOT NOIR | R |

ALEX CRAIGHEAD WINES, JOSEFINA VENTURINO & ALEX CRAIGHEAD, Nelson – Organic (certified Biogro), biodynamic practices

Alex Craighead and Josefina Venturino are establishing a reputation in the natural wine world. They have settled on a new vineyard located in Upper Moutere in Nelson. This particular vineyard has been certified organic since 1997 and as such is one of the oldest organic vineyards in New Zealand.

Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Syrah are grown here. The organic regime involves using sulphur, seaweed, compost, bat guano, and copper (only when absolutely necessary) to maintain the health of their vines, there are trees in the vineyard, a creek that runs by it and wild cover crop (particularly clover) that help to fix the nitrogen in the soil. Early in the season neighbouring sheep are allowed to roam the vines, mow the grass and nibble the stray shoots. Alex also purchases fruit from a couple of organic growers in the region including old vines (for New Zealand) Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. There is another label called The Don. The idea here is to illustrate the difference of the terroir from Nelson and Martinborough, the Nelson soils being all Moutere clays which are the oldest and poorest soils in New Zealand, whereas the Martinborough vineyards are from old free-draining river gravels. The wines are made the same way with just the sites changing.

The Nelson wines are now made from Alex Craighead's organically certified home block in the Upper Moutere valley. The rolling hills where the vines are planted help to create more variability and complexity in the grapes. The region has the highest sunshine hours in New Zealand and has in excess of 1000mm of rain per annum. Being closer to the sea creates a temperature buffering effect with less range in temperature resulting in more pronounced fruit in the wines.

Alex has been focusing on his vineyards ensuring maximal biodiversity. Winemaking is equally exacting. Alex may be making natural wines, but his approach is anything but laissez-faire. He creates a pied de cuve which he can start the ferments with. He allows plenty of oxygenation during fermentation to prevent reduction, and then uses CO2 to protect the wine from unwanted bacteria. He occasionally racks the juice off the solids and then returns it.

In an age of manipulation and science these wines are a product of the "unlearning" of much of what Alex was taught in his studies and work experiences. These are "living" wines and will evolve from every tasting.

The Kindeli labels (and the labels are exotic!) have proliferated and Alex now makes around 8 per vintage.

The Kindeli Blanco is Chardonnay (40%) and Sauvignon (60%) from three parcels in Nelson. A tiny amount is fermented carbonically, the rest is destemmed, and a portion is fermented on skins for 10 days. Fermentation is with native yeasts and ambient in a mixture of amphora and stainless tanks and aged in same for a further nine months on the lees, whereupon it is bottled by gravity without filtration or fining or any added sulphur.

The Kindeli Tinto is an intriguing mix of 90% Pinot Noir and 5% Syrah and 5% Petit Verdot. The Pinot Noir comes from a couple of vineyards, the Syrah from Moutere clay. There is skin contact – 5-12 days, carbonic maceration and whole bunch pressing employed in the winemaking. Really fun cloudy red wine prickling with juicy fruit – reminds one of youthful Crozes-Hermitage. This is all done in tank.

Luna Nueva is a new wine, being a field blend of 40% Viognier, 30% Pinot Blanc, 30% Pinot Gris. The grapes are destemmed, macerated for 12 hours and fermented naturally in amphora and aged for nine months. As with his other wines, no sulphur is added.

Luna Llena is made from a field blend of Cabernet Franc (40%), Syrah (50%), and Petit Verdot (10%). The grapes receive only a four-day maceration and are mostly destemmed for fermentation in amphora. The wine is then pressed off for élevage in amphora.

The styles are the wines are evolving. Although fruit is to the fore, Alex also wants to celebrate the age of the vines and the quality of the Moutere clay soils. He is reducing the carbonic, whole bunch element, but equally ensuring that there is no unnecessary extraction. The wines have a gentle phenolic quality and texture from skin contact and natural malolactic.

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| 2020 | KINDELI NELSON BIANCO ~ Chardonnay, Sauvignon | W |
| 2019 | THE DON NELSON CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2018 | THE DON HOME BLOCK CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2019 | THE DON NELSON PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2018 | THE DON BARN BLOCK PINOT NOIR | R |

What is man, when you come to think upon him, but a minutely set, ingenious machine
 for turning with infinite artfulness, the red wine of Shiraz into urine?

Isak Dinesen – *The Dreamers*

Pin by thy lugs ye figjams and mollydookers cos I'm stoked to announce some serious true blue grog.

You'll have noticed an Australian-shaped aching emptiness in the heart of our list.** This constitutes ambivalence to one of the greatest wine-producing countries. On the one hand is an industry dominated by massive global corporations making perfectly acceptable bulk wine for the supermarkets. The provenance of these wines is irrelevant; the price point is king. Then there are the Braggadocio wines, swaggering with bold flavours, flaunting incendiary levels of alcohol. Finally, there are a number of growers who appreciate that the best way of expressing the regional identity of their wines is to work the vines with great understanding and to diminish the number of obtrusive interventions in the winery.

Terroir is not just about the soil but, philosophically speaking, the way the finished wine bears the imprint of the place it came from and the nature of the vintage. Barossa has indeed its individual sense of place and particular style of wine. In Australia, in particular, there is a kind of prevailing determinism whereby winemakers desire correctness and maximise interventions and so manipulate their wine towards a precise profile. Profiling is taking a product of nature and gearing it to what a group of critics thinks or a perception of what consumers might be comfortable drinking. What they call consistency, others might call homogeneity. Besides all sort of chemical interventions it is the use of oak as the final lacquering touch that often tips these wines into sweetened stupefaction. They become so big they are essentially flavour-inert.

Enjoying wine is about tasting the flavours behind the smoke and mirrors, or in this case, beyond the toasty oak and alcohol. It is not that these components are bad per se, just that they are overdone and throw the wine out of balance. The wines of Barossa have natural power and richness; to add more to them is to, in the words of Shakespeare "throw perfume on a violet". Having said that I think there is generally a more judicious approach to oak in the New World than previously. It's also true to say that we have witnessed the emergence of wines from cooler climate regions in Oz (Mornington, Tasmania, Yarra, Eden and Clare Valley, Great Southern, Adelaide etc), where the winemakers realise that aggressive oak would mask, if not emasculate, the subtler aspects of the fruit in their wines. This is a positive trend. There is still, however, a tendency to look at super-ripeness as a license to layer on the flavours. A Napa Valley producer once told me proudly that his Chardonnay (14.5%) went through malolactic, lees-stirring and a high proportion of barrique. A transformation from nondescript duckling to ugly swan? The Syrah/Shiraz dichotomy has been mulled over by a few New Zealand growers who are trying to come to grips with the grape. They call their wines "Syrah" to (and I quote) "differentiate it from the typical porty Australian Shiraz".

There are too many unnecessary interventions in winemaking. We keep talking about winemaking as an end rather than considering the winemaker as a kind of chef. The good cook examines the quality of the ingredient and thinks: "How best can I bring out its essential flavour?" The more interventionist, meretricious chef thinks: "That's a good piece of meat/fish – it can take a really big/complex sauce and a lot of seasoning". A lot of wines lack charm and balance because they are being "made" to win prizes at international shows. That's a style issue because it is about creating a wine to conform to "perceived standards".

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ENOLOGIST

- I was discovered inside a case of free Gallo wine samples at Heathrow Airport.
- A Brand Blag?!
- I believe it was a case of Chardonnay destined for a restaurant in Belgravia.
- Mr Worthless, the grape variety is irrelevant. I will not consent to my niece conducting a relationship with a supermarket trolley or marrying into a wine lake.
- My intentions are entirely honourable. I believe in minimal intervention.
- My dear sir, doing nothing may be the natural thing, but nature itself is entirely unnatural. We should avoid contact with it at all costs.
- Do you not enjoy the taste of wine, Lady Brandall?
- It is so much better not to enjoy wine. One can then boast about one's disappointment. Besides all pleasures are fleeting. My disappointment invariably begins the moment the cork is pulled.
- I would venture to disagree. I believe that one does not taste wine. It tastes us.
- I'm sure, Mr Worthless that is a dreadfully modern thing to say. However, it does not avoid the fact that the wine you make has no purpose other than as a medicinal cure for fainting fits. Unless you can furnish me with evidence of a noble viticultural lineage, I must ask you to cease paying court to my niece.

To be continued....

The eucalyptus tongue-down-yer-throat of Cabernet, the oak prisons of Chardonnay,
the carpeted corridors of Shiraz and the port lakes of liqueur Muscat?

Or...

A glass of Shiraz on a Friday evening
Looking down from the observatory
The sun is melting in a wine dark ocean
It brings out the Australian in me.

Al Stewart – *The Shiraz Shuffle*

Father Ted (*hunched over picnic basket to conceal what he is doing*): Okay, Father, I'm just getting ready for the picnic.
Accidentally clinks two bottles of wine together as he puts them in the basket.

Father Jack: Drink!

Father Ted: Oh no, Father, it's just sparkling lemonade.

Father Jack (*with a triumphant leer*): Jacob's Creek Chardonnay 1991!

Father Ted: You can tell that just from the sound of the bottles?!

Father Jack: Drink! Drink!

Victoria

“Coonawarrifying” Wine – The New Terroirism

Although novelty may be as old as the world itself everyone in the wine trade is constantly aware of the importance of reinvention and relabeling. Wine, as a business, is less concerned with what goes on inside the bottle and more with the notion of pushing product. The notion of terroir, for example, has been hijacked by many people who wish to give credibility to their product. Producers, regions, even countries are highly conscious of image and the necessity to talk up individuality in a competitive global market. In Australia, for example, there is a move away from the well-trodden, well-marketed varietal path towards the notion of promoting regionalism, the glimmerings of a foundation of an appellation contrôlée, encouraging quality wines. Each country wishes to establish discrete terroirs, to differentiate between commercial swill and high-quality wine, insofar that the region itself, Coonawarra, for instance, due to the particular properties of the soil, is recognised as a denominator of quality, a form of high-level branding. Terroir is subtler than this for within a region there is a sub-region, therein a microclimate, a row of vines, some grapes, a grower's personality, a range of vinification options and a singular cuvée of a wine from a particular vintage. Regionality is thus not the whole truth. Take Chablis, a classic example of a wine that does not need to be marketed by its grape variety. Not all wines from Chablis are, however, made in the same way – one *vigneron* may use new oak, another stainless steel, another old oak – and taking into the account the variables imposed by nature, weather conditions, the aspect of the slope, the geological composition of the soil, the yeasts, we can see how a multiplicity of different wines of different styles may derive even from one region. Furthermore, there is a dilution of terroir – just as Chablis widened its remit with the creation of Petit Chablis AOC, so Coonawarra as a region began to encompass land outside the fabled *Terra Rossa* soil. Given how arbitrary this all this it would be useful to discover a form of categorisation that considers what the wine actually tastes like. *What thus defines the wine is the accumulation and aggregation of innumerable details; what really defines it further is its taste or, more precisely, our taste-response to it.* Which leads to the second point: wine needs to be marketed more imaginatively to achieve a truer sense of what is in the bottle. As Jean-Luc Godard observed: “To me style is the outside of content and content the inside of style, like the outside and inside of the human body”. We should never lose track that we cannot define the essence of wine any more than we can describe a person, but we can describe its most obvious characteristics and say how it affects us.

STANTON & KILLEEN, Rutherglen

Australians are basically a bunch of loudmouth drunks, but I once met a group near Peera-Peera in the southern Australian outback who were the complete opposite. Not only were they quiet and reserved, but they also happened to be vegetarian teetotallers. However, before I had a chance to speak to them, they hopped away into the bush.

Kelvin Birdseye

Rutherglen lies in undulating countryside, where the hills of Australia's Great Dividing Range meet fertile plains of the Murray Valley. Hilltops of quartz gently fall away to bands of well-drained red loam on the lower slopes and it is here the vines of Rutherglen's great fortified wines are grown. Rutherglen has a Mediterranean climate, with long, dry summers stretching lazily into warm, golden autumns – ideal for ripening grapes to sugar levels way up on the Baume scale. Fifteen to seventeen degrees Baume is normal; an exceptionally good autumn can produce the astonishing levels of twenty degrees Baume, and beyond. Rows of huge, venerable casks have matured countless vintages of muscat, and a huge range of red and white table wines at Rutherglen – an ideal area for producing a full range of still table wines and fortified dessert wines. Classic Rutherglen Muscat – A maturing style blended from selected parcels of Muscat, to impart greater levels of richness and complexity, with the beginnings of 'rancio' characters produced from the maturation in wood. This luscious solera style fortified wine displays medicinal flavours of toffee, Seville orange, cocoa bean and coffee.

NV

STANTON & KILLEEN RUTHERGLEN LIQUEUR MUSCAT – ½ bottle

Sw

MOMENTO MORI, DANE JOHNS, Heathcote – Organic methods

Sourced from the Chalmers vineyard in Heathcote. New Zealander Dane Johns (who once worked for Bill Downie) has blended equal parts Vermentino, Fiano and Malvasia with 10% Moscato Giallo to create the latest edition of 'Staring at the Sun'. After three and a half months on skins and no additions whatsoever, this time around the fruit has imparted rich florals, some charcuterie and fleshy orange elements. A little musk, ginger spice and savoury grip marks the complex finale. The fruit for this wine was grown by the Chalmers Family Vineyard on the Mt Camel ranges in northern Heathcote. Dane works closely with them to achieve the quality of fruit they require each year. In turn they are meticulous in the vineyard, using organic viticulture practices and have decades of knowledge growing alternative varieties in Australia. All of Dane's wines are as hand-made as can be. Small ferments, wild yeast, no new oak, no mechanical pumps, no fining, no filtration, no additions. All his wines are full of character, freshness and purity, and above all else, they are alive. The Incline is from Heathcote and is Paiko Selection variety planted on own rootstock, a rarity in Australia. 60% whole bunch, eight-week fermentation in stainless steel then gently pressed to old Hungarian oak hogshead barrels. This is a medium bodied and lively Syrah probably due to the vine age and has beautifully integrated tannins. Lots of blue fruits, good acidity and loads of complexity. This wine comes in at 9.3% Alc and has amazing depth and structure for something so light in alcohol! For the Nosiola the fruit was split into three small stainless-steel tanks and each vinified in different ways before being blended back together 8 months later. The thinking behind this is to create extra complexity and to balance out any ferment style dominance in the finished wine. The resulting wine is complex, pure and structured while having an amazing finesse about it. It has notes of green apple, olive brine and spiced pear with an almost electric lemon and lime acidity. There were no additions of any kind made to the wine, including no SO2 at any stage.

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| 2021 | BIANCO | Or |
| 2021 | FISTFUL OF FLOWERS ~ Moscato, Vermentino | Or |
| 2021 | STARING AT THE SUN | Or |
| 2019 | GIVE UP THE GHOST ~ Greco | Or |
| 2021 | MOUNT CAMEL RANGE ROSE | Ro |
| 2021 | RACK AND RUIN | Ro |
| 2020 | THE INCLINE | R |
| 2020 | ROSSO | R |
| 2018 | THE WANDERER (PINOT NOIR) | R |
| 2022 | BAG OF BONES PIQUETTE | Pique |

FREE RUN JUICE

If a wine does what it says on the label then these varietals are like sitting at a dining table whilst a crazy Samurai slices bunches of grapes to liberate the juice into your wine glass.

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|------|--------------------|---|
| 2023 | SAMURAI CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | SAMURAI SHIRAZ | R |

PATRICK SULLIVAN, GIPPSLAND, Victoria – *Biodynamic conversion*

Born of the many rural regions of Victoria, Patrick had a nomadic childhood. His first vinous whiff probably came whilst climbing the Cambrian hills north of central Victoria on a farm his family once owned. All grown up and married he lives and makes wine on their own farm in the Strezleki ranges, Gippsland, Australia. The wines are inspired by emotion, a moment in time and a sense of place.

There is an emphasis on cool-climate wines. The Ada Chardonnay is situated on volcanic soils, the Manilla vineyard having the benefit of being in its very own natural Clos at 350m in elevation. This provides protection from the elements creating a slightly more humid and stable environment. A Chardonnay of great power depth and clarity. A pure, rare and pristine beast its palate sings long and fast. Baw Baw Shire Chardonnay is a blend of grapes from vines on both north and south facing slopes at the

Bull Swamp Vineyard. The south-facing component always gives the strength and shoulders of the wine whereas the north-facing element confers the finesse. Grapes are harvested by hand with rigorous sorting, before whole cluster pressing to a new 2000l oval vat. Ferment proceeds with indigenous yeast for 10 days.

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| 2022 | ADA RIVER CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | WOORI YALLOCK CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2021 | BULL SWAMP CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | BLACK SANDS CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2021 | GIPPSLAND PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2021 | MILLSTREAM PINOT NOIR | R |

JUMPIN JUICE, XAVIER GOODRIDGE, Gippsland, Victoria

"Gee Dub: Australian Muscadet! Pure, crisp and raw. Destemmed, seven days on skins, then pressed straight to tank. It tastes as if the Bathurst 1000 was raced around the streets of Bondi. 100% Sémillon the Australian way. Grown biodynamically since inception in the ancient soils of southern Margaret River. Farmed by Mike Slegers who is one of the great unsung grape growers in Australia. 12.8% alc/vol." The wine is packed full of citrus and zesty acidity. White peach and lemon zest on the nose with flavours of juicy pear and apricot on the slightly textured and racy palate. The wine is packed full of citrus and zesty acidity. White peach and lemon zest on the nose with flavours of juicy pear and apricot on the slightly textured and racy palate. Half Full Red: Always about optimism. Life's great and as is this wine... always. Now in its 8th year and countless incarnations.

Bright, delicious and incredibly juicy. This is the best version of this wine to date. Farmed by us in the Baw Baw Shire. An absolute fruit salad with the slight majority being early picked Shiraz, destemmed and held at 0c for a week, then pressed. 30% white grapes added back for tension. It's basically a trial of our trial rows. All biodynamically farmed." "Sunsets": Sometimes we just want to drink Juice. Sometimes we just want a bit of alchemy. Skin fermented Sauvignon Blanc (80%), Cabernet Sauvignon (20%). One month on skins, then pressed to tank. The colour of summer and the scent of a holiday. Crunchy, lush, fruit bomb crazy. Margaret River grown and farmed by the master Mike Slegers. Biodynamic. Delicious! 12.8%alc" - Patrick Sullivan "Half Full Yellow" is made from Sauvignon, whole bunch, carbonic, skin ferment (one month), ripe, tropical, pineapples and cream. Grown in southern Margaret River.

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| 2023 | JUMPING JUICE RIESLING | W |
| 2022 | JUMPING JUICE CHENIN | W |
| 2022 | JUMPING JUICE SUNSETS ~, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet | Or |
| 2023 | JUMPING JUICE ORANGE ~ Vermentino, Fiano | Or |
| 2022 | JUMPING JUICE HAGGIS | Or |
| 2022 | JUMPING JUICE HALF FULL RED ~ Shiraz, Viognier, Semillon | R |

XAVIER WINE, XAVIER GOODRIDGE, GIPPSLAND, Victoria – Organic methods

Xavier Goodridge used to work at Bress, a vineyard and sustainable mixed farm situated just 90 minutes from Melbourne creating fine wines, ciders & produce using biodynamic practices from a variety of regions in Victoria, before starting out on his own.

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|------|-------------------|---|
| 2022 | PAPA PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2021 | HENTY PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2021 | MAFFRA PINOT NOIR | R |

CASTAGNA, JULIAN CASTAGNA, Beechworth – Biodynamic certified

Having purchased a few acres of grapes, and bought a little bit of fruit, Julian Castagna made his first vintage of wine in 1998 with the help of neighbour Rick Kinzbrunner, of Giaconda. Twelve years on, Castagna has more than arrived. He is thoughtful and thought-provoking, interesting and argumentative, a vigneron's vigneron.

With his son Adam working with him in his tiny winery behind the house, and the farm settled comfortably into its biodynamic routine, Julien Castagna seems focused on fine-tuning his wines while at the same time playing around with the raw materials he has on hand. Castagna currently produces two levels of wine. The Adam's Rib label, featuring a red blend and a white blend, is run by his son as an odd hybrid between a second label (for slightly lower quality juice) and a separate project altogether. The Castagna line of wines contains a white, a rosé styled after the pink wines of Tavel, and several reds, including a Sparkling Shiraz, which is a style of wine that Castagna adores.

The winemaking at Castagna is pretty much what you would expect from a tiny biodynamic outfit that produces 1800 cases of wine across two labels. Everything is done by hand, with very little electricity. Hand harvesting leads to gentle crushing of whole clusters and some destemmed grapes. Fermentations take place at their own speed with native yeasts, pressing is done by hand with a basket press, and the wines are never fined or filtered. New oak is generally kept to a minimum.

The results of Castagna's approach truly speak for themselves. The wines range from very good to tremendous, and clearly reflect both the soil and the season in which they are made as well as the vision of the person who has made them. Castagna is clearly making wines of philosophy and of place, and succeeding admirably, even as his wines defy the stereotypes of Australian wine as big, over-oaked, fruit bombs. The Castagna Vineyard is situated at an altitude of 500 metres five-and-a-half kilometres outside the beautiful town of Beechworth in Northeast Victoria, high in the foothills of the Australian Alps. The soil consists mainly of decomposed granitic-loam on a base of clay. The climate is distinctly Mediterranean with hot days and cool nights during the important part of the growing season. The land is farmed biodynamically, using Rudolf Steiner's biodynamic principles, because Julian believes it is the best way to achieve optimum fruit quality that best expresses its terroir. The vineyard is hand-pruned and the fruit is hand-picked and cropped at a bit less than two tons per acre. The winemaking is very traditional using only the vineyard's indigenous yeast with minimal interference. Elevage varies between 18-20 months using only the very best, tight grain French oak available, about half of which is new each year. The intention is to make, as simply as possible, wine which is an expression of the place where it is grown.

The colour of the Genesis Syrah is dark plum to magenta yet still somehow transparent. A full-throttle wine of depth and complexity. It smells of cassis and spice with enchanting aromas of cedar, sweet black pepper, freshly dampened earth and vanilla pod – yet restrained. The palate is rich, concentrated, deep – dark and mysterious with fine powdery tannins and a lovely drying extract. A subtle, delicate floral aspect lingers with the finely powdered tannins on the finish. The graphite-like character and the fresh acidity ensures the wine finishes long, dry, and spicy, always alive.

Un Segreto (Sangiovese/Shiraz) is deep crimson. The nose is of exotic spice, liquorice, and tar over black cherry, cedary wood and earthy extract. The palate has an earthy, black-fruited impact with textural richness coming from the fine tannins. It is taut, fine and long with vibrant acidity. It has a middle pallet which is long, clean, with a savoury finish. Overall, it is dry and savoury with lovely earthy elements, deliciously rich, but avoiding sweetness. "Deep crimson-purple floral and herbal, highly aromatic, blackcurrant and dark plum with ethereal savoury and spice complexity that includes flashes of fennel, leather, black olive, cherry, anise and mint. Savoury and complex medium-full boded blend of 60% Syrah and 40% Sangiovese, the long and structured core of tangy fruit shows similar flavours to the nose, structured by a spine of firm acidity and handsome minerality, spicy roast coffee oak with finely grained but mouth-filling tannins." Adam's Rib is a blend of 70% Nebbiolo, 30% Shiraz.

Medium garnet in the glass, this wine has a nose of cherry and dried flowers. On the palate it is soft and delicate, with a very nice floral aspect and raspberry and cherry flavours with light tannins that emerge after several mouthfuls. Subtle and elegant. A recent move at Castagna has been the purchase of two egg-shaped, food-grade concrete tanks, each holding 900 litres. They are, he says, 'the most perfect shape in physics', and in the winery reduce pressure on the lees and deposit the lees over a larger surface area which, he believes, will eliminate the need for batonnage. Castagna believes that these vessels will allow him to make eggs-emplary wines (I have more where that came from).

| | | |
|------|-----------------------|---|
| 2021 | INGENUE VIOGNIER | W |
| 2019 | BEECHWORTH CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2021 | ADAM'S RIB RED | R |
| 2018 | GENESIS SYRAH | R |
| 2018 | LA CHIAVE | R |
| 2018 | UN SEGRETO | R |

At yet another of those conferences where the audience is harangued for not being globally ambitious the newly appointed head of Fozzies laid out his blueprint for world domination.

“I believe that we need to create a brand that brings Australian wine to life”, he said pulling a switch that delivered a current of 30,000 volts into the twitching behemoth that is the Australian wine industry. “We must generate”, he continued, flicking another switch, “a real, clear and solid set of messages whatever they may be as opposed to a mythical, cloudy and gaseous stream of innuendo and half-baked nostrums”.

“The Asian consumer markets are expanding all the time: from Mongol hordes to Tibetan monks the growth potential is unbelievable. The trouble is these ockers couldn’t even point to Australia on a map if they were just being shown a map of Australia.

“The wine blokes on our bloody island need to stop bleating like boomers playing didgeridoos, start behaving like true blues and sell God’s own grog flat out like a lizard drinking.”

He further rebuked the Australian wine industry: “Things are so crook in Tallarook that your chooks may turn into emus and kick your shithouse door down...You bludgers have got to do some hard yakka until beer o’clock. Our vino should be numero uno in the whole wide. Those Ruskies are one stubbie short of a sixpack if they don’t give a xxxx about Brand Oz.”

He spreads his arms wide. “My message is simple. Go forth and multiply your sales.”

GENTLE FOLK, GARETH & RAINBO BELTON, Adelaide Hills – *Biodynamic methods*

A love of wine, food and growing things eventually led Gareth and Rainbo Belton away from their former careers involving scuba gear and the study of seaweed. Having fallen in love with the gastronomy and the people of the Adelaide Hills, they set up shop in the Basket Range to make the wines that they liked to drink, and thus work organically and biodynamically in the vines, and with as little intervention as possible in the winery. They don’t like to define their styles or wine making techniques, just make wine in the way they feel is right for the grapes and season, and with maximum drinkability and enjoyment in mind. Crushability is the name of the game. The Sauvignon Blanc from Gareth and Rainbo’s original Scary Gully vineyard is now gone but fortunately they managed to find a special site just close by. The Cottell Family Vineyard is a 1.1ha block of relatively old vines in the Summertown/Ashton valley that is home to many a great vineyard. The soil is clay over schist with seams of quartz and ironstone. Being north-facing on gentle slopes and in one of the coldest regions in South Australia (at 600 metres above sea level), makes for a wine with generosity but maintaining a good acid spine and produces Sauvignon with less of the grassy, green flavours and more of the juicy, succulent summer fruits.

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| 2022 | VIN DE SOFA ~ Sangiovese, Pinot, Syrah, Merlot | R |
| 2022 | RAINBOW JUICE ~ Gewurz, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Syrah, Sauvignon | R |

COMMUNE OF BUTTONS, JASPER BUTTONS Adelaide Hills – *Biodynamic methods*

The Commune of Buttons is in the Basket Range on a property called ‘Fenglen’ with 150 years of agricultural history. Its 70 acres fills an undulating hidden valley with slopes of all aspects to the sun. The 3.5 hectares of vineyards are a mix of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Nebbiolo planted between 1993 and 1995. The vineyards have been managed organically for the last 10 growing seasons and a program of regenerative pruning has begun to ensure the vines have a healthy future. These wines speak of a maturation of attention to detail in the winemaking and purpose at the commune, and for the hard work of the many hands that have been used in their making. From manual pruning in winter and spring to the hand harvesting and bottling at the cellar, these wines have been made by real people coming together with a shared love of agriculture, wine, and friendship!

| | | |
|------|----------------------|----|
| 2021 | CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2021 | ABC CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2021 | MACERATED CHARDONNAY | Or |
| 2021 | PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2021 | GLORIA PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2022 | BASKETOLO NEBBIOLO | R |

"A return to inspiration, pure instinct, the poet's only reason – by means of poetry a man more rapidly approaches the cutting edge that the philosopher and the mathematician turn away from silence."

- Lorca

By the same rationale one might exalt the intuitive approach of the traditional winemaker who allows nature to be the inspiration behind the wine. We codify and rationalise things excessively until they are reduced to a digestible blandness, or as Wordsworth once wrote, "Our meddling intellect/Misshapes the beauteous forms of things/We murder to dissect". Great winemaking, like any proper farming, lies in allowing (and helping) nature to express itself; not in destroying or compensating for the original product through a profligate zeal to make something clean or commercial.

JAUMA, JAMES ERSKINE, MCLAREN VALE, South Australia – Biodynamic methods

"I love cooking, music, drawing and vinification as each of these sensual activities I can do on my own or share with family and friends to create tangible, visible and audible representations of the spirit behind the world which forms me." So says James Erskine, brains and brawn behind Jauma (the Catalan version of James), and Natural Theory Selection conspirator.

Each of the vineyards he works with is harvested by hand using only the most sophisticated of grape analysis instruments to select the time of harvest – the senses; no Ph meters or Baume refractometry, here, my friends. His primary passion is working with Grenache (Pinot of the south!) from the McLaren Vale sub-appellation Blewitt Springs but given that he lives in the Adelaide hills he also pays homage to, not Catalonia, but a few of the more interesting growers he has encountered there and produced a couple of locally grown wines. He says that he feels very lucky to have been able to set up a cellar in one of the original, basket range sandstone buildings built in 1841 just around the corner from his family home which formerly housed the Crammond family's Jam Factory. No quips about jammy Barossa reds here. In the cellar, all ferments are wild and each vineyard's wine is made without the addition of sulphur, enzymes, fining agents, acid or tannins. None of the wines are filtered or fined and no sulphur was added until bottling when a minimal addition is made to give James the confidence to ship his wines interstate and internationally. The cellar has multiple stories, so he is able to work using gravity rather than pumps. By trusting his own palate in the cellar rather than technical instruments he is able to follow and guide the will of each vineyard, the aim being to produce wines that capture both the essence of each vineyard and "my own personal, creative energies".

Danby (Grenache, Mataro, Syrah) is about fun, slurpable drinking and as the label depicts, leaves you feeling warm inside and keen for chat with that stranger down at the end of the bar. The Grenache comes from both the Wood and Waite vineyard (located, respectively, at the top and bottom of Blewitt Springs) while the Mataro comes from Mark Jeismann's Willunga vineyard. Each of the components of this wine was fermented individually in barrels with their heads removed and no sulphur was added until bottling.

Wood Vineyard was planted fifteen years ago by retired civil engineer Ralph Wood and assisted by daughter Fiona. This vineyard is not for the light-hearted, according to James. David Gartelman introduced him to the Woods, knowing he was interested in working with smart growers. Harvesting this vineyard with the Woods and their picking team he could not believe the flintiness of the site. "Every berry I put in my mouth reminded me of licking fire-flints as a child whilst exploring Aboriginal middens near my family's farm in Beachport SA. Harvesting a few bunches, I was not too sure if I was harvesting Grenache or some wily mutant, the rachii (stem of the grape bunch) were thick, short and gnarly and the grape skins had very little colour but the fruit intensity was ka-boom. Fermenting this wine was a bit like peeling an onion, every week into this my last wine to press off for the vintage I became more and more confused and, in the end, just handed over the reins totally to the Rachii god and did what I was told. This is not Grenache; this is one of the greatest examples of terroir I have seen in my backyard."

Blewitt Springs (dry-farmed Grenache) Ascension is produced from the east-facing side of the vineyard i.e., those grapes which only see the morning sun and therefore produce a wine with less leathery/spicy character and more floral dimension. Ascension refers to the rising morning sun and the etheric lift of the wine. This wine was fermented in a five-year-old puncheon with the head removed with plenty of whole bunch adding to its sinewy structure.

| | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|----|
| 2022 | JAUMA FUJISAN PET NAT CHENIN | Sp |
| 2022 | JAUMA 1000 FIRES CHENIN ARNEIS | W |
| 2022 | ORIGINS ARNEIS | Or |
| 2022 | SOMEWHERE ON ANOTHER HILL | W |
| 2022 | JAUMA LIKE RAINDROPS GRENACHE | R |
| 2022 | JAUMA TIKKA SHIRAZ GRENACHE | R |
| 2022 | JAUMA FAIRYGARTEN SHIRAZ GRENACHE | R |

*I met a blogger from an antique land
 Who said: `Two nasty unlabelled bottles of oakjuice
 Stand on the table. Near them, at the bar,
 Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
 And wrinkled lips, and droop limp-wristed hand,
 Tell that its owner well those fashions read
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless wines
 The hand that mocked them and the tongue that is dead,
 And on the bottle's glass surface these words appear --
 "My name is Ozzie-Chardonandias, thing of things:
 Drink of my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
 Nothing, no flavour remains. Round the decay
 Of those colossal oak wines, boundless and bare
 The lone and level blandness stretches far away.'*

KARRI VINEYARD, MARGARET RIVER, Western Australia – Biodynamic (not certified)

Karri is the aboriginal name for the *Eucalyptus Diversicolor*, and Karri forests only occur in this part of Western Australia.

This is a project of Les Caves de Pyrene and Xavier Goodridge to make terroir-driven natural wines from organic and biodynamic fruit. The location is the Karridale sub-region of the southern Margaret River. This vineyard is located right on the coast on Calgardup Brook Road only a few hundred metres from the Indian Ocean. This brook runs straight down to the ocean. This maritime element has an influence in the flavour profile of the fruit. It's also quite windy in this location and if there is good swell one can sense the sea spray in the air.

Terroir: Coastal limestone loam soils

In the vineyard:

- *Both the Semillon and the Cab are from the same vineyard*
- *This vineyard is owned and farmed by McHenry Hohnen, a well-known BD winery in southern Margaret River.*
- *The viticulturalist is Mike Slegers, who is one of the main authorities on BD farming in this part of the world*
- *Vineyards run east-west on slight slopes with moderating/cooling sea breezes.*

Organic and biodynamic practices are used. These include: -

- *Composting with grape marc and cattle manure*
- *Cover cropping alternate rows. Sowing legumes and different types of grasses to help fix the nitrogen and attract insects*
- *Natural pest and insect control; encouraging native birds and bees*

In the cellar:

Semillon

- *Whole bunch, direct-pressed, stainless steel*
- *Fermentation with indigenous yeasts at low temperature*
- *No malo*
- *Aged on the fine lees*
- *Bottled without filtering or fining*
- *Sulphur added*
- *Classic Semillon – herbaceous notes when young, moving to apple skin and citrus*

Cabernet Sauvignon

- *Grapes are destemmed*
- *One month maceration*
- *Indigenous yeast ferment in stainless tanks*
- *Aged in used barrels for 6 months (where wine does malo)*
- *No filtration or fining*
- *30 ppm of SO2 added at bottling*
- *Well-made Cab Sauv with aromas of currants, pepper and hint of spice from the oak and eucalyptus*

| | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 2022 | KARRI VINEYARD SEMILLON | W |
| 2022 | KARRI VINEYARD CABERNET SAUVIGNON | R |

CONTINENTAL PLATTER WINES, XAVIER GOODRIDGE & TERROIRS PROJECT

Continental Platter is the name of a project which is a collaboration between Les Caves de Pyrene, Xavier Goodridge and local growers and winemakers to source sustainably or organically farmed grapes from various Australian regions and make varietal wines with minimal additions.

| | | |
|------|---------------------------|---|
| 2022 | MAPPINGA HILLS CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | SAND GROVE RIESLING | W |
| 2022 | STONE SPRING SHIRAZ | R |
| 2023 | COOLA HILLS PINOT NOIR | R |

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SI VINTNERS, SARAH MORRIS & IWO JAKIMOWICZ, Margaret River – Biodynamic methods

Margaret River is not the part of Australia you associate with jazzy iconoclasm. Wines from this region tend to be square and big-boned (and big-fleshed) and usually clad in heavy oak apparel. S I & I Vintners is made up of Iwo Jakimowicz and Sarah Morris who in September 2010 purchased a 30-reacre estate with 20 acres under vine (the majority of which were planted in 1978). Their property is situated just south of the Margaret River township of Rosa Glen and the motivation was to handcraft natural (and natural tasting) wines, expressive of the vineyard and sub-region. They started farming their vineyard organically/biodynamically from the beginning and all their wines are made without any of the usual commercial winemaking additives apart from a small sulphur addition at bottling and bottled without fining or filtration.

Baba Yaga is skin contact Sauvignon Blanc co-fermented with a small proportion of Cabernet Sauvignon. The Sauvignon spends around 30 days on skins and the Cab is added in whole bunches towards the end of that time. Fermented in neutral tanks and bottled with no SO2 addition.

Ada is a vineyard site which Iwo and Sarah have a long-term lease on and have been hitherto farming for four years. The vines, around 20 years old now, grow out of granitic bedrock with ironstone gravels and large rocks. Although they have always worked in this way, they are currently working on full biodynamic certification. Winemaking is very simple as always with hand harvested grapes which are whole-bunch pressed and fermented in used 500-litre puncheons, whereupon the wine is blended into stainless after 12 months to settle and come together. Minimal sulphur addition at blending of 30 ppm. Ada is Iwo's sister.

She has been waiting to have a wine named after her since they made Sophie Rosé (named after is Sarah's sister!) The Ada takes the classic power of Margaret River Chardonnay and winds it into a tighter frame. A surprisingly intense yet light Chardonnay with lively acidity balancing out a fruit notes, finishing with a gentle nuttiness on the palate (from the oak). Good length and finesse. Not too shabby and not too unlike Chablis. Which can only be a good thing. And breezes in at a non-vast 12.5%.

| | | |
|------|------------------|----|
| 2020 | ADA CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2021 | BELLA CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2021 | BABA YAGA | Or |
| 2018 | HALCYON CABERNET | R |

CHILE

Chile has so many reasons for making good wine, namely, the absence of phylloxera, a superb climate, lots of land and massive investment in plant and equipment. And yet only recently is vineyard differentiation an issue; the inexhaustible supply of irrigation from the melting snow of the Andes makes it an easy option to grow vines on the flat lands. The commercial philosophy of having enormous wineries churning out massive production is useful in manufacturing oceans of super plonk, but quality wines are almost invariably the result of greater discrimination in the vineyard and the winery. Wine makers are discovering the value of terroir: the Casablanca Valley, for example, seems to suit white grape varieties, the limestone soils of Limari are a natural terroir for mineral Chardonnay, whilst the cooler hillside regions are ideal for red wines. In addition to the usual varietal suspects some distinctive wines are made from the Carmenere grape, which, for some reason, has been confused with Merlot until now. Malbec also shows great potential, Syrah has a home in Choapa, whilst Pais, Carignan and Cinsault perform eloquently in the unirrigated vineyards of Maule. We work with the truly artisan: Villalobos with their wild vines that grow up trees and in bushes in the forest (their viticulturists being the local wild ponies), Leo Erazo works with old plots of bush vines in Itata and is mapping the local terroir. Here we find grapes like Torontel, Moscatel, Corinto, Pais and Cinsault made with minimal interventions. Mauricio Gonzalez has embarked on a similar project in Bio-Bio. These Chilean producers have abandoned the religion of extraction and oak. The wines they are a-changing.

“With that he poured the glass of blood-red Carmenere that clung to the glass with butterfly wings that seemed to edge up the lip of the stemware as if they were trying to escape.... What I heard in that glass was not the singing of peasants or the sound of panpipes so familiar in Chilean wines, but the sad roar of the Antarctic Ocean and the distant wallowing of walruses. This was a wine made from the legendary Tierra del Fuego vines grown in his Aconcaguan vineyard. Its perfume was heady – all berries, sun and mountain water diverted from the melting glaciers to irrigate his vineyard. The flavour was exceptional and the effect bedazzling. Moments of conquistadors flashed before me; gold-covered mountains and fleeing Indians; blood and earthquakes; mountain pumas and Mayan cities.”

Pedro ‘El Diablo’ Escovar – Oberon Kant’s Big Book of Wine

CASA AZUL, Rapel Valley

A jaunty quintet of varietals punching considerably above their flyweight prices. The Sauvignon Blanc fruit comes from the Curicó Valley, located in Chile’s central zone. There are rich, alluvial soils in this region and this, in conjunction with a Mediterranean climate, makes it possible to produce grapes with a characteristic freshness. The vineyards are managed with care in order to ensure that the exposure and irrigation of the fruit is carefully monitored. In this way a balance is maintained between the leaf development and the ripening of the fruit. In colour the Sauvignon is a pale, gleaming greeny-yellow, with the fragrance of tropical fruits and white flowers. It has a fresh, light, youthful taste, with gentle acidic overtones, shouts “goosy grassberries” and leaves the mouth refreshed. The Chardonnay, meanwhile, from vineyards located in the Maipo valley, reveals ripe buttery fruit, hints of apricot, melon and nectarine and is soft and round in the mouth. The Maipo valley terrain also suits the Cabernet Sauvignon. There is a predominance of alluvial gravel-type soils in most of the best vineyards, with some more sandy soils in other areas. A wide variety of strategies and techniques are used in canopy management, such as positioning the shoots vertically, all with the aim of maximizing the amount of sunlight in the area where the fruit is ripening. Irrigation is used wisely to maintain the balanced growth of the vine and obtain a constant rhythm of ripening.

The Cabernet is a dark red wine with a touch of purple. Complex cherry scents combine in the nose with chocolate to give an intense aroma. This is a medium-bodied wine with the taste of fresh grapes, balanced by sweet tannins. The persistence of the flavour is excellent.

The popular Merlot, vinified from Rapel Valley fruit, has pleasant aromas, reminiscent of plums and red fruits, with some peppery notes. In the mouth it offers a very slight touch of pepper and ripe red fruits. It is smooth, full of sweet rounded tannins and with a silky finish with hints of mocha.

The reds, in particular, show why Chile is hot on the heels of the Bordelais, producing wines with stuffing, varietal character and drinkability.

New Merlot tasting profile introduced in US

Who needs wine when you've got labels?

Divided into four categories Plum, Plummier, Plum Bum and Brian Sewell, the Merlot profile is designed to make consumers aware of the sheer range of plumminess that Merlot can attain. A similar Argentinean initiative calibrates "chocolaticity" in their versions of the grape.

The profile was created by the International Merlot Foundation (IMF), a nonprofit organisation dedicated to "putting the "Oh" factor" back in Merlot, after market research discovered that the grape variety was being confused with a small marsupial that lives in the Kalahari Desert.

Dr Merle Ho has been using the plum scale on her back labels for two years and says that the proof of the pudding is in the labelling.

A new Alexander Payne movie called Backside, celebrating the re-emergence of the world's plummiest varietal, is said to be in the pipeline, starring Paul Giamatti as Robert Parker's amazing farting dog.

VINA MORANDE, Rapel Valley

| | | |
|------|---------------------|---|
| 2022 | NACIENTE CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | NACIENTE SAUVIGNON | W |
| 2022 | NACIENTE PINOT NOIR | R |

LA PODA CORTA, DENIS DUVEAU, Rapel Valley

Denis Duvéau is a man on a mission. A consultant oenologue from the Loire he has decided to make terroir-driven wines in the New World. With colleague, Antoine Toubanc, a resident of Santiago, he discovered a location in the Rapel Valley, 100 km south of the capital, which had a perfect climate and terroir for making high quality red wines. The soil was composed of lime and clay with glacial deposits, whilst the temperature reached on average 32C during the day and 15C at night – perfect for the production of good anthocyanins. The grape they chose to express this terroir was Carmenere, formerly a Bordeaux speciality, but which had disappeared after the invasion of phylloxera.

The El Grano is made from grapes grown at 450m. The vines are ploughed, no weedkillers are required, and because of the exceptional climate, no chemicals are needed either. The yields are kept low by a green harvest. The juice is fermented at about 30C in stainless steel and sees no oak. The nose expresses greenery in abundance: capsicum, green bean and mint pea and there is a satisfying highly digestible savoury bitterness in the mouth. La Poda Corta is from 35-year-old vines grown at 700m altitude. The grapes are harvested by hand. This wine spends 16 months in French oak barrels.

| | | |
|---------|----------------------|---|
| 2021/23 | CARMENERE "EL GRANO" | R |
|---------|----------------------|---|

*"Wine: Noble beverage, drawing its tonics from the minerals of the earth
its balm from the sun, sheltered by the vineyard;
Its diversity of fragrances from the breezes that caress its flowers,
delight of epicurean palates, honey of dreams,
culmination of intelligences, light which illumines the spirit,
our lips kiss it, our minds meditate on it."*

Pablo Morande

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

This wine is an assemblage of various vineyards where the Mission grape grows on 250-300-year-old bush-vines. Also known as Listán Prieto or Pais de Quenehuao locally, these vines are on original roots and re-started with old school pruning techniques (Provignage), but have never had to have been re-planted since the Spanish Mission days. This is a wine of unique character and style, crafted in small lots and done with passion and integrity. Luyt uses whole cluster with a light pressing, which leaves a bit of structure and allows a more upfront fruitiness to show through. The Pais is bright, tangy and vivid red wine with pomegranate, cherry, damsons and blueberry fruit, along with zesty acidity, mineral tones, sweet herbs and exotic spices. The finish is nicely astringent, suggestive of red grape skins.

We executed, furthermore, a carefully calculated plan. I pretended to get drunker and drunker, and with every apparent attack of nausea, I staggered off to the stream, a bottle of red wine hidden inside my leather jacket. After five attacks of this type we had the same number of litres of wine stored beneath the fronds of a willow, keeping cool in the water.

The Motorcycle Diaries – Ernesto “Che” Guevara

METIC, LUCA HODGKINSON, Colchagua

Metic is Luca Hodgkinson in Colchagua. Luca consults for many wineries in Chile and has his own business sourcing grapes from sustainable and in many cases organic vineyards. He makes the wines with less manipulation than one would expect at this level. This is 90% Carmenere, 10% Petit Verdot. Soil is perfect for Carmenere, comprising of pure clay sitting on a gravel old riverbed. The vines are 30 years old planted on non-grafted rootstocks. The grapes are hand harvested, then destemmed with wild yeast fermentation in concrete vats and a maceration of 35 days, before being aged in concrete tanks. Light filtration and very limited sulphur. Ripe dark fruit flavours, very soft palate, an easy drinking Carmenere. Drink with meat empanadas (small Chilean Cornish pasties!) and lamb chops. The Cabernet Sauvignon is an absolute belter being from 120-year-old ungrafted vines. Naturally fermented in cement tanks and aged in same this has varietal Cab curranty character with that bit extra. Metic was the term used in Ancient Greece for a foreigner living in Athens that contributed to the cultural and economic life but did not have the same rights as a true citizen. This wine was inspired by famous song ‘Le Métèque’ by Georges Moustaki and led Luca to call this wine Metic.

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|------|------------------------------|---|
| 2023 | LA PATAGUA SEMILLON MOSCATEL | W |
| 2023 | LA CUEVA PAIS CARIGNAN | R |
| 2021 | METIC CARMENERE | R |
| 2020 | METIC CABERNET SAUVIGNON | R |
| 2023 | METIC MERLOT | R |

DOMINIQUE DERAÏN & JULIAN DOROSO, Casablanca

Dominique Derain has farmed vines and made biodynamic wines in his estate located in the old presbytery in the village of Saint-Aubin (Hautes Cotes de Beaune) for thirty years ever since he bought the estate in 1988. Before being a vigneron, he was a cooper. He is now retired but has passed his estate on to Julien Altaber and Carole Schwab. He still helps them out in the vineyard and in the winery. Now that he is «an old man» (his own words) and has so many years' experience of farming biodynamically and so much experience making biodynamic wines, he receives regular requests from many vineyard owners throughout the world to vinify wines for them, Dominique enjoys these challenges at this late stage in his life. He met the Chilean vigneron who farms these Pinot vines, one Julio Denoso, through a mutual friend who owns a wine and photograph shop in Paris called Faute 'O Vin. He took Julio to visit Dominique; Julio tasted the wines and proposed to Dominique that he come out to Chile to vinify some of his wines there. A firm friendship has now been forged (Dominique refers to it as «une histoire humaine très sympathique»).

This north-east corner of Casablanca region is only 20 minutes from the ocean, benefiting from relatively mild temperatures, and decent rainfall. The young Pinot vines are planted on terraces at an altitude of 350 metres on granitic-clay soils rich in manganese and farmed biodynamically. Grapes were manually harvested at night to retain acidity, whereupon Dominique did a 'saignée' of the grapes destemming 60% with the remainder whole bunches. Transferred to a cuve tronconique béton, the wine was macerated with skins overnight, whereupon 7 hl of juice was drawn off. The wild ambient ferment proceeded in a cement egg, then free-run juice and the press juice were blended and transferred to 40-hectolitre stainless steel vat with adjustable lids, and containing an air chamber, where the wine subsequently spent a further three months ageing and completing its alcoholic fermentation.

Las Nubes was bottled without filtration and fining and zero sulphur was added. The lab analysis gives a total SO₂ of 0.001. You can taste it! The name of the means the clouds and derives from the name of the area in which the vineyard called 'Montsecano' is situated. The owner of the vineyard (Julio's uncle) asked Dominique to put the name 'Las Nubes' on the label for this wine. A delightful light red, closer to a mid-rosé in colour, with lifted primary red fruit on the nose and on the palate. With its delicate extraction, we are reminded of a really cracking Beaujolais, a kind of Pinot-primeur.

| | |
|------|----------------------|
| 2018 | LAS NUBES PINOT NOIR |
|------|----------------------|

R

A LOS VINATEROS BRAVOS, LEONARDO ERAZO, Itata Valley – Organic

The old Itata Hills are a fantastic place. The terroir potential for making wines here with special character is terrific, and the way Leonardo Erazo works is to bring that sense of a place into the bottle. This region has a beautiful heritage with historic old vineyards planted over volcanic or granitic soils with a lot to say and tell.

A Los Vinateros Bravos want to communicate that message by returning to the artisan methods of organic viticulture, and by means of sympathetic natural winemaking. “We feel like we don’t need to fix nature but rather enhance her capabilities, to enhance her potential. We want wines full of life, vibrancy, tension, freshness, and joy”. Farming is organic, the ancient bush vines are unirrigated and since the vineyards are impossible to work with tractors all the work is manually done or with horses.

A talented young winemaker and viticulturalist with a degree in Agronomy and Enology from the University of Chile, Leonardo travelled the world for ten years to learn about and gain experience in classic and remote wine regions and their diverse terroirs. During this time, he studied biodynamic methods in California, soil types in South Africa, and geology in New Zealand, among other adventures. In Itata, Leonardo has worked with the scattered local farmers’ old vines—many well over 100 years, still growing as dry farmed, untrained small bushes—to enhance their traditional natural practices to align with biodynamic guidelines. His mission, throughout this journey, has been to bring a sense of place into the bottle. The hand harvested fruit from these low-yielding ancient Pais vines grown on basaltic soils is fermented with native yeasts in concrete tanks and pressed in a basket press before ageing in big barrels made from native Rauli wood for 14 months. The wine exhibits the delicate underbrush aromas of Itata’s wild grass, red fruits and a little bit of cassis. It’s fresh and delicate, marked by fine grained tannins that give a unique structure and create a long lingering ending with a distinctive mineral character due to the volcanic soils where the old vines thrive. The Pipeño comes from the Guarilhue region of Itata, southern Chile, a climate influenced by nearby Pacific Ocean – 700-1000 mm of rain per year Located high on a hill the nearly seventy-year-old bush vines are on marginal granitic soils, very sandy with large quartz deposits. The wine itself is a field blend containing predominantly Moscatel but also other grapes such as Corinto and Semillon, co-harvested and co-fermented in tank with native yeasts. Bottled with minimal intervention in a litre bottle this is a turbid natural tasting wine with a touch of grapefruit, dried spices and a zesty tang.

Arbol Arriba is a 1er cru white wine from Torontel: a local clone of Torrontés, but not the overly aromatic version (it is also used in Pisco production). Granitic derived topsoil but vine roots reach the 200m yr old granite mother rock. This wine comes from an east facing vineyard planted in 1930, only exposed to the morning sun, providing fresh wines. Aged in concrete tank/egg. Very direct and saline in typical Leo style. The “Cru Series” is the result of 10 years of soil-mapping across the Itata Colinas, where complexity, depth, layers, and ageing potential are the common factor. The tiny production of each cuvée, limited by the soil unit (UTB, Unite Terroir de Base), gives a unique and intense character to each wine, which aims to be the purest expression of the soil beneath. Cold climate (this part of Itata is cooled by afternoon ocean breezes), granitic mother rock, organic viticulture, and natural winemaking, combine to make each of these artisanal wines a totally unique experience. Farming is organic, the ancient bush vines are unirrigated, and since the vineyards are impossible to work with tractors, all the labour is either done manually or with horses and traditional local tools. Winemaking is straightforward. Grapes are harvested manually, the juice is handled gently, fermented in concrete tanks/eggs with indigenous yeast with a natural malolactic following. Nothing touched other than a coarse filtration, bottling by gravity and minimal sulphur is used (totals are around 15-20 ppm). There are three iterations of Cinsault to consider. Granitico Cinsault is both a wine of pleasure and one to be mulled over. It exhibits the prettier side of this grape with some salty pep from the granite mother rock. Hints of violets and red cherries leaning into a medium-bodied palate of dried herbs and delicate peppery notes. Fresh finish. Las Curvas is a dream vineyard, owned since 2017, and probably one of the first Cinsault parcels to be planted in the area, back in 1940. This old bush-vines Cinsault vineyard planted on its own roots, has a northern exposition, and exposed to a constant sea breeze, sits on super low-fertility red soils, with a high content of granite and quartz. These characteristics make this vineyard a great mirror of terroir. This is a reserved wine with more restrained aromatics suggestive of dried fruits and an almost granular palate with lots of spice, the grip of fine tannin and in the background a hint of wild herbs (or grass after rainfall as Leo describes it). Real old vines intensity. Amigo Piedra exposes the veins running through Itata’s special granite terroir. A Cinsault from a vineyard planted in the 1970s where the vines literally grow on the granite mother rock. Its depth, minerality and well-structured tannins drink like an uppercut from Mohammed Ali: you never see it coming! Yields are a mere 30 hl/ha, all-natural fermentation with native yeasts, regular punch downs, and 6 weeks maceration, pressed with a manual basket press, and aged on lees for a year in spherical concrete tanks before being bottled by gravity. A wine of incredible power with a degree more alcohol than the other versions of this grape, but still so agile and, most definitely, natural Cinsault. Or, as we should perhaps call it: Grand cru Cinsault.

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| 2021 | PIPENO BLANCO – 1 LITRE ~ Moscatel, Corinto, Semillon... | W |
| 2022 | ARBOL ARRIBA TORONTEL | W |
| 2021 | PAIS VOLCANICO | R |
| 2021 | PIPENO TINTO – 1 LITRE ~ Cinsault, Pais | R |
| 2021 | GRANITICO CINSULT | R |
| 2019 | HOMBRE EN LLAMA ~ Carignan | R |
| 2019 | LAS CURVAS ~ Cinsault | R |
| 2019 | AMIGO PIEDRA ~ Cinsault | R |

YUMBEL ESTACION, MAURICIO GONZALEZ CARRENO, Bio-Bio – Organic

Mauricio is part of the Asociación de Productores de Vino Campesino de Chile, organized by natural wine advocate and sommelier Macarena Lladser. Their group of four, all practice within the wine regions inside of the Secano Interior. They dry farm their organic land and mostly old, ungrafted vines. Devoted to low intervention winemaking they are committed to revitalizing the local heritage of the Pipeño, a refreshing wine, low in alcohol, made from the grape País, raised in pipas – barrels made from the local wood raulí.

Maurico has 4 hectares of land to work, just himself, and his wife. Two hectares are planted to Pais, 1.5 to Malbec and .5 to Carignan. The Malbec and Carignan are grafted to Pais rootstock. He has a good amount of volcanic soil, and very few of the pine and eucalyptus trees that the growers in this region disdain. The trees steal exorbitant amounts of well-needed water, they encourage fires, and they are not indigenous to the region...in other words they are intrusive.

Mauricio's harvests are manual, the wine ferments in a large traditional Raulí Lagar...open top. He does not use sulphur, except to clean...and no chemicals or modern technique of any kind to 'correct' the wine. The wine is aged in old pipas and tinajas (barrels and amphorae), and the result is pure and fresh.

The Pipeño is Pais planted on volcanic sand, is from 200 year gnarly bush vines. Grapes are destemmed and naturally fermented. No sulphur is added. The wine is matured in Raulí beech wood barrels of varying size.

The Moscatel is fermented in tinajas (300-900 l) on skins and aged on skins also. Orange in colour with aromas of white flowers and citrus fruits. Vibrant and intense acidity and a great structure in mouth.

2022 MOSCATEL TINAJA

Or

2021 PIPEÑO TINTO

R



The Wild Vineyard @ Villalobos

TARA, VINA VENTISQUERA, Atacama – Organic

Located north of Santiago, the Atacama Desert boasts Chile's northern-most vineyards. This close to the equator, many farmers have opted to grow heat-loving Muscat grapes and distil them into pisco, Chile's traditional libation. Growing grapes for high-quality dry wines seems like a thankless task. But, thanks to cool winds blowing in from the Pacific Ocean (just 20 kms to the west), the grapes ripen in a (surprisingly) cool Mediterranean climate.

And, while irrigation is necessary to grow anything here (the Atacama is one of the world's driest places) some relief is provided by the Camanchaca fog, which creeps in from the coast each morning. When annual precipitation is measured in millimetres, every drop counts.

As mentioned above, the soil has a high saline content which presents unique viticultural challenges. Nature, however, often buries a blessing inside of the obstacles she puts in our path. In this case, it is an unmistakable mineral quality to the wines from the Atacama Desert. Some say there is even a noticeable saline flavour permeating the palate. I wouldn't go that far, but the wines I tasted all had ample acidity and an undeniable freshness that were very attractive.

The trio of winemakers – Felipe Tosso, Sergio Hormazábal, and Alejandro Galaz – make the best of their small lots, producing small quantities (4,000-5,000 bottles) of three different wines. They adhere to low-intervention methods both in the vineyards and in the winery:

The Chardonnay is grown on calcareous soils with alluvial stones, located in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd terraces of the River Huasco in the areas of Longomilla and Nicolasa. Both the soil profile and the waters of the River Huasco lend the wine a significant level of salinity. In the north of Chile, "vintage variation" is virtually non-existent. Year after year, the harvest dates are more or less the same and 2018 was no different, with the grapes being picked in early March. In the part of the Huasco Valley where the Longomilla and Nicolasa vineyards are situated, the dense fog known as "camanchaca" blankets the land each day. This fog comes in from the Pacific Ocean, just 15-20 km to the west. In this desert climate, the moisture from this daily fog provides the vine leaves with a small but important increase in humidity. The must was fermented with native yeasts in stainless steel tanks. There was no additional treatment nor, were any products added to the grapes. After the fermentation, a small, one-off addition of sulphur dioxide was made. The wine was aged for 24 months; 70% in stainless steel barrels and 30% in fifth-use, 228-litre, Burgundy-style, French oak barrels. The objective is to produce a wine as close as possible in identity to the Atacama Desert.

Neither clarified nor filtered the wine contains a fine sediment, which gives it a very special and unique character. Fresh, nervous, mineral Chardonnay, tense and well-structured. The chalkiness and salinity of the soil come through in the palate. The nose reveals fruit, such as sweet cucumbers and apricots, as well as floral notes. As you sip the wine, it evolves in the glass.

Tara White 2 is the result of an interesting experiment. Initially, for the 2011 vintage, vintage Viognier 2011 was used in the blend. When the levels of wine in the barrels of Viognier 2011 became low, they decided to top them up with Viognier from the 2012 vintage to avoid the wine oxidizing. This is how the solera blending began. Six years later they began this limited

production and for its fourth release we blended wines from the 2011 to 2019 vintages. Between 20% and 50% of the grapes were whole cluster-pressed, depending on the condition of the grapes each season. No acid, sulphur dioxide, stabilizers, or any products other than the grapes were used in order to retain the maximum character and sense of identity of the place the grapes come from. The must was fermented with native yeasts, without the addition of any other products. During the 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 harvests, 100% of the juice was fermented in fifth-use French oak barrels. From 2015 onwards, they began to ferment the must in stainless steel barrels and today all of the grape juice is fermented in them. An aromatically complex wine with different layers, revealing notes of candied orange peel, orange blossom, lime, sponge cake and dried fruit. The palate is broad and well-structured but tense at the same time. It is very fresh, with special persistence and there is a saline note in the finish that is characteristic of the wines from this area of the Atacama Desert.

The Pinot Noir undergoes a cold maceration for 5-7 days. Then 2 to 3 pump-overs took place each day at natural fermentation temperatures of between 15°C and 25°C. Once the fermentation was complete and after the malolactic fermentation, a small amount of SO₂ was added. This wine was aged for 24 months: 60% in a 1500-litre capacity untoasted cask and 40% in a 1000-liter capacity concrete egg. This wine was not clarified, nor did it receive a final filtration. Beautiful light ruby-red colour and has a complex nose with cherry and raspberry aromas intermingled with notes of mushrooms, fallen leaves and forest floor. In the mouth it is intense, with crisp acidity, firm tannins and good structure. Its minerality and the tension in the mouth from the chalky soils are very clear.

The Syrah was fermented in small, open 500-kilo vats. The must was fermented Pinot Noir style with its native yeasts. Pump-overs were used two to three times a day for a week. The wine was then raked into fifth-use French barrels, where the malolactic fermentation took place. After fermentation, a small quantity of SO₂ was added just once. This wine was not clarified, nor did it receive a final filtration. 24 months' ageing in fifth-use, Burgundy-style, 228-litre French oak barrels. This is a deep ruby-red wine which reveals a mix of black fruits, herbs and graphite. It's fresh, with notes of wild herbs, spices and firm tannins. In the mouth, this medium-bodied wine displays delicious acidity, which lends interesting tension to the wine, as well as firm tannins. Very long in the finish.

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| 2020 | TARA CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | TARA SAUVIGNON | W |
| NV | TARA VIOGNIER 7 TH EDITION | W |
| 2020 | TARA PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2019 | TARA SYRAH | R |

ARGENTINA

The advantage of having imitators is that at last they cure you of yourself.

- Jorge Luis Borges

Mexicans are descended from the Aztecs, Peruvians from the Aztecs, Peruvians from the Incas and Argentineans from the Ships.

- Octavio Paz

People are fond of quoting the statistic that Argentina is the fourth (or fifth) largest wine country in the world – akin to saying ‘never mind the quality feel the width’. At present Argentina does not have the most dynamic wine culture (try finding a wine bar in Buenos Aires) and the levels of expertise lag well behind its neighbour, Chile. Yields, for example, are still ridiculously high. There are, nevertheless, a dozen wineries or so that are leading the drive for quality and they are planting a range of grape varieties reflecting Argentina’s rich cultural heritage: Tempranillo from Spain; Sangiovese, Barbera and Bonarda from Italy; Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon from South West France; Syrah from the Rhône. The potential is enormous. If you go to Mendoza you will see wonderfully healthy vines with beautiful grapes and perfect growing conditions. Now for the winemaking to catch up to the raw material.

A recent trip to Mendoza saw us ensconced in Restaurante Francis Mallmann 1884 looking for something cool and fruity to go with our bistecca dino-haunches. So here was a wine list, a panoply of the most glittering jewels in Argentina, a 70 odd page digest – and indigest – of wines, mostly Monsignor Malbec’s progeny. Each wine was listed with its author (sorry, oenologist), the oak regime, the number of bottles made, with special mention for the ultra limitada wines. Cue hosannas. We ordered several bottles, each home to a wine so dark that people disappeared behind it. And the taste and texture, whatever the variety, whatever the region, was always the same – the velvet fist in the chocolate glove.

Not that we didn’t try to stretch the sommelier:

Señor Cañadas: “We want to drink something organic or biodynamic, something fresh, stainless steel fermented, and as natural as possible.”

Waiter: “Natural? Well, we try to work more and more with wineries where the winemaker is not smoking in the cellars.”

Michel Rolland, he say, “No smoking in the winery. Micro-oxygenate!!”

At Bodegas Cecchin they make truly artisan wines. The wines have a gentle freshness that one might associate with southwest France or cooler parts of the Languedoc. Organic methods (they still use horses in the vineyards) and cement vats rather than oak for vinification help to make deliciously digestible red wines.

LA AGRICOLA, Mendoza

The Zuccardi family have created an excellent range of commercial wines. Chenin-Torrontes, Villa Vieja, from vineyards in Mendoza sees Chenin (grape of the Loire) meet Torrontes (grape of northern Spain) to create an intriguing example of Argentinean fusion. The Torrontes provides plenty of aromatic appeal, distinct floral notes of rose petal, delightful notes of fresh Muscat grapes and Turkish delight, the Chenin gives weight and a steely balance with its firm acidity. A delicious summery wine that would complement asparagus or artichokes and simple salads. The Viognier flaunts ample, white-fleshed fruit and manages to avoid the hollowness that cheaper versions from the Languedoc exhibit. It is the El Abasto range of wines that show best what Argentina is capable of. The relaxed vinification of the reds highlights the excellent quality of the fruit. The Malbec is punchy, red fruits and tannins in alignment, whilst the Malbec-Bonarda is a brilliant blend with lifted aromatics and stemmy freshness.

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| 2023 | VILLA VIEJA CHENIN-TORRONTES | W |
| 2023 | VILLA VIEJA VIOGNIER | W |
| 2023 | VILLA VIEJA SHIRAZ-MALBEC | R |
| 2024 | EL ABASTO PINOT GRIGIO | W |
| 2021 | EL ABASTO TORRONTES | W |
| 2023 | EL ABASTO MALBEC | R |
| 2023 | EL ABASTO MALBEC-BONARDA | R |

SANTA JULIA, ZUCCARDI, Mendoza – Organic

The Organica range from Zuccardi represents excellent value for money. The wines are remarkably pure with lovely fruit and fine acidity. The Malbec is rich yet fruity with a nose of sweet violets as well as ripe fruits such as figs and raisins. Also notes of tobacco, vanilla and chocolate.

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| 2023 | SANTA JULIA ORGANICA MALBEC | R |
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Cara Sur was formed in 2011 as a partnership between two couples inspired to revive ancestral vines and produce wines from traditional Argentine varietals. Sebastián Zuccardi and Marcela Manini teamed up with Nuria Año Gargiulo and Pancho Burgallo, an avid mountaineering couple who live in Barreal, in the Calingasta Valley of San Juan, north of Mendoza. They produce wines from 80-year-old vines of Moscatel, Moscatel Negro, Bonarda Piedmontese, and Criolla Chica (the Argentine iteration of Pais). The vines are Parral trained, a ceiling-trellised system that provides shade and maximises airflow. The main vineyard sits alongside the Los Patos River on stony soil at 1500 metres above sea level. The Cara Sur wines are made in a tiny winery next to Pancho and Nuria's home where they produce small quantities with minimal intervention. Sebastián and Marcela regularly make the trip north to work alongside Pancho and Nuria. The quartet are producing some of the most unique wines from one of the most underrated microclimates of Argentina. Cara Sur translates to South Face and refers to the more challenging approach to Cerro Mercedario one of Argentina's tallest peaks, which can be seen from Barreal. Pancho notably once tried to tackle the legendary south face of this 6,720 m massif – in the middle of winter!

Zooming out for a moment, we are in the greater San Juan region, north of Mendoza, but that does not begin to tell the story about this isolated location. This is the north-south running Calingasta Valley, surrounded by mountains, wedged between the Precordillera and monumental rampart of the Cordillera de la Ramada that divides Chile and Argentina. The valley has the influence of three rivers: Los Patos; Castaño and Calingasta. The vineyards and winery are centred on the villages of Barreal, Hilario and Calingasta. These are tiny remote places with a narrow road and would be effectively desert, were it not for the rivers bringing glacial melt down. Needless to say, regular irrigation is used. The days are hot, the nights very cold. The intensity of UV light makes the paraje system the most logical one here with its protective leaf canopy.

Vines are old (difficult to know how old with scanty records) with thick trunks and big variegated bunches of grapes hanging down randomly. The vineyards are natural and don't take kindly to hard pruning or regulating techniques. What you notice most, is the varying colour of the grapes – from purple to pink to golden and other colours in between. It is a riot of grape diversity.

Sebastián showed us the baroque family tree of Criollas and crosses. Many descend from Muscat of Alexandria (Moscatel) and Listán Prieto (a.k.a. Mission) are the crossings of these grapes, and then is the way of things, further crossing and mutations. From these are derived varieties such as Canelon, Cereza, Criolla Grande, Malvasía Criolla, Moscatel Amarillo, Torrontés Riojano, Torrontés Sanjuanino and many others. Each grape has its unique identity, and the traditional co-plantation and co-fermentation is dedication to the heritage method of putting everything into the same wash to create wines with subtle inflections. The lighter and less intense grapes always ameliorate the darker and richer ones. It's a joyful harmony; it's rustic, it's traditional, respecting the heritage of mixed grape varieties - and it's natural. As mentioned, this is the passion project of two families. It is probably fair to say that a few years ago, criolla wines were only consumed locally. The commercial Argentinean wine industry had hitched its colours to international varieties and winemaking was all about the maximum extraction of flavour.

At Cara Sur, just 40,000 bottles are made across the various ranges, with just over 1,000 bottles of the three single parcel wines. Sebastián, Marcela, Pancho and Nuria seek to produce wines with freshness, salinity, rusticity, texture. They are against colour, extraction and wood flavours. The vineyard itself is a palette of colours and flavours; their endeavour is to faithfully capture and translate this unique grape and terroir patrimony with the minimum of intrusive interventions. Sebastián likes to use the word rustic to describe the overall style of the wines. They are definitely not polished or aromatic.

There is usually some skin contact, a degree of flor (on both whites and reds), fermentation is always ambient, malolactic invariably happens, the wines are never filtered or fined. Small quantities of sulphites are used; sometimes after fermentation finishes, usually a bit before bottling. The rough edges are deliberate, these wines are moreish and digestible. You can easily imagine them with food. The single vineyard wines are quite beautiful.

The wines are split into three ranges. The Viños del Valle (valley wines) called Pérgolas. These are blends from a multitude of tiny vineyard parcels through the valley. Then we have the Viños de Paraje (Patrimonio) aka the Paraje Wines (Heritage) – divided into Cara Sur Criolla Family and Cara Sur Field Blends. Finally, the aforementioned Viños del Parcela (Parcel Wines), these last being from the sweet spots in the vineyard that give the best expression of the grapes and terroir.

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| 2022 | BALLENA DEL SUR SEMILLON TORRONTES | W |
| 2022 | BALLENA DELSUR MALBEC | R |
| 2022 | CARA SUR PARAJE HILARIO BLANCO | W |
| 2022 | CARA SUR CRIOLLA CHICA | R |
| 2022 | CARA SUR PERGOLAS CRIOLLAS BLANCAS | W |
| 2022 | CARA SUR PERGOLAS CRIOLLAS TINTOS | R |
| 2022 | CARA SUR PARAJE MOSCATEL RBLANCO | W |
| 2022 | CARA SUR PARAJE MOSCATEL TINTO | R |
| 2022 | CARA SUR PARAJE HILARIO TINTO | R |
| 2021 | CARA SUR PARCELA DURAZNERO BLANCO | W |
| 2021 | CARA SUR PARCELA LOS NIDOS TINTO | R |
| 2021 | CARA SUR PARCELA LA TOTORA | R |

Primus Malbecius Superbius

Sometimes you taste a wine so rich that you are tempted to tap it on the shoulder and ask it for an unsecured loan of \$100,000,000 Zimbabwean dollars. Reading an estimable wine organ recently I discovered that there are wines among us that do not merely court perfection they seek to transcend it. As a mere humble vessel with a shallow palate accustomed to coarse French wines I needed to understand that greatness can only be critically arbitrated by those whose mouths that can carry a greater weight of wine in them.... Primus Malbecius Superbius emanates from irony-free vines grown at 3000m high in the Andes whose deep-delved roots are verily refreshed by the purest glacial melt waters known to man. Cuttings for the vines were sourced from Malbekistan, a tiny lost republic nestling in the Caucasus Mountains and the undoubted cradle of wine civilisation as we know it. So saturated with ripeness that the bunches touch the soil, the grapes are individually plucked by trained condors who carry their precious burden back to the winery, a glass and metal cathedral construction laid out on the lines of an ancient Incan temple. Each barrel in the cuverie is fashioned from 200% new oak, toasted evenly on both sides by artisan coopers flown over by private jet from their villages in France and after a 60-day maceration to ensure that no light can escape the wine and pigeage with velvet-coated battering rams, the wine matures to the mellifluous sound of Bolivian pan-pipes and massed devotional choirs. The first cask samples are tasted by the cowed and hooded *Parkeristas*, a cabal of Gauchos, who repeatedly murmur binary incantations of ones and two zeros until the wine is imbued with incontrovertible supranumerical greatness. It is then given the sacred papal benediction of Rolland who releases nano bubbles of reputation into the wine until it is so smooth that it begins to drink itself.

BODEGA CECCHIN, Mendoza – Organic (certified Organización Internacional Agropecuaria)

They play rugby and they make wine. Or is it the other way round? The nice thing about this trio of red varieties is that they possess a tasty angularity that is sometimes absent from other wines in this country. The company has always been in the hands of the Cecchin family since 1959. Oscar Alberto Cecchin (45 yrs old) is the third generation. The first members of the family came to Argentina from Italy in 1910 and found work in the local vineyards. In 1959, Jorge and Pedro Cecchin fulfilled their dream of owning some land, acquiring 11-hectares of vineyards and olives, including the winery dating back from 1901. The crops in all three of the estates that make up Bodega Cecchin have been certified for organic farming as of 2005. Cecchin's handling and processing in the winery is also certified as organic from 2005, so its wines are subsequently certified organic. Bodega Cecchin also farms biodynamically, but only in a small portion of the vineyards (just 2 -hectares in each of the three estates). This is because biodynamic farming is too labour-intensive to be implemented over a larger area of vines. Bodega Cecchin owns not only vineyards planted with a wide range of different grape varieties, but also peach, fig and apricot orchards, olive, walnut, and almond groves. The planting of these different crops is necessary to comply with the rules stipulated by the organic certifying agency, OIA. The soils throughout the vineyards are mainly clay and cultivation is still done with horses. Harvest is manual in small baskets and yields are accordingly low. Grapes are de-stemmed for the alcoholic (wild yeast) fermentation which takes place in 120 hl cement tanks coated on the inside with epoxy. This size and type of cement tank is used by Bodega Cecchin for many of the stages of vinification of most of the wines as it keeps the wines at a stable temperature. The wines are lightly filtered, but unfinned. There is no oak. This sets them apart from most Argentinean reds. Strict adherence to organic methods in the vineyard is not undermined by larding on the oak; the intention here is to represent the terroir and capture the essence of the fruit. The Carignan, a grape variety we associate more readily with the Languedoc-Roussillon is tasty with notes of earth and leather underneath the blueberry fruit. The Cabernet Sauvignon is sinewy and peppery with flavours of dried herbs. The Malbec, a grape that Argentina has successfully appropriated, is made without the addition of sulphur and contrasts to the lavish, extractive, chocolate-cakey numbers that most wineries seem to churn out. Here one notices the acidity of the grape along with savoury red fruits and liquorice.

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| 2022 | CARIGNAN ORGANIC | R |
| 2022 | CABERNET SAUVIGNON ORGANIC | R |
| 2020 | GRACIANA ORGANIC | R |
| 2022 | MALBEC ORGANIC CLASSIC | R |
| 2022 | MALBEC SIN SULFITO ORGANIC | R |



You're in a restaurant leafing through their bible of a wine list. You leaf in vain. There is no natural skin-contact Torrontes! Rightly, you walk off in a huff and hail your uber(natural) taxi.

Fear not. That gaping list chasm can be bunged now with the arrival of one El Otro Lado Torrontes from one Pol Andsnes, an American chap who went to Argentina presumably to be closer to his near-namesake mountain range. No puns, if you please, about Andsnes and Booms-a-Daisy. Pol was inspired to create this wine by the only other example (as far as we know) of a skin-contact Torrontes being made in Argentina. He greatly admired the wine in question, which he felt successfully demonstrated the potential that the variety might express were the skins to be used intelligently. Before making his interpretation of this wine, however, he spent several years in search of the right vineyard that would allow him to make a wine with comparatively more elegance and acidity. Eventually, he came across what was the only parcel of Torrontés in the [in]famous Gualtallary region, one known for its higher altitudes, calcareous soils and cooler climate. Typical of Gualtallary, the plot of vines had very little organic material or sand, being mainly composed of alluvial rocks filled in with calcareous sediments. The vines had also seen virtually no chemicals (only copper and sulphur.

While making the wine, Pol was convinced that a longer maceration on the skins would achieve the character he was looking for, so he decided to macerate the wine for at least 8 months. In the end, it spent a total of 10 months on the skins. The grapes themselves were manually harvested with whole bunches crushed by foot and fermented in plastic tanks. As mentioned, the wine spent ten months in contact with skins. Fermentation took place in three tanks; when completed, Pol pressed one of these tanks to top up the other two. The whole process was naturally with indigenous yeasts and ambient temperature. (The tanks were located outdoors "beneath the stars", keeping cool on the chilly nights.) Malolactic ferment occurred naturally. After the long maceration, the pressed wine was aged five months in old barrels of French oak in order to sediment the lees and prepare it for bottle, which it went into without filtration, fining and only 10 ppm of SO₂ added. The bottle is clear, and the wine is cloudy with plenty of leesy crud to satisfy the most demanding of gloom aficionados. The wine is reminiscent of various skin-contact Malvasias of our acquaintance with a touch of florality, apricot and quince flavours, quinine bitterness from the skin maceration, spice from the lees and all with a fine seam of acidity and minerals. If Opuesto means opposite, then El Otro Lado certainly is taking an alternative direction with the Torrontes grape.

"If I were told I could only make wine in Argentina from one variety, I would choose Bonarda". Bonarda has fascinated Pol more than any other Argentinean varietal since he arrived. Being the particularly particular chap that he was, it took him a full five years before he discovered the exact vineyard that would express (for him) the real potential of the grape. Unfortunately, Bonarda is still largely underappreciated, so there are few wineries or grape farmers planting the variety in the more interesting terroirs and climates. Those who appreciate it are a rare breed, and the name Mala Hierba is a kind of homage to them. It also refers to the fact that in this particular vineyard the grower does not remove the 'mala hierba,' allowing instead the wild plants to grow naturally and compete with the vine, creating a biodiverse environment and ensuring healthy soils. This is also a traditional "parral" (pergola) trained vineyard with vines over 45-years-old. The vineyard is managed as if organic, but with no certification. Whole bunches of Bonarda grapes are crushed and trodden with nineteen days of maceration. Whilst the wine was fermenting Pol pressed it in a manual basket press and it finished the fermentation in old barrels. As with his other wines, the process is natural and ambient. The Bonarda is aged for a further eleven months in old 225-litre French oak barrels (where the malo also occurs) and is bottled without filtration, fining and only a tiny bit of sulphur added. Bonarda is probably the same grape as Charbono or Douce Noir, hailing from Savoie or Piedmonte. It was prolific in Argentina, but mainly used for blending. Pol's version treads a lovely line between fig, cherry, blueberry and cassis. Plenty of energy here.

And now for something completely different. With a desire to stray from Malbec and the typical international grapes, Pol searched for more authentic Argentine varieties and eventually came upon a vineyard which, as far as he has found, is the only vineyard in the Uco Valley that has retained any of the unfashionable Criolla varieties. The owner couldn't say what year the vineyard was planted—because it was older than him—but believed it was somewhere in the 1950s. Certainly, the trunks of the vines were as thick as trees, and with its high-trained traditional pergola canopy it gave the impression of being in a forest. Criolla Grande is the third most produced grape in Argentina, yet it is unappreciated by winemakers, and hardly anyone that makes a varietal wine from it (it usually gets blended anonymously into bulk wines or sent straight to the juice-concentrate factories). And of course, the challenge was to do the opposite, the unusual thing, is often what tickles the fancy of polOpuesto! Qué GRANDE sos! is a field blend composed mainly of the Criolla Grande variety, with 5-10% of white and pink Muscat, plus a small amount of Criolla Chica (aka, País, Mission), Cereza, and a few plants of Tempranillo and Bonarda. The varieties are interplanted and this wine is a blend of whatever is in the vineyard at unknowable percentages. The vineyard has been organically farmed for five years. though not certified. In this pergola-trained vineyard a number of horses graze freely in the shade below the canopy, helping to control the weeds and obviating the need for ploughing. The horizontal leaf canopy and the grapes are positioned at around 2 metres above the ground. Irrigation is carried out with the traditional flood irrigation system in which canals are formed to bring the snowmelt waters through each row of vines. Whole bunches are foot-stomped and fermented in plastic water tanks outside the winery, underneath a walnut tree. As 2016 was an historically cold harvest season and the wine fermented outdoors, the fermentation was very cool and slow, never going above 20°C and taking more than a month to complete. The maceration lasted exactly 40 days before being pressed by hand in an old, manual wooden basket press. After an ambient native ferment, the wine was aged for 8 months in very old French oak barrels.

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|---------|------------------------|----|
| 2021 | EL OTRO LADO TORRONTES | Or |
| 2017/18 | MALA HIERBA BONARDA | R |
| 2018 | CRIOLLA QUE GRANDE SOS | R |

BODEGA MIRAS, MARCEL & PABLO MIRAS, RIO NEGRO, Patagonia – Organic

Bodega Miras is based near the city of Neuquén in Rio Negro province, Patagonia - about 800km south of Mendoza. Rainfall here is minimal, with semi-desert conditions, but fruit trees (this is Argentina's main apple and pear producing region) and vineyards thrive due to traditional irrigation from the huge Rio Negro.

Marcelo Miras has worked at many of the big names in Patagonia (Humberto Canale, Fin del Mundo), but this is his family project which he started by making wine for family consumption. He is a lovely, lovely man, an encyclopaedia on all things Patagonia. His son Pablo is now involved in the project. They work organic vineyards, use natural ferments but also – for now – use more commercial temperature control, gentle fining and filtration, moderate levels of sulphur. There is quite a bit of Trousseau and old vine Semillon planted in the region, as well as Pinot Noir.

, With no more than 150 mm rainfall per annum this is very dry, mild continental climate. Being this far south, however, summer temperatures are not excessive and allied with cool evening you have a very different climate to Mendoza, resulting in wines are fresher, more aromatic and delicate.

All the reds are destemmed into stainless tanks and fermented with indigenous yeasts. The Trousseau, the same grape as one finds in Jura and also Galicia, is a medium-to-full-bodied red with a moderate tannic structure and plenty of dark berry fruit. The Malbec is a delight, being fresh, unoaked, sappy, saline, and very drinkable, especially slightly chilled.

Reminiscent of the versions you might find in the Loire valley. Finally, there is Semillon, a grape variety that evinces surprising potential in this region. Very fresh, fruity nose of lemon, peach, of membrillo. Good varietal character, waxy, lemony, super fresh.

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| 2022 | MIRAS JOVEN SEMILLON | W |
| 2023 | NARANJO | Or |
| 2020 | MIRAS MALBEC | R |
| 2021 | MIRAS TROUSSEAU NOUVEAU | R |

40/40, LUCAS PFISTER, Mendoza – Organic

After finishing his studies in France and doing harvests around the world Lucas decided to start this small project back home using only his favourite plots. The idea was to express as much as possible the terroir in the wines by avoiding over manipulation and winemaking tricks in the winery. The vineyard is located at 890 m above sea-level. With a continental dry climate Ugarteche is known for very cold nights and very warm days. This is a blend of two parcels of Malbec, one richer from deeper clay soils and the other from a parcel with some clay but also a high percentage of gravels. The grapes are manually harvested in 20 kg boxes, destemmed with (7-10%) whole bunch, followed by a stainless vat fermentation with maceration on skins for twenty days. Ferment is ambient with native yeasts and the wine is matured in used barrels of 225 litres for 12 months. No fining, a light filtration and a small amount of sulphur used. 40/40 – the family estate is in Ugarteche, south of Mendoza city, which you find at 'km 40' on Route 40, the main highway running through Mendoza – it spans the entire length of Argentina from Bolivia to Tierra del Fuego.

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| 2022 | 40/40 CUARENTA MALBEC | R |
| 2022 | 40/40 CABERNET SAUVIGNON | R |

BODEGAS WEINERT, Mendoza

Lovely traditional-style wine, a blend of Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, aged in large oak vats for ten years until soft and mellow. Soothing mature register of flavours: tobacco, cedar and leather, some similarities with Musar and old-fashioned Rioja and gran reservas but with its own Argentine twist. Think pipe, slippers and a dressing gown in front of a roaring log fire.

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| 2012 | CAVAS DE WEINERT | R |
| 1994 | CAVAS DE WEINERT | R |
| 1994 | TONEL UNICO MALBEC | R |

CALIFORNIA

POPULIS, SHAUNT OUNGOULIAN & DIEGO ROIG – Organic

Populis is the love child of three winemaking school friends, Diego Roig, Sam Baron, and Shaunt Oungoulain. Populis was born from the desire to make light-hearted, naturally made, extremely drinkable wines from exciting vineyard sites throughout California. They partner with farmers who grow organically, many of whom dry farm historic, old vine vineyards. Sam has left to pursue his own project, but Diego and Shaunt have plenty of experience, having worked in Europe as well as the States and numbering COS, Didier Barral and Domaine Valette on their respective cvs.

The Populis Wabi-Sabi white is inspired by Cheverny Blanc and is a blend of Chardonnay, Sauvignon and Colombard— comes from three sites.

Both vineyards are farmed organically but are not currently certified.

Whole clusters were pressed directly. The juice was allowed to settle overnight and decanted off the grape solids. The juice fermented in a mixture of neutral French oak barrels and 12 hl polymer tanks. No sulphur or inoculation was made at this point and the fermentation was 100% indigenous. The wine was aged for 7 months sur lie - the mouthfeel is characterized by laser-like acidity, while the aromas and flavours strike a balance between greenness and riper opulence, resulting in a style that is uniquely Californian, yet with an old-world approach. The old vines give this wine an additional dimension of depth and complexity. The minimalistic approach in the cellar lends a wine that is highly drinkable and digestible.

Sauvignon Blanc comes from the Venturi Vineyard, Chardonnay, the Barra Vineyard, and the French Colombard from Inland Vineyard, Venturi Vineyard is located just north of Ukiah, in the Calpella Valley, on predominantly Pinole gravelly loam soils. These highly regarded soils contain a mixture of sandstone, shale and quartz formed from alluvial flows. Barra Vineyard and Inland Vineyard are located in Redwood Valley. The red soils of Redwood Valley and the cooler climate compared to surrounding regions make this an ideal region for growing white grape varieties.

The Populis Wabi red comes from Poor Ranch. It is massale selection Carignane planted in 1948. The vineyard is located on Pinole soils, which are deep gravelly, clay loams formed in alluvium from weathered sedimentary rock. These Pinole soils are particularly well suited to viticulture as their pH is quite high for CA and their depth and clay content lend to deeper and larger root systems, allowing for dry farming. The Poor family has been homesteading and growing grapes at this location since the late 1800's for four generations. These vines have been organically dry farmed since their planting 67 years ago.

The clusters were 100% destemmed upon receipt. No yeast or sulphur was added, and the fermentation was 100% indigenous. Once a day pump-overs were performed throughout the moderately warm maceration. The wine was pressed after ten days of maceration and raised in neutral French oak barrels for seven months.

This wine is dangerously drinkable! Delicious red fruit and animal aromas lead to a rich mid palate with a solid backbone of acid throughout. One glass is just never enough.

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| 2021 | POPULIS MACERATED CHARDONNAY | Or |
| 2021 | POPULIS SAUVIGNON | W |
| 2021 | POPULIS RED REVERSEE ~ Carignane, Validgue, Zinfandel | R |
| 2021 | LES LUNES COSMIC BLEND | R |
| 2020 | POPULIS WABI-SABI RED | R |

MARTHA STOUMEN WINES, Northern California - Organic

One-woman winemaking and grape growing project based in Northern California. Martha seeks to express wines that represent her land with purity and precision. She has chosen to work with sun-loving grapes: either those historic to California viticulture, or those that flourish and maintain elegance in California's warmth, such as Carignan, Zinfandel, and Nero d'Avola, whilst utilising natural, traditional winemaking practices she learned while apprenticing in Italy and Southern France (Didier Barral). And most importantly, to truly respect her Californian roots, she ensures her vineyards are farmed in such a way that healthy ecosystems are created and maintained.

Post Flirtation white is a zippy, glou glou (French wine slang for gulpable) version of a traditional California red blend: This wine showcases all of the raspberry, hibiscus, and rhubarb zing that these two grapes can exhibit when picked on the fresher side.

Composed of head-trained vines Carignan (50%), planted in 1948., dry-farmed from a Mediterranean climate in Venturi Vineyard, Mendocino County AVA grown on sandstone/quartz, Post Flirtation red is vinified whole cluster, foot stomped, and aged in neutral oak for 6 months. The remainder is Zinfandel (50%). Planted in the 60s, these head-trained, dry farmed vines are the youngest in the historic Del Barba vineyard in Contra Costa County. Grown in pure sand. Imagine walking on the beach—that's what the soil is like in this vineyard. Destemmed and aged in stainless steel for 6 months to preserve freshness.

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| 2019/20 | POST FLIRTATION WHITE ~ Marsanne, Colombard, Roussanne, Muscat | W |
| 2021 | POST FLIRTATION RED ~ Carignane, Zinfandel | R |
| 2020 | BENCHLANDS RED ~ Petite Sirah, Zinfandel, Nero d'Avola | R |

IDLEWILD WINES, SAM BILBRO, Healdsburg

Idlewild has a relatively concise aim within a broad context: to produce wines of exceptional balance and beauty. It is a journey to pursue Italy's Piedmont in the elevated hills of Mendocino County, and to find the sides of these varieties that are intriguing, delicious, and haunting. Each wine is unique and treated as such, though the common thread is balancing depth and seriousness with vibrancy and joyfulness. Emphasis is on the vineyard followed by minimalist winemaking techniques.

While not dogmatic in practice, an honest and sustainable approach is fundamental in making wines of purity. Located in a funky concrete warehouse turned simple winery, the focus is not on a tasting room nor any sense of grandiosity but instead on the vineyards and what is in the bottle. Grapes are predominantly sourced from Fox Hill Vineyard in Mendocino County where Idlewild is allowed full oversight of the farming. The Bee comprises roughly 35% Muscat Canelli 35% Friulano, 20% Arneis, and 10% Cortese. The Muscat Canelli comes from organically farmed, well drained volcanic soils on the southwest edge of Lake County. The Friulano and Cortese both come from Fox Hill Vineyard with soils that are well drained with high concentrations of gravel and sandstone. The Arneis for this blend comes from the high altitude of Potter Valley in Northeast Mendocino. The grapes were whole cluster pressed, fermented via native yeasts, left on all the lees and solids, aged in neutral oak, and underwent native secondary fermentation. Complexity and texture are gained from allowing secondary fermentation and aging on lees in neutral oak for four months, while the structure and acidity from picking plenty early allow for great vibrancy and energy through the wine. The broad spectrum of aromatics includes spicy wildflowers, wet river rocks, green papaya, peach, honey, salty air, and alpine freshness. The mouthfeel is lean and linear with just a kiss of mid palate weight and texture before a vibrant acid driven finish. Fox Hill Vineyard is without a doubt one of the most unique vineyards in Northern California. One of its true beauties is that it has remained relatively unknown. Located southeast of Ukiah on Mendocino's Talmage Bench, the soils are well drained with high concentrations of gravel and sandstone, and the farming is as old fashioned and straight forward as it gets. What makes this site so unique though is the fact that Lowell Stone decided to buck every trend and simply plant what he was interested in planting. Many trips to Italy turned to inspiration and the wild spectrum of varieties began to take root. There are two blocks that I work with due to their more sheltered and north facing (read cooler) aspects.

Bird comprises Dolcetto, Barbera, Nebbiolo, Grignolino and Freisa. While the wine is designated as Mendocino County, most of the fruit in fact comes from Fox Hill Vineyard. Located southeast of Ukiah on Mendocino's Talmage Bench, the soils are well drained with high concentrations of gravel and sandstone. In contrast to the varietal bottling of these wines, these grapes are from sections of the vineyard that yield softer structure and are handled with this early to bottle style in mind. The focus in fermentation was to build enough structure for a very versatile food wine but also to emphasize the exuberant and delicious elements of each grape. To do this, the wines were left largely whole cluster, and all fermentations started with carbonic maceration. None of them were pushed to be fully carbonic wines. Instead, the initial lift in aromatics and push on frothy fresh fruits was achieved, and then Sam fully trod the wines to allow fermentation to switch to a more standard flow. This gave a backbone and savoury qualities to act as bass notes to the carbonic high tones. All the wines were pressed a touch early to ensure that that tannic structure was appropriate for a shorter time in barrel, just four months in neutral oak. The Bird displays black cherries, anise, fresh strawberries, freshly turned soil, and spicy floral tones highlight the aromatic profile. The mouthfeel is fresh and bright, leans towards a touch of mouth filling richness, and then quickly moves to a clean and firm food driven finish.

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| 2021 | THE BEE FAUNA FLORA WHITE ~ Muscat Canelli, Friulano, Arneis, Cortese, Favorita, Erbaluce | W |
| 2021 | THE BEE FLORA FAUNA RED | R |

LO-FI WINES, MIKE ROTH & CRAIG WINCHESTER, LOS ALAMOS – Organic

Lo-Fi is a partnership between two lifelong friends who believe in hand crafted honest wines that are made for everyday drinking. Wines to be enjoyed not to be collected. Easy drinking lower alcohol wines made to pair well with all types of foods.

Mike Roth believes in neutral barrels, native yeasts, little to no sulphur additions, and no adjustment of pH. He loves whole cluster fermentation. We adore carbonic maceration and embraces a nothing-added, nothing taken away philosophy that gives birth to wines that are young, vibrant and alive. But in all reality Lo-Fi is less about what it is and more about what it is not. The Cinsault was hand-harvested from the steep slopes of the biodynamically-farmed Demetria Estate early on a cold and foggy October morning by the light of the harvest moon. The grapes were fermented whole-cluster in an open top bin, given a few foot treads and later daily pumpovers. After two weeks the grapes were pressed and barrelled down to a 600 litre demi-muid and aged for a further six months. No added sulphur. Turbid cherry-red with thick raspberry fruit and hints of wild herbs and leather. Although a medium-full bodied wine it drinks so easily with its moreish savoury quality. Good natural (very natural) medicine.

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| 2022 | CHENIN HONEYBEAR ORCHARD | W |
| 2022 | ALBARINO | Or |
| 2022 | BEBIDA MORADA | R |
| 2023 | SANTA BARBARA CABERNET FRANC | R |
| 2022 | GAMAY CLOS MULLET | R |

RUTH LEWANDOWSKI WINES, EVAN LEWANDOWSKI, California – Organic

Evan Lewandowski used to live in Utah where he went to Mormon school. This accounts for the Old Testament references from the Book of Ruth (a favourite of his)

Why “Natural Wine”?

“Natural wine is the true expression of the land by way of a grapevine. I’m not interested in debating exactly WHAT natural wine is. People get all uptight about numbers and definitions in the wine world. It tends to be easier explaining exactly what natural wine is not.

It is not industrially farmed with the use of synthetic pesticides and herbicides and fungicides and fertilizers. It isn’t an industrially produced beverage product through employing unnecessary amounts of sulphur, without cultured ‘designer’ yeast and/or bacteria strains, and the myriad of other techno cellar wizardry products we have at our fingertips these days. No acid additions, no sugar, no water, no tannin, no filtration for filtration’s sake, etc etc. Inasmuch as it is possible, I strive to produce wine made of SOLELY grape juice. That is, to me, the true expression of the land via the grapevine.”

And what wines! For starters a thrilling Grenache Gris called Naomi from dry-farmed centenarian vines in McDowell Valley in Mendocino County. He ferments whole-cluster, presses the fruit and separates the juice from the skins to ferment in egg-shaped tank. The manually controlled press cycle is a long, fairly rough one to extract a higher-than-average amount of phenolic material from the beautiful, very unique fruit.

After about three weeks, native alcoholic fermentation was complete, and by the end of November the malolactic conversion had also taken place naturally. Naomi saw no winemaking additions of any kind except for a scant 20ppm of So2 at bottling. It is unfined, unfiltered, and completely intriguing. There truly is no better indication that your vineyard and the subsequent fruit born of the vineyard are healthy than a naturally healthy fermentation. Without the ‘help’ of cultured yeast, bacteria, yeast nutrient, fining agents, filtration, or sulphur during the winemaking process, one is entirely at the whim of the organisms that exist in the vineyard and in one’s winery.

Over the ageing process, Naomi develops a faintly peachy glow, which just so happens to match the white peach aroma. Overripe pear and a touch of creamy pineapple round things out... Whites made from the Grenache family often have a somewhat waxy or oily texture... this rings true here, with a refreshingly balanced acidity to counter the weight. Taut minerality carried by the reduction and a compressed leanness give this wine a further edge.

Sourced from the famous Fox Hill Vineyard in Mendocino, Chilion is Evan’s singular take on Cortese. As Evan remarks the grapes gradually turn the most beautiful opalescent apricot hue in the vineyard and gather some very interesting cognac-like spice and this was his impetus to skin-ferment the Chilion. “I couldn’t simply ditch the skins in the compost heap. So just like a red wine, the Chilion fermented to complete dryness and finished its malolactic fermentation, bubbling away for just over seven weeks before I decided to press.”

Fermented and aged naturally (without the ‘help’ of cultured yeast, bacteria, yeast nutrient, fining agents, filtration, or sulphur) in both egg-shaped tank and old, neutral barrique, Chilion is another mould-breaker. First off, it is orange. The nose bequeaths a captivating mix of apricots and golden apple, that aforementioned cognac spice, and candied orange rind. The palate is equally as enigmatic suggestive of quince and baking spice and crushed rocks. It’s got refreshing acidity, a pleasing amount of tannin and at 12.9% abv, it is deceptively light yet with the sturdiness to age. One is reminded of Stefano Bellotti’s A Demua.

Feints is a blend of Arneis, Dolcetto and Barbera. On the nose, it reveals peppery raspberries and forest-ey meaty aromas. The palate is equally intriguing. It’s lively, with fresh acidity, and an ever so slight presence of tannin. A very light red. A deeply hued rosé.

Boaz is old vines Carignan, whole cluster ferment lends a brighter, higher-toned aromatic profile, a mellowing of acidity and an all-around more delicate side to what might otherwise be a very muscular wine. Concentrated, with intense structure, it’s just very well balanced by fresh acidity, florality and bright berry tones.

Evan’s endeavour with Tatto was to find some sort of skin contact “middle ground.” Where bright freshness and intriguing depth and texture meet. Macerated wines can often be clunky or very cerebral...even our Chilion is sometimes a bit of a ‘thinking humans’ wine. With a shorter maceration of these varieties, the wine turns out to be a big ol wooden bowl of citrus fruits and lime leaves and baking spices...with a texture that gives away the maceration but isn’t quite the focal point.

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| 2022 | NAOMI ~ Grenache Gris old vines | W |
| 2021 | CHILION ~ Cortese on skins | Or |
| 2022 | TATTO WHITE BLEND ~ Friulano, Riesling, Muscat on skin | Or |
| 2023 | FEINTS CUVÉE ZERO ~ Arneis, Dolcetto, Barbera, Nebbiolo | R |
| 2020 | BOAZ ~ Carignan, Grenache, Cab Sauv | R |
| 2023 | ROSE | Ro |

“Say there be;
 Yet nature is made better by no mean
 ‘But nature makes that mean: so, over that art
 Which you say adds to nature, is an art
 That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
 A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
 And make conceive a bark of baser kind
 By bud of nobler race: this is an art
 Which does mend nature, change it rather, but
 The art itself is nature.”

BROC CELLARS, CHRIS BROCKWAY, Berkeley – Organic

Broc Cellars was started by Chris Brockway in Berkeley, California. His little winery is located in an old ink factory across the street from a cement plant in an industrial park - this is not Napa Valley big money. Chris's goal has always been to focus on sustainably farmed vineyards, old vines, heritage grape varieties, and minimal intervention in the winery. Chris works with vineyards from across California: Mendocino, Sonoma, Napa, Green Valley, Santa Lucia Highlands, Madeira, Santa Barbara, Paso Robles, the Lime Kiln Valley, and so on. Many of these sites are dry-farmed, a real feat in California's increasingly arid and drought-prone climate. He works closely with farmers to ensure grape are grown to his specifications - opting for ripeness at lower potential alcohol levels and higher acidity. The entire portfolio is true to place and grape while being sensationally drinkable and joyous.

The Love Sparkling is an ancestral method fizz. Shell Creek Vineyard is planted in eastern Paso Robles. It has been farmed by the Sinton Family since the 1800s. The 45-year-old Chenin Blanc vines are farmed organically on sandy soils with a calcareous bedrock. This year, 13% Muscat from North Canyon Vineyard in the Santa Maria Valley was blended in for an aromatic lift. The grapes are pressed whole-cluster into stainless steel where the juice ferments until fully dry. Chardonnay juice is then added for a second fermentation in bottle. In spring, the wine is hand disgorged and topped up with the same wine.

Amore Bianco comes from the famed Fox Hill Vineyard in Mendocino County. Soils here are mostly sandstone, but you'll find a wide variety of rocks and quartz scattered throughout. This year, we've got a combination of Tocai Friulano (60%) and Trebbiano (40%). The former was fermented on skins in sandstone jars for 10 days before being pressed off into a combination of sandstone and neutral barrel. The latter saw three days on skins before being pressed off for élevage in the same vessel.

In 2016, Chris grafted over some Syrah vines in Wirth Ranch Vineyard, Solano County, to Trousseau. He used massale selection from Jackson Vineyard planted in 1888. The vineyard is planted on steep iron-rich volcanic soils. This year features 15% Zinfandel from the same site. Both varieties were destemmed and co-fermented in stainless steel before being pressed off into concrete for élevage.

This cuvée is a blend of Sangiovese (26%), Montepulciano (24%), Sauvignon Blanc (23%), Dolcetto (22%), and Trebbiano (5%) grown in Mendocino County. Fox Hill Vineyard, planted on rocky sandstone between Hopland and Ukiah, provides the Italian varieties. Mi Hija vineyard in Redwood Valley provides the biodynamically farmed Sauvignon Blanc. Sangiovese, Dolcetto, and Sauvignon Blanc were picked on the same day and co-fermented carbonically in stainless steel. The Montepulciano and Trebbiano were harvested later and were also co-fermented carbonically. After a short élevage in concrete, the wine was bottled.

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| 2021 | PET NAT CHENIN | Sp |
| 2023 | LOVE WHITE | W |
| 2022 | LOVE RED | R |
| 2022 | WIRTH RANCH ZINFANDEL | R |
| 2022 | FOX HILL SANGIOVESE | R |
| 2021 | TROUSSEAU | R |

No people require maxims so much as the American. The reason is obvious: the country is so vast, the people always going somewhere, from Oregon apple valley to boreal New England, that we do not know whether to be temperate orchards or sterile climate.
Edward Dahlberg

SOKOL BLOSSER, Dundee Hills – Organic

Bill and Susan Sokol Blosser planted their first vines in 1971 in the Dundee Hills. Back then there was no Oregon wine industry. Now Dundee, in the heart of the Willamette Valley, is the epicentre of Oregon Pinot Noir. Sokol Blosser estate vineyards are farmed organically and received full USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) organic certification in 2005. Local organic straw, organic cow and horse manure, grape pomace from the crush and organic rock phosphate contribute to the composting. The insect population is kept in check by a resident flock of bluebirds. The vineyards have been certified “green” by LIVE (Low Input Viticulture and Enology, an international certification). And the underground barrel cellar, built to US Green Building Council standards, became the first winery in the country to earn the prestigious LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification.

Evolution white was created out of the desire to make a fun wine, one that would accompany the modern predilection for yoking different kinds of food together. It is a blend of nine grape varieties (I’ve come over all Mas de Daumas) to wit: Müller-Thurgau, white Riesling, Semillon, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer, Muscat Canelli, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc and Sylvaner. And a soupçon of kitchen sink. It is a beautiful mosaic with, as they say, snap, spice and zing, very much more than the sum of its very disparate parts. The label will also give much pleasure to the diehard traditionalist. As for the red allow me to quote the literature of the winery:
Introducing Evolution red. This Syrah-based blend (with some Montepulciano, Sangiovese and the nine Evo white grapes) reveals aromas of cherry and red plum, notes of ripe raspberries, a hint of cinnamon, and has a finish that’s long and juicy. It contrives, without apparently contriving, to be pleasurable and serious, the sort of wine designed to light your (barbecue) wine. It’s a friend to grilled meats, barbecued chicken, Italian red sauce dishes, pizza, cioppino and even a fine ratatouille. The label alone is worth the price of admission.

The grapes for the Pinot Gris are not de-stemmed, but pressed as whole clusters and given a slow, cool stainless steel tank fermentation lasting about a month. This is followed by an extended period of lees contact prior to blending and bottling in February the following year. The result is a wine with a firm, focused steely backbone and a creamy lushness. Now, at about 14 months post-bottling, while still exhibiting the primary fresh fruit characters of apple, pear and citrus it is just beginning to show the complex secondary earth, mineral and spice flavours and aromas that will continue to develop over the next few years. The mid-palate is fleshing out and the finish is beginning to lengthen. Pinot Gris is a versatile food wine and is particularly good with shellfish, chicken, quiches, goat’s cheese and smoked fish.
Pinot Noir thrives at Sokol Blosser and the exceptional red (volcanic) Jory soils of the Dundee Hills provide a good home. The vines range up to 30 years old and careful hand-sorting of fruit ensures that only perfectly ripe fruit makes it to the fermentation stage. Winemaker Russ Rosner (now succeeded by Alex Sokol Blosser) uses an original technique for producing full-flavoured wines allowing for a post-fermentation soak of up to three weeks resulting in soft, supple tannins and a more complex wine. The wine is then aged in French oak barrels for approximately sixteen months followed by a further year in bottle. Aromas and flavours of black cherry, liquorice and mocha, smooth and supple, long and elegant. This fragrant wine would be pleasant lightly chilled and served with salmon, pork or mushroom risotto.
The Orchard Block Pinot is a formidable wine, made from a mixture of old vineyard blocks and young vines and low yields. The wine is fermented in large open top fermenters punched down three times daily and receives the same post-fermentation maceration as the Dundee Hills. It is 100% barrel-aged (60% new, 40% once used French oak from Allier, Bertranges and Vosges oak) and is unfinned and unfiltered. The fruit is rich and heady with thick black cherry and blackberry flavours and a hint of secondary earth and truffle character.

| | | |
|------|---|---|
| 2020 | EVOLUTION LUCKY NINE ~9 aromatic white varieties | W |
| NV | EVOLUTION RED 9 th EDITION – Syrah, Sangiovese, Nero d’Avola + 9 aromatic whites | R |
| 2022 | WILLAMETTE VALLEY PINOT GRIS | W |
| 2023 | EVOLUTION PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2021 | DUNDEE HILLS ORGANIC PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2018 | ORCHARD BLOCK PINOT NOIR | R |

“Our native soil draws all of us, by I know not what sweetness, and never allows us to forget.”

— Ovid, *The Poems of Exile: Tristia and the Black Sea Letters*

KELLEY FOX WINES, Willamette Valley – Organic & Biodynamic methods

Kelley Fox Wines is a small winery producing Pinot noir from self-rooted, dry-farmed, old vines of the historic Maresh Vineyard in the Dundee Hills, and the Demeter-certified biodynamic Momtazi Vineyard in the McMinnville foothills since 2007. So much for the dry and dusty history for this is a story of a woman and the very special places where the vines grow and the wine is made and mediated.

Kelley Fox has been a full-time, on-the-floor winemaker for over sixteen years. Most of the canopy work in her blocks at Maresh she does personally and in solitude, including the biodynamic sprays. The wines are touched only by Kelley, but they are not a personal expression as she always says... “No stylistic intentions are imposed. They are silent, living songs of these beautiful farms.”

She writes: “Ovid wrote in his “Metamorphoses” that we have entered the Age of Iron, “that hard age of baser vein” (l. line 128), but farms like Maresh and Momtazi are tended with such deep respect for nature that they feel more like the previous Ages of Silver or Bronze.

Maresh Vineyard is in the Dundee Hills AVA with its reddish-brown trouser-staining volcanic jory soils. The own-rooted vineyard has been farmed organically since planting in 1970. Kelley personally stirs and sprays the biodynamic sprays with a copper backpack since 2008. The pruning is done with a crew, but the suckering, shoot-thinning, head-thinning, leaf removal, and fruit selection post-veraison in solitude.

The Mirabai is utterly transparent and full of light with a youthful red hue that is delicate to the point of bordering on dark pink. This happens to be my favourite look for a red wine. This is all Maresh fruit. The nose is classic Maresh: red fruit and soft minerals. The texture is weightless and silken in a way that is pure pleasure. There is serious structure in this wine-yes-but in the way of hidden tensile strength.

Kelley Fox is highly attuned to the song of each vineyard. She would make “spirited” wine, of course, wherever she was farming. Her approach is subtle and responsive; for her grapes are matter waiting to release the energy of the vineyard, and the wines are the liquid containers of that energetic potential. She is a humble exponent of the personal give-and-take of biodynamics, the notion that the entire process of winemaking involves tapping into a primal cosmic energy; a process that is sharp and painful in that it often takes over your whole life, the love in your body, your integrity, and your perception of the nature within you and without you.

Nature never hurries. Atom by atom, little by little she achieves her work ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

For growers such as Kelley (and there are not many like her) nature itself is the real sublime artist, whilst the vigneron, the natural artisan vigneron, labours to capture its indifferent beauty. Like the artist in Joyce’s Portrait of an Artist... she never puts herself at the forefront of the enterprise, remaining within or behind or beyond or above her handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence. Of course, she is a sensitive and sensible editor, makes myriad choices and has the technical savvy to respond to the needs of the wine. She speaks eloquently, however, about liberating the story of the wine, part of the process of channelling of the energy of the vineyard, and, that the once the wine is born, it no longer belongs to her (and becomes its own free spirit). This returns us to the notion of humility and respect, that farmers are stewards or guardians of the land.

What they take they also need to give back, which is why this form of vine growing is not just physically demanding as the process of endless nurturing inevitably is, it is equally spiritually demanding. The process is two way; the vineyard can be a healing place also. Momtazi has an initial exoticism on the nose (say Turkish delight – is this associative) leading into deeper aromatics of cool, crushed minerals. The wine had a fine depth and cutting edge with saline crunch and beautiful shape and whooshes with sour crunchy black cherry fruit. It is kinetic, salty, sappy, and tonic, bursting with life. When I say is, I mean was. The wine does not obey human rules and will always have the last laugh. Wines will move in the glass; both the wines will keep something back. With their tautness and coiling energy, they straddle the divide between abrasiveness and elegance. Maresh is different, more feminine perhaps. I get wild briary fruit interwoven with crunch of souring rhubarb and orange as well as background aromas of mint, wild herbs, earth, fennel, peppercorns, and smoke. The herbal tannins lend a medicinal note and the beautiful natural acidity creeps up on you.

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| 2021/22 | FREEDOM HILL PINOT BLANC | W |
| 2022 | WILLAMETTE CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | DURANT VINEYARD CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | NERTHUS ~ Early Muscat, Pinot Gris, Riesling | Ro |
| 2022 | MIRABAI PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2022 | MARESH VINEYARD GOLDEN CROWNED SPARROW BLOCK PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2020 | VERMOUTH | Ver |

Profile of Kelley Fox Wines

Not a profile as such, nor an in-depth analysis of the wines but a transient personal feeling about Kelley's wine. The first sensation (what I smell, when I taste) is the strength of the terroir. There is a Gaelic expression *Is Blath an Fhuil* – "the blood is strong" – and I feel the sanguine vitality of the respective vineyards pulsing in the wines. Kelley Fox disappears into her wines (for want of a better expression); hers is a reclusive, generative presence – she understands her wines whilst detaching from them. Meanwhile, the taster needs to approach with an open mind and an open spirit; in other words, not burdened by preconceptions of what Oregon Pinot Noir might or should be. When you drink a bottle of Momtazi or Maresh you should embark on a journey – these wines embody everything that is wonderful and intriguing (and occasionally frustrating) about Pinot Noir. They carry the darkness and light equally in their souls, sometimes they are temperamental and sometimes they beam with pure energy. What I love most of all is their opaque transparency. The oxymoron is justified; the wines are limpid, sans veneer, whilst the fruit is dark, volcanic, throbbing. There is deep-rootedness, but not heaviness, textural completeness but not obviousness, flowers, herbs, earth and sky, all rolled into a whole. Three wines – Mirabai, Momtazi and Maresh. All authentic and true to themselves. The truth is in the tasting. In lieu of knowing the wines, you can certainly "feel" them.

Once the wines are made, Kelley detaches from them. As the Georgians might say "she put them on their feet." She might deprecate the notion of being a winemaker. She is a combination of artisan, a translator, a midwife, a sensuous individual. She feels and understands natural beauty; she is brilliant, charismatic (yet reserved), loyal and respectful. The wines reflect that – they make no concessions and are not polished to an easy sheen. They are what they are and isn't that the essential message of terroir?



Sunrise over Maresh Vineyards, Dundee Hills, Oregon

BECKHAM ESTATE, ANDREW & ANNEDRIA BECKHAM, Chehalem Mountains - Organic

In 2004 Andrew, a ceramics artist and High School ceramist teacher and his wife Annedria, purchased land in the Chehalem Mountains AVA in Sherwood, OR to build a studio for Andrew's budding art career. They were inspired by their neighbours with 20 year old vines to begin growing Pinot Noir. In late winter of 2005, they began clearing 60-year-old Douglas Fir trees and began to plant the first two acres of self-rooted and dry-farmed Pinot Noir vines. Each year they made progress and to date they have 28 acres with 6.5 acres planted to 4 clones of Pinot Noir and a further acre planted to Riesling. Another 7 acres of North American rootstock were planted in 2014 with plans to graft to Chardonnay, Gamay, Trousseau and Savagnin.

In 2013 the "Amphorae Project" began as an attempt to marry Andrew's two passions—making wine and making art. Drawing inspiration from Elizabetta Foradori of Italy, Andrew began experimenting with producing wine in amphora. The terracotta amphorae are incredible insulators. The fermentation in amphorae has been much cooler and more prolonged compared to conventional fermentation vessels. Fermenting in amphorae means natural temperature control. Primary fermentation takes around three weeks to a month for completion. Largely because of the cool and prolonged fermentation the wines coming from amphorae are bright, high toned and very compelling. Ageing wines in the vessels has also yielded some incredibly interesting results. There is a common textural component similar to dusty brick. There exists an iron-driven earth tone regardless of varietal. The A.D. Beckham Amphora wines are fermented with native yeasts, no commercial inoculation and are unfinned and unfiltered.

The Pinot Gris is from manually harvest grapes which are whole berry fermented on the skins in amphora for 30 and 40 days. Indigenous yeast, no additions. Pressed and 50% aged in amphora and 50% aged in two acacia barrels. Natural malo, no filtration, no fining and no sulphur.

| | | |
|------|-----------------------------|----|
| 2022 | ALIGOTE | W |
| 2019 | AD BECKHAM PINOT GRIS | Or |
| 2022 | BECKHAM ESTATE PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2022 | AD BECKHAM NOIR | R |
| 2021 | AD BECKHAM PINOT NOIR CRETA | R |

BOW & ARROW, SCOTT & DANA FRANK, Portland – Organic & Biodynamic methods

Husband and wife team Scott and Dana Frank have experience of all sides of the wine industry. From working in restaurants, to retail, to wholesale, they've gained plenty of knowledge and experience over the years. They recently embarked on a new project producing wines under their own label Bow and Arrow and are taking Oregon wines to new heights! You often hear about Oregon Pinot Noirs being compared to the Pinot Noirs of Burgundy. And for good reasons, they share a similar cool climate in which Pinot Grapes thrive and produce wines of higher acidity and lower alcohol. The Willamette Valley, formed long ago by repeated glacial flooding, is abundant with fertile and rocky vineyard sites. It is also situated along the 45th parallel, which coincidentally runs through Burgundy and the Loire Valley. And despite Oregon's constant comparisons to Burgundy, it's the Loire Valley that inspires Scott and Dana's wines. They only started bottling in 2010 but have quickly earned a reputation for bringing a bit of the Loire to the Pacific Northwest. They source fruit from vineyards planted by some of Oregon's earliest 'wine pioneers' that were planted with grapes like old vine Pinot Noir, Gamay, Cabernet Franc, and Melon de Bourgogne – all typical Loire Valley grapes. These carefully sourced grapes are treated with the greatest care and minimal-intervention winemaking techniques. Their resulting wines are a breath of fresh (French) air from Oregon, lighter in style, lower in alcohol, and extremely food friendly. Gamay Noir is a dead ringer for a light style Gamay from Touraine. In fact, iconic Loire producer Clos Roche Blanche's winemaker Didier Barouillet served as a casual 'over-the-phone consultant' for Frank and Dana's Gamay Noir. Soft red fruit flavours and an earthy and granite-based minerality are all well-integrated into a medium bodied and tart finish. Rhinestones. A blend of Gamay and Pinot Noir, this red is inspired by Cheverny, a typical Loire valley red of the same blend. Ripe, juicy black cherry aromas lead to a mid-weight palate full of flavours of tart blackberries, earthy moss, and snappy acidity. It's great on its own but is a perfect food-friendly red for any occasion. Air Guitar is 60% Cabernet Sauvignon from the Borgo Pass Vineyard located in the foothills of the Coast Range just outside of Monroe along with 40% Cabernet Franc from Johan Vineyard. Given the grape varietals, it's easy to think of this wine being done in a larger Bordeaux-like style but the style here couldn't be more different. For those that love aromatic, soulful, and sensual wines it should not be missed. A stellar nose of baked cherry, sandalwood, jasmine, and spicy herb notes build from the glass followed by red cherry, and mineral that blitz the palate, with fine flavour intensity.

The long, complex and savoury finish keeps you coming back for another glass. Commencing with mineral scents and undertones of flint, this Melon from the legendary Johan vineyard situated in the van Duzer corridor with cooling breezes from the Pacific, then draws more complexity from lemongrass, melon and lime tones for enhancement. Brisk and mouth-watering on the palate with fine intensity and length, this is a wonderful match for a plate of freshly shucked oysters.

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|---------|--------------------------------|---|
| NV | TIME MACHINE BLANC | W |
| NV | TIME MACHINE ROUGE | R |
| 2021 | FOOL'S GOLD | W |
| 2021 | GAMAY NOIR | R |
| 2021/22 | RHINESTONES ~Pinot Noir, Gamay | R |
| 2021 | AIR GUITAR | R |

OVUM WINES, JOHN HOUSE & KSENIIJA KOSTIC, Newburg

John House and Ksenija Kostic both have day jobs so they're able to take risks with Ovum. For example, they focus solely on whites rather than more lucrative reds. "They are unveiled, so raw," explains House. "You can't hide anything. I think whites are a better conduit for terroir (the expression of a vineyard site) than red wines."

Where a larger winery might ferment whites quickly in large, temperature-controlled steel tanks for a consistency of style from year to year, the goal at Ovum is to reflect the vintage, no matter what it brings. So the techniques are old-school: House and Kostic allow fermentation to happen spontaneously and linger for months, in neutral (old) oak barrels. The resulting wines are richly textured and deeply layered.

The name "Ovum" is a reference to the perfect natural shape of the egg, and the life cycle a wine takes, from grape to bottle. And, yes, for all you wine geeks out there, these guys do have one of those au courant egg-shaped concrete fermenters. "There is a special convection that occurs in the concrete egg during fermentation that constantly stirs the lees," House explains.

"The natural energy and heat generated by the yeasts make the sediment move in a circular fashion, making, in my experience, wines on the most mineral end of the spectrum."

House and Kostic have made it their mission to find the state's best old plantings of overlooked varieties like Muscat and Gewurztraminer. Their explorations have led them to highlight different vineyards, often in unexpected regions, with each vintage. "There are parts of southern Oregon we find very compelling," says House. "I just got an e-mail from someone who has plantings of Riesling, farmed organically in the Umpqua Valley since 1979. Where has this fruit been going until now? It has been blended."

New to the range is Old Love, a co-fermentation of 5 different Riesling sites, fermented/aged in Novum amphora, Austrian cask, cement egg and inox. OLD LOVE takes the co-fermentation of Big Salt, applies it solely to Riesling (although it may not always be one grape, and doesn't reveal the varietal on the label because it's a process driven wine). Once all 5 vineyards are harvested at Auslese level ripeness, soaked on skins/pressed to tank (nothing added), John racks 40% of the juice into amphora, oval cask, egg and neutral barrel, whilst the remaining 60% stays in tank. After 30-40 days, he racks out of those vessels back into the tank (effectively filling the tank back up), once it's blended with the tank wine, he racks BACK into the vessels for another 30 days. That happened three times. But why? The idea is the desire to capture the complexities of amphora (structure/dryness/tannin), Austrian cask (texture/weight/richness), cement egg (heightened minerality) ...without those vessels being obvious in the wine. Most white wines couldn't handle that much movement, but Riesling benefits from the subtle oxygen in this case (low pH/high ta).

Flavours? Think GG meets Smaragd meets Ovum - the nose is dominated by tangerine, apricot, red apple skin. It's dry (5g/L RS), and has ripeness without being over-the-top. The palate is fruit packed and yet linear and yet structured all at the same time. None of the vessels or treatment are blatantly noticeable, but you can sense touches of the amphora or cement egg as you dive deeper.

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| 2023 | BIG SALT ~ Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Muscat | W |
| 2023 | PNK SALT | Ro |
| 2023 | BIG SALT ORANGE ROSE | Or |
| 2022 | OFF THE GRID RIESLING | W |
| 2022 | FOR LOVE NOR MONEY RIESLING (ceramic bottle) | W |

LA GARAGISTA, DEIRDRE HEEKIN & CALEB BARBER, BARNARD, Vermont – *Biodynamic methods*

La Garagista Farm + Winery began in 2010. Deirdre and Caleb farm three parcels of co-planted, alpine varietals that are horticultural crosses of vinifera and native riparia and labrusca vines. The family trees of these varietals are quite baroque and uniquely American. They practice biodynamic and also pull from organic and permaculture concepts. Firstly, in the home farm and vineyard in the Chateaugay, a protected forest in Barnard, Vermont (1600 feet) where they also grow vegetables and fruit and raise some livestock for their restaurant Osteria Pane e Salute. The farm is a polyculture project with vegetables, orchards, flower gardens, vines, and chickens all interplanted. The chickens are particularly interplanted. They also raise pigs on farm, utilizing them to naturally till new ground and to be the source of their farm-cured charcuterie. In the vineyard, they co-plant vegetables between the vines focusing on root vegetables, escaroles and chicories, and flowers, all things that aid the soils in this parcel. The two other parcels are in the Champlain Valley (184/194 feet) and are close to Lake Champlain. No-till and natural field cover crops are part of the farming at these two vineyards, encouraging the flora and fauna particular to each microclimate.

The name Grace & Favour is inspired by Hampton Court. La Crescent is descendent from Muscat d'Ambourg, also known as Black Hambourg. The Great Vine at Hampton Court is Black Hambourg. "Caleb and I made a pilgrimage to pay our respects to the Vine and while there read some of the history of Hampton Court. After Richelieu took over the palace from Henry the 8th, the apartments in the palace were given to ladies in waiting and chevaliers in "grace and favour". We thought this was a perfect nod to La Crescent's parentage". Currently, this wine is only available in the London market.

Vinu Jancu and Harlots and Ruffians each have their stories. The former is homage to Salvo Foti's Vinu Jancu in Sicily.

Vinu Jancu means white wine in Sicilian dialect, but also an old-style white wine that was always fermented on skins.

The Vinu Jancu vineyard is right on Lake Champlain with only a tree-lined hedgerow between vineyards and water, an intimate vineyard with essentially a natural clos. This vineyard works in a way, defying probability, one that allows Deirdre and Caleb to keep it wild. Three primary flora grow up into the canopy of the vines: purple aster, daisy fleabane, and wild mint. It is composted naturally with coyote and deer scat which roam through the vineyard in the winter months. This wine has five weeks on skins in the glass demi-johns.

Harlots is 50% La Crescent (descendent from Muscat d'Ambourg) + 50 % Frontenac Gris (descendent from Aramon and Muscat d'Alexandria) from the Vergennes vineyard in Champlain, a broad, open field five miles from the lake. The grapes are harvested by hand, destemmed into open fibreglass vats, then five weeks on skins before press. Indigenous yeasts, ambient ferment, malo for the La Crescent before bottling with a minimum amount of added sulphur. "An Orange Omelet for Harlots and Ruffians is a medieval Italian dish that we make at our restaurant, the orange ingredient used believed to inspire the debauched to purity. The citrus and creamy notes are reminiscent of this dish for us". (Writes Deirdre)

Damejeanne is 90% Marquette (descendent from Pinot Noir), 10% La Crescent (descendent from Muscat d'Ambourg) from the same vineyard as the Harlots. Yields are a mere 8.5hl/ha. The wine takes its name from the glass demi-johns in which it is fermented and aged.

Loups-Garoux speaks of the woodland and is mercurial in nature. Deirdre and Caleb use typical biodynamic preps of horn manure, silica, horsetail, stinging nettle, kaolin clay, and small amounts of minerals copper and sulphur due to intense humidity and also experiment with plant medicines provided by the vineyard floor when needed. Loups is 100% Frontenac Noir destemmed into small open fibreglass vats for wild ferment and then into 59 gallon seven year old Burgundian casks for ageing. No sulphur is used in the making of this wine.

This wine is made essentially like a ripasso on the vine. Because of its naturally high acidity, they wait until about half of each bunch is raisined then pick the whole bunches, seeking the tension between the raisined fruit and the fresh.

This Valpol-style approach yields aromas of blood sausage, bruised sour black plums and notes of bitter chocolate and roasted herbs. This would be great with venison or meat cooked with wild berry fruit.

The wines are stunning – the whites (which are amber-hued) wildly floral with flavours of orange marmalade, cloves, wild mint and strawberry leaf. They are nourishing. La Crescent expresses the different terroirs of the vineyards in the most eloquent way imaginable. The reds are very different. All share this Alpine meadow character; Deirdre has captured something unique here.

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| 2020 | GRACE AND FAVOUR PET NAT ~ La Crescent | Sp/W |
| 2020 | CI CONFONDE WHITE ~ Brianna | Sp/W |
| 2018 | VINU JANCU RESERVE ~ La Crescent | Or |
| 2019 | THE FLESH AND THE BONE ~ Vin ed Pomme | Cider |
| 2019 | FLEURINE APPLE/GRAPE WINE | Cider/wine |
| 2019 | NATIVE LOVE HOME FARM RED | W |
| 2019 | DAMEJEANNE ~ Marquette, La Crescent | R |
| 2018 | LOUPS GAROUX ~ Frontenac Noir | R |

LOST CAUSES AND DESPERATE CASES, DEIRDRE HEEKIN & CAMILA CARRILLO, Vermont ~

Biodynamic

“When Camila Carrillo joined us in 2018, I asked her what kind of wine she was interested in and interested in making: Sherry was her answer. I had several demijohns of things that either had developed flor or had different profiles to the wines we were currently making, so I set them aside to see what would happen. I thought they might be good candidates for an oxidative project we could pursue together. We tasted through and decided to put some toward rancio aging, others toward flor-ageing. Currently, we have three wines in this family, plus two more that are in progress. In 2021, we received several 50- and 100-year-old Amontillado barrels from Cota 45 {!} and since then we have deployed them in our joint project and Camila is using also for her own oxidative wines.”

They call this project “Lost Causes and Desperate Cases”.

B. Loup Rancio white is made from La Crescent and B. Loup Rancio Red is 100% Marquette. The rancio white dates back to 2014. Every year since then, a portion of La Crescent is put toward this cuvee. In 2018, they began placing the La Crescent outdoors (in their rose garden) in glass demijohns, then bringing the jars indoors in late autumn to winter in the cellar. In total, the two rancio bottlings spend three summers outside in the sun. As Deirdre notes, it helps that there is flor in the vineyards.

Because they have to rack the wine once in the summer and once in the autumn, in order to bring them out of and into the winery (a complicated procedure because in the winter the demijohns are full and high on shelves in the winery, and because La Garagista is a tiny operation and has no forklift, they gravity-rack into demijohns that are only half full in order to move them to the garden and to encourage oxidation. They have to rack back up onto the shelves for winter. It thus gives them the opportunity to add in the newest vintage to the whole and have consistency between demijohns.) The Rancio sec is nutty, floral and with notes of baking spices, but also tastes of the sun and earth. And minerals galore. The rancio red is primarily Marquette from 2017, an incredibly hot vintage that year with temperatures in the mid-30s! As a consequence, the Marquette had a degree of raisining that lent itself to a particular style of wine. Since then they have been adding a portion of the new vintage of Marquette to the whole in the same way they do for the rancio white. They are still developing the process for the red rancio. Now, a portion of the fruit is aside to partially raisin on the vine for this cuvee and the rancio spends the winter in the amontillado barrel.

As this project develops, they will have two flor-aged La Crescent soleras. One is done all in glass and the other in 100-year-old Amontillado barrel. There will be two bottlings to illustrate pure Vermont biological ageing, and the other the Vermont-Jerez connection.

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| NV | B. LOUP NO 1 | Ox |
| NV | B. LOUP NO 2 | Ox |
| NV | FOUND LOVE SOLERA WHITE | Ox |

*The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy hand
in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
and what I dream include thee, as the
wine
Must taste of its own grapes.
Elizabeth Barrett Browning – Sonnets*

Several years ago I wrote: “If you had to hold up a country as an example of how not to do it, vis-à-vis wine, then South Africa would be in pole position.” Most of the reasons were historical. During the eighties, before apartheid came to an end, other countries were able to invest heavily in vines and technology, whilst South African growers were left out of the loop. Secondly, the co-operative system which for so long determined prices and production, although it established security for the industry, neither promoted quality nor encouraged innovation. There had to be a major undertaking to abandon the age-old habit of growing as many vines as possible on the same estate on easy-to-cultivate land. Sensible measures, such as planting higher up on hillsides in search of cooler climates, are only a comparatively recent phenomenon. Having said all that there are encouraging signs: the Coastal Region has an ideal climate to produce quality grapes and there are some fascinating examples of Pinotage. And the IPW (Integrated Production of Wine) system officially launched in 1998 has set benchmarks for quality that are beginning to bite. My sneaky feeling is that more growers should experiment with Rhône and Italian grape varieties rather than adding to the world’s brimming reservoirs of Chardonnay and Cabernet.

And so to the present day. That chomping noise you hear is me eating my air-dried words liberally barbecued with humble grape pie. Within the past couple of years strong identification of terroir allied to a sensitive organic approach to winemaking has driven quality of South African wines remorselessly forward. I’ve tasted great Cabernet, Merlot (and blends thereof), Shiraz is improving and Grenache, especially where there are old vines, is a star. Synergistic (yes, it’s the revival of that buzzword) blends are in fashion, oak is being used to highlight rather than obliterate the fruit, the approach to winemaking is certainly more considered at every stage of the process.

The (Fun) Winery team encompasses everything characteristic about the ‘New South Africa’. A diverse cultural and racial mosaic, combining indigenous South Africans with Northern Hemisphere adoptees - a blending of ideas, of values and of purpose, creating a natural dynamic for innovation and success. The Winery’s distinctive range reflects entirely separate styles. Each range has its own *raison d’être*, independent of the others, though complementary to the bigger picture. The wines have a pleasing restraint from the Burgundian Radford Dale Chardonnay to the very mineral wines from Black Rock and Vinum. Working organically across all their ranges, with very low yields in the vineyard, making wines with less extraction and oak flavouring The Winery has embraced change with relish.

The Winery is definitely a winery to watch, so to speak. This year they have been recognised by the respected John Platter which garnishes virtually all the offerings with plentiful stars – and quite right.

If The Winery covers many bases extremely capably then Niels Verburg’s Luddite is a one-off speciality. This is a knock-your-socks-off-and-marinade-your-toes-in-it-Shiraz, a wine so generous you’ll be smiling for days. This year we have brought on board even more wines from Craig Hawkins in the Swartland. He is pushing the natural boundaries, making natural (& skin contact!) Chenin with fantastic energy. And now Intellego.

With the rise of the Australian and New Zealand dollar, South Africa is where the “bang-for-spring-buck” is. Now all they must do is to learn how to play rugby again.

LUDDITE, NIELS & PENNY VERBURG, Bot River

Niels Verburg founded Luddite wines in 1999 with the express intention of making world-class Shiraz. He has recently purchased a 10-hectare hillside vineyard in cool Walker Bay and we await the fruits of these grapes with keen interest. This entirely creditable effort is made from bought in grapes from unirrigated vineyards in the warmish regions of Malmesbury and Bottelary. Grapes are crushed and destalked the next day into open cement fermentation tanks. Once fermented dry, the wine was pressed with the horizontal basket press into tank where it underwent malolactic fermentation. Barrels were 30 per cent new, 50 per cent second fill and 20 per cent fourth fill. 75 per cent French Allier and 25 per cent American barrels were used. Total of 12 months in barrel. Wine was racked and given a light filtration before bottling. The Luddite Chenin expresses the nature of this grape in the Bot River. Batches of free run juice and pressed juice were put in barrel without settling and allowed to ferment naturally. This was combined with a skin ferment component with regular punchdowns. The wine was left on lees for 12 months with regular batonnage (all old barrels) – no sulphur was added to allow the wine to develop its own characteristics without any intervention. The fruit is all Bot River from a couple of vineyards including some very old vines at Avontzon Farm. Peachy apricot with hints of honey and spice come to the fore, rich, mouth filling entry with yellow peach, melons, raisins and spice. Good fruit sweetness balanced by clean, citrus tones create a beautifully balanced wine with a refreshing finish.

2021 LUDDITE CHENIN
2018/19 LUDDITE SHIRAZ

W
R

I look at a stream and I see myself: a native South African, flowing irresistibly over hard obstacles until they become smooth and, one day, disappear - flowing from an origin that has been forgotten toward an end that will never be.

Miriam Makeba

VINUM, Stellenbosch

These mature, prime vineyards are located on the slopes of the magnificent Helderberg Mountain, facing the ocean, in a south-westerly and south-easterly orientation. They consistently produce some of the finest Chenin grapes in the Stellenbosch Region, where the great Chenins of South Africa are produced. All picking and sorting was by hand. The bunches were then de-stemmed, very gently pressed in a pneumatic bag press, and the juice settled in chilled stainless-steel tanks prior to fermentation. This took place mainly in tank, on the lees, with less than 5% being transferred into small, new Burgundian barrels. Kept on the lees for six months, with regular batonnage, both in tank and in barrel, ultimate freshness was preserved, whilst developing considerable fruit complexity and depth in the wine; achieving a wonderful minerality on the palate. Bottled young, after seven months maturation, the wine retains lively fruit, steely acidity and abundant aromatic concentration: the exact qualities you'd expect from beautiful old vines. The nose hints at the wonderful elegance of this wine. White petals, citrus crispness, gentle vanilla, spicy cinnamon. The palate unfolds layers of fresh lime, deep, opulent fruitiness, and tingling spices -all wrapped in very subtle and harmonious notes of French oak, hanging on the palate with a mineral resonance. In essence, it has immense personality. A wonderfully balanced combination of the finer attributes of good Cape Chenin. For best results decant and serve not too cold alongside some grilled wild salmon (if you're paying).

In the 2021 vintage, the Vinum family grew to incorporate a Chardonnay, Gamay, Pinot Noir, Grenache and a Pinotage.

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| 2022 | VINUM CHENIN BLANC | W |
| 2022 | VINUM CHARDONNAY | W |
| 2022 | VINUM GAMAY | R |
| 2022 | VINUM PINOT NOIR | R |
| 2022 | VINUM GRENACHE | R |
| 2022 | VINUM PINOTAGE | R |

RADFORD DALE "THIRST"

This unconventional Gamay is grown in the warm region of Wellington. The old vines from which the fruit for this wine is harvested grow in deep alluvial soils and have never been irrigated. Planted on the lower slopes of the on the Eastern bank of the Berg River with a West facing aspect, the grapes ripen in the warm conditions of the region. Low, single wire trellising and the sprawling growth pattern of the variety mean that grapes are carried within the canopy, which shelters the thin-skinned bunches from too much direct sunlight, thus conserving natural acidity and freshness. Yields are small, as can be expected from a vineyard of this age.

Following a pre-selection process in the vineyards, the grapes are picked by hand at sunrise into 15kg lug-boxes. They are then ferried to the winery on the Helderberg Mountain in Stellenbosch. The hour-long journey is carried out early in the morning, before the sun has time to raise temperatures. Here, the bunches are hand sorted over a rolling sorting table whole clusters are then placed in stainless steel fermentation tanks. Dry ice is employed to ensure the tanks are saturated with CO₂ before any fermentation starts, thus encouraging the carbonic maceration that gives this wine its unique character. While this intracellular, enzymatic process takes place over the course of 10 to 12 days, the wine is only pumped over once or twice. The focus being on the gentlest extraction possible while also allowing a homogeneous medium. The whole bunches are then basket pressed and the wine then transferred to tank, to complete its alcoholic fermentation. By this time the malolactic fermentation is mostly complete as a result of the carbonic maceration. The wine is matured for a short while (3 months) on lees and then racked. The wine is not fined or filtered. Nothing has been taken away or added, except for a small amount of SO₂ before bottling. From the vibrant, pink hue with purple tinge on the rim to the soft, yet striking strawberry and cranberry aromas of the nose, this wine refuses to be defined by the rules of modern conventional winemaking. The palate shows a range of red fruits and a touch of tomato leaf, before a bracing acidity brings the wine to a long, clean finish. Light, supple tannins provide texture and a lift in the finish which refreshes and rewards at the same time. Utterly moreish, this wine seems to disappear out of the glass on its own. The wine is lean and fine but my no means simple. It intrigues with its subtle vivacity and nonconformist attitude.

The Cinsault comes from youngish vines on sandy soils of the Moddergat River. Whole bunch ferment in stainless steel with native yeast, 14 days on stems with occasional pump-overs. No filtration or fining and sulphur added only at bottling.

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| 2022 | THIRST CINSAULT | R |
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GOOD HOPE, Stellenbosch

Or Wine of Good Hope. I'm getting itchy palms so I must have found a bargain. This is about as good a unoaked Chardonnay as you could wish to find in this price bracket.

From mature, trellised vineyards right on the bank of the Breede River the Chardonnay grapes are selected from four vineyard blocks, on a gentle slope, bedded on several metres of large, oval sandstone river stones. Generally, a hot region, this spot benefits in fact from the moderating factor of the river, as well as an altitude of 350 – 370m above sea level. Green harvest thinning is carried out sufficiently early in the growing cycle, allowing for focused development of a smaller yield (around 55hl/ha) than customary in this region. Attention is paid to retaining natural acidity and minerality whilst manipulating the canopy to promote phenolic ripeness, without developing high sugars and thus excessive alcohol. The grapes are vinified with minimum skin contact, using free run juice only and reductively handled to obtain fresh, clear juice. After a cool fermentation in stainless steel tank the wine is kept on lees for 2 months, with regular batonnage. Overall, the focus is on fruit retention, natural amplification of flavours through lees work and fresh, natural minerality and acidity. Crunchy apple flavours, a hint of flint with good length, it is hopefully good value and then some.

The Chenin Blanc is something quite special and was recently voted "Best South African Unwooded Chenin" by Wine Enthusiast Magazine. The wine is made from low yielding old bush vines located in the Helderberg area. Kept on the lees with regular batonnage it is at once rich, spicy and honeyed but also balanced with a mineral undertow. Honeyed apples swarm out of the glass followed by poire William and sweet quince; the texture of the wine is admirable – mouth-coating beeswaxy fruit with sweet cinnamon.

The Pinot Noir ticks all the right boxes. Several parcels over four individual vineyard sites are used in producing this wine. The first two at altitude on the cooler mountain slopes of Elgin, the second two on the ocean-facing hilltops in the Stellenbosch-Helderberg area, facing directly into the False Bay Atlantic breezes. The vines are mostly Dijon clones and density, trellising and canopy management conducted in such a manner that the subtler characters of Pinot could be best expressed. Green harvest thinning was carried-out sufficiently early in the growing cycle, allowing for focused development of a smaller yield (+/- 38hl / ha). Fragrant, bright and refreshing Pinot with wonderful succulence and expressive fruitiness. The successful combination of its earthy, mineral & red berry characters make for a really lovely drinking Pinot, at a very reasonable price.

As with the Chardonnay green harvest thinning is carried out sufficiently early in the growing cycle, allowing for focused development of a smaller yield (38hl/ha). The fruit is rigorously hand-sorted and tiny parcels are vinified separately in small open-top tanks with traditional Burgundian methods.

Pump-overs and punch-downs are kept to a minimum as elegance is sought rather than super-structured Pinot. Taking the wine off the skins right after completion of fermentation, the free run juice was placed directly into small, 2nd-fill Burgundian barrels – previously used for Chardonnay. The pressings are matured separately and ultimately discarded from the final blend. Each of the vineyards gives a particular component to the final blend –the Darling Hills fruit has typical earthy Pinot character, the Stellenbosch fruit displays wonderful raspberry flavours and the Simondium fruit exudes a clean, mineral acidity.

The Pinotage comes from beautiful old bush vines on the Helderberg Mountain at the heart of the estate in Stellenbosch. These bush vines are over 30 years old and are of an age that allows for spice and fruit to impact on equal terms. Green harvest thinning was carried-out early in the growing cycle, allowing for enhanced focus of flavours and the restriction to a lower yield (+/- 35 hl / ha). With a short fermentation of free-run juice, no sulphur or other additions and no filtration or fining this wine focuses of the good aspects of Pinotage's heritage (cherry fruit related to Pinot, spiciness related to Cinsault) and avoids all of those that have so often made Pinotage infamously awful. Using free-run juice only is reflected in the red cherries, violets and juicy palate, which finishes with balance, length, a touch of minerality and some really funky spice. A Pinotage for pleasure. Even slightly chilled. I never thought I would put Pinotage and pleasure in the same sentence – except as deadly adversaries.

Lastly, we come to a hand-harvested Shiraz from the Western Cape (sourced from two mature vineyards). Plenty of natural ripeness here, blue-and-blackberry fruit, refreshing acidity and a lick of spice.

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| 2023 | GOOD HOPE (UNOAKED) CHARDONNAY – stelvin | W |
| 2023 | GOOD HOPE (BUSH VINE) CHENIN BLANC – stelvin | W |
| 2022 | GOOD HOPE (MOUNTAINSIDE) SYRAH – stelvin | R |
| 2022 | GOOD HOPE OCEANSIDE CABERNET MERLOT - stelvin | R |

RADFORD DALE, Stellenbosch

The Chardonnay fruit for this estate comes from two parcels. The first is from the ocean-facing, easterly and westerly slopes of Helderberg Mountain, one of the coolest microclimates in Stellenbosch. The vines, grown in Clovelly soil (decomposed granite), are mature and virus free, usually yielding 40 hl/ha and providing wonderful fruit depth. The second, a beautiful limestone-based vineyard on the western slope of the Simonsberg Mountain, provides rare flinty and mineral flavours. 2005 was a perfect vintage with even flowering, optimal rainfall at the right times and hot days with cool nights. The grapes were all hand-picked at dawn into small lug-bins, chilled for 24 hours, then hand-fed over a sorting table. The quality of fruit was immaculate which resulted in very little bunch rejection at all. It was then whole bunch pressed, with the free-run juice settled for two days before being gravity-fed into barrel. Alcoholic fermentation was entirely carried out in barrel for 8 – 10 weeks. The must had particularly lively and intense flavours this vintage, with better natural acidity than normal and greater fruit complexity, due to the season of cool evenings coupled with the longer hang-time for the fruit. Batonnage was applied weekly during the first two months, then monthly for the following eight and finally the wine was racked out of barrel after eleven months, assembled, and left to settle for six weeks with a light bentonite fining and no filtration until bottling. The oak is 100% French: Allier & Vosges 228 L barrels. 30% 3rd fill, 50% 2nd fill and 20% new. This superb Chardonnay combines fine restraining acidity, citrus flavours and gentle oaking with ripeness, length and great depth. Genuinely mineral, with a crisp lime-citrus edge and an elegant yet intense length on the palate. “A Chardonnay daring to be individual, focused on backbone not butter.” A classy wine, deserving of yer best Lobster Thermostat, as the great Arthur Daley would say.

Radford Dale Nudity is from a single vineyard, rooted in ancient granite soils on the east facing slope of the famed Paardeberg mountain. 2014 marked 10 years of organic cultivation and the effects are being seen more and more in the health of the vineyard and the clarity and purity of the wine. Harvesting took place only by hand into 15kg lug boxes in the early morning so that cool, intact grapes could be transported to the cellar and to protect the purity of the fruit. Bunches were then individually hand sorted before being destemmed and lightly crushed. Fermentation occurred spontaneously through natural yeast in a large open-top fermenter. No additions of any kind were made during the vinification of this wine. The result is a wonderfully expressive, complex and elegant wine. The nose beams dark red fruits, and intriguing fynbos aromas. With pure and weightless intensity of fruit, as well as graphite like minerality, the palate delights before leading into a fresh and wholesome finish.

Finally, to the seriously serious Gravity (but seriously), a beautifully harmonious three-way blend of Merlot, Shiraz and Cabernet. Each parcel of these vines is situated on ocean-facing, mountainous slopes of the premium Stellenbosch appellation.

These considerably cooler maritime areas of Stellenbosch benefit thus from the cooling influence of the ocean, the sanitizing breezes and the temperate altitude. Yields are low, at around 37 hl /ha, all grapes are handpicked and rigorously selected over a sorting table. Following the triage process, each batch of grapes is entirely de-stemmed then pre-fermentation cold-soaked,

all individually. Pump-over is made once, maximum twice a day, as is punching down. Left on skins for two weeks after fermentation before racking off the free-run juice subsequently goes to barrel (small Allier oak, new & first fill, using only fine artisan French coopers), again each batch separately, and entirely by gravity. The pomace and skins are left over-night to drip-drain – this time into new “demi-muids” (600-litre French oak vats), natural, gravitational pressings, which give rise to far more integrated and supple tannins in the final wine, thereby achieving equilibrium between natural sweetness of fruit and integration of structure. Each varietal contributes its unique facets; the Merlot its deep red-berry fruit and suave mouth-feel, the Shiraz its persevering spiciness and its gutsy, supple body; the Cabernet its blueberry backbone and dense, ripe tannins. All knitted together by patient, careful maturation. This wine bears the hallmark of the region it was reared in and the mineral soils in which it has its roots.

Which leads me to write:

Gravity, Gravity, there's nothing quite like Gravity

There never was a wine of such elegance and suavity

It may be Merlot, it may be Shiraz, you're really not too sure

But whatever it is, with all that flavour, you know Gravity's a damn good pour!

(With apologies to T.S. Eliot)

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| 2022 | RADFORD DALE TOUCHSTONE CHARDONNAY ~ Elgin | W |
| 2020 | RADFORD DALE RENAISSANCE CHENIN ~ Stellenbosch | W |
| 2018 | RADFORD DALE BLACK ROCK RED ~ Swartland | R |
| 2022 | RADFORD DALE FRANKENSTEIN PINOTAGE ~ Stellenbosch | R |
| 2021 | RADFORD DALE FREEDOM PINOT NOIR ~ Elgin | R |
| 2020 | RADFORD DALE NUDITY No 16 ~ Syrah, Voor-Paardeberg | R |
| 2014 | RADFORD DALE GRAVITY ~ Stellenbosch | R |

X –cess – as in “Give me excess of it, that surfeiting, /The appetite may sicken, and so die”. Obvious, vulgar, over-acidified, over-oaked, heavily alcoholic, cloying wines tend to be indigestible and resistible. Three-piled hyperbole in wine tends to batter our critical faculties into submission; not only can’t you taste the fruit for the trees; but you get jaw-ache trying to ingest slowly the pneumatic properties of the *Dolly Partons*. Some people like this stuff, but they’ll pay for it in the end; there is, after all, no accounting for gout! ~The Alternative Wine Glossary

BRUNIA WINES, WADE SANDER, Walker Bay ~ Organic conversion

Wade Sander dreamt about being a vigneron from an early age. He enrolled at Elsenburg Agricultural College in 2010, and after graduating, joined the CWG internship programme working with the likes of Le Riche and Bouchard Finlayson whilst also completing two international harvests in Edna Valley, USA as well as a very influential apprenticeship in the Loire Valley with Thierry Germain of Domaine des Roches-Neuves. Wade then joined the Mullineux & Leeu Family Wines in 2015 in his final year of internship and was appointed as an associate winemaker.

The relationship with the Mullineux family lasted six vintages and was instrumental in the development of his winemaking philosophy. The time there exposed and presented him with the opportunity to explore and experiment with natural winemaking techniques and enhanced his perception of fine wine. The development of the Leeu Passant brand was also a valuable learning curve and provided an ideal environment in which to hone his craft.

A harvest trip to Jura in 2018 at Domaine de la Tournelle further served as a catalyst and prompted a desire to pursue his Brunia Wines project in Sondagskloof full time.

Cold Mountain Vineyards was finally acquired by the Sander Family in September 2016. The farm is located 17km east of Stanford in a valley known as Sondagskloof, which drains westward into the Uilenkraal River. The surrounding topography rises to an altitude of 845m, whilst the highest point on the farm is 290m.

With the exception of a sandstone hill, most of the farm is characterised by moderate slopes. The farm is bounded by the heights of the Koueberg Mountain range in the south and has the imposing Tafelberg on its northern boundary and stretches over 417ha with 17 devoted to vines, 6 ha under figs and a further 5ha of seasonal vegetables. The farm, as is much of the Cape South Coast, is blessed with vast tracts of pristine fynbos, home to a diversity of plant and animal species, including the rare Brunia Laevis, more commonly known as Silver Brunia which lends its name to the range of Wade’s boutique wines. Under the direction of Brett and Wade Sander, the family has been transforming the estate into a mixed farming organic and biodynamic operation.

Sondagskloof as mentioned is situated on the slopes of the Koue Berg mountain range and classified as a cool-climate region. It has a strong maritime influence being just 17km from the Atlantic Ocean and benefits from being positioned 280m above sea level giving rise to a moderate growing season and extended hang time. The grape varieties currently planted there include Sauvignon, Semillon, Chardonnay, Syrah, and Pinot Noir.

Both the Sauvignon Blanc (the oldest vines) & Semillon are planted on decomposed granite soils; these are south facing slopes situated approximately 280m above sea level. The Syrah is also on a north-facing granite-rich site – at a similar altitude.

Sustainable practices are followed in the vineyard and the brothers are in the process of conversion to organics, but have taken a long-term approach, having switched from chemical fertilizers to compost and eliminated all systemic sprays in the vineyard. They have also recently invested in an under-vine weeder as well as a cover crop planter.

The saline nature of this granitic terroir is communicated through the wines which are precise and tense. We begin with Brunia White, a blend of Sauvignon (69%) and Semillon (31%). The blend will vary according to the vintage. Grapes are whole-cluster straight-pressed into 228 litre French barrels (a small proportion of which are new) and ferment with ambient yeasts for 14-18 days before ageing on the lees for a further ten months. The wine is then racked and goes back into barrel for another spot of ageing before bottling without filtering and just a small amount of sulphites (total So2 is around 50 ppm). The wine has an herbaceous twang with some real stony purity and nice lingering acids. The oak provides some support and rounds out the ensemble.

The Sauvignon – a mere 600 bottles produced in 2020 and none in 2021 – is cut from a similar cloth. This wine is the opposite of the classic floral/aromatic styles, being almost steely-dry and tensile, with fine fluidity.

Finally, there is the Syrah, which is 40% whole cluster, the remainder being destemmed whole berries placed on top. The open-top ferment starts naturally with daily punch-downs with a twenty-one-day maceration and then the wine is pressed to 228-litre used barrels where it ages for 14 months and then is bottled without filtration or fining and a just a modicum of added sulphites. This parcel gives a classic expression of Syrah, with typical pepper, clove & fynbos aromas. The 2019 is a textured wine with fresh tannins and great length and might remind one (dare one say) of a Crozes-Hermitage from a certain Dard & Ribo.

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| 2022 | BRUNIA SAUVIGNON | W |
| 2020 | BRUNIA WHITE | W |
| 2019 | BRUNIA SYRAH | R |

"I can't bear art that you can walk round and admire. A book should be either a bandit or a rebel or a man in the crowd." (DH Lawrence)

TESTALONGA, CRAIG HAWKINS, Swartland – Organic

Craig Hawkins is a young winemaker who has travelled extensively in Europe and worked in Portugal and Austria. He makes wines under his own Testalonga El Bandito label and a few years ago he introduced the Baby Bandito wines. He experiments in each vintage although he has pretty well found his winemaking style.

El Bandito Cortez; Skin Contact Chenin; Mangaliza and Sweet Cheeks are all from the Boschgassfontein old Observatory Vineyard (planted in early 70s, bush vines). These vines are farmed by Craig – organically and are unirrigated. He uses cover crops, ploughs a couple of times once or twice or mows, depending on the vintage. The soils are old decomposing granite with some quartz interspersed.

The Baby Bandito Chin Up; Stay Brave; Hallelujah Chicken Run; Queen of Spades; The Dark Side and Monkey Gone to Heaven are from vineyards Craig started working with when he left Lammershoek (now fully organic) and he shares these blocks with Jurgen. The farmer's name is Rick Mcgrindle (they lie west of the Observatory vineyard towards Malmesbury). All are organic.

The Ninja Pet Nat is from a tiny block close to Lammershoek (the farm owner doesn't farm, so he allows Craig take care of it.)

The Baby Bandito Keep on Punching and Follow Your Dreams are from the farm next door to Lammershoek called Morelig. Craig helped him convert to organics back in 2011 when he brought the farm.

THE WINES

Baby Bandito Follow Your Dreams – Carignan – whole bunch, no carbo, 35 hl/ha in foudre

Baby Bandito Stay Brave – Chenin (11 days on skins), carbonic and then foudre

Baby Bandito Keep On Punching – Chenin – stainless

Baby Bandito Chin Up - Cinsault

El Bandito I Wish I Was A Ninja – Colombard (bush vines) – pet nat

El Bandito I am the Ninja – Chenin (bush vines) from 1961 vineyard – pet nat

El Bandito Queen of Spades– 100% Tinta Amarela – 500-litre used barrels

El Bandito Monkey Gone To Heaven – Mourvèdre – whole bunch fermented – then into 500 litre old barrels

El Bandito Cortez Chenin – Whole bunch pressed. Aged in 500 l barrels and one large tank

El Bandito Chenin Skin Contact -Destemmed, fermented in open top – 8 days maceration – aged in 3000 litre foudre

El Bandito Lords of Dogtown Chenin -from a previously abandoned 1981 vineyard. Whole bunch into 500 l. No SO2

El Bandito Mangaliza – Harslevelu bush vines – Whole bunch – 500 litre

El Bandito The Dark Side – Syrah – Whole bunch, open top fermentation, aged in 500 l barrel

He came dancing across the water
Cortez, Cortez
What a killer

Neil Young ~ Cortez The Killer

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|---------|---|----|
| 2023 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO I WISH I WERE A NINJA PET NAT ~ Colombard | Sp |
| 2023 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO I AM THE NINJA PET NAT ~ Chenin | Sp |
| 2023 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO "CORTEZ" | W |
| 2023 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO SKIN CONTACT | W |
| 2023 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO SWEET CHEEKS | W |
| 2023 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO LORDS OF DOGTOWN | W |
| 2023 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO "MANGALIZA" ~ Harslevelu | W |
| 2022 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO "LEKKER" ~ magnum | W |
| 2022/23 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO "THE DARK SIDE" SYRAH | R |
| 2023 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO QUEEN OF SPADES ~ Tinta Amarela | R |
| 2023 | TESTALONGA EL BANDITO MONKEY GONE TO HEAVEN ~ Mourvèdre | R |
| 2022/23 | TESTALONGA MIELE GREEN CHENIN (Les Caves de Pyrene exclusive) | W |
| 2021 | BANDITSKLOOF DAISY'S POND WHITE ~ Grenache Blanc | W |
| 2023 | BABY BANDITO KEEP ON PUNCHING WHITE ~ Chenin | W |
| 2023 | BABY BANDITO STAY BRAVE ~ Chenin skin contact | W |
| 2022/23 | BABY BANDITO FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS RED ~ Carignan | R |
| 2022/23 | BABY BANDITO CHIN UP RED ~ Cinsault | R |

Magnums on request

PEARL MOUNTAIN WINES, DAVID RETIEF, Paarl– Organic

On the Northern slopes of Paarl Mountain, you will find Pearl Mountain, a fifth-generation farm dating back to the 18th Century. Originally established in 1747 as a blacksmith's home and forge, today it is home to Pearl Mountain Wines. In 1873 it was purchased by the first generation of Retiefs, in 1999 the first vines were planted, and the first vintage was in 2004. David Retief is now at the helm.

Organically farmed since 2016, though not certified. Multiple cover crop combinations are sowed or allowed to go to seed and regrow the following season before being rolled or mowed. Planting rows are mowed and weeded by hand only, but soil is never bare. Vines are "weeds" themselves so can generally outcompete any lesser vegetation as long as it isn't allowed to take over.

Soils are decomposed granite, and the vineyards are at an altitude of 185m. Vineyards are trellised using the VSP system and run from N-S along the slope so that there is a certain amount of protection from the heat of the midday sun that we can experience in mid-summer. Vineyards are suckered and tipped after flowering and fruit-set. 50% (although this figure is adapted depending on bunch counts/season) of all bunches are discarded early on to allow more even ripening and to avoid putting vines under unnecessary stress in the height of summer. Irrigation is available but is only supplementary and to date only post-harvest irrigation has been applied. Grapes are manually harvested into lugs, partially crushed, and whole bunch ferment take place in open top tank for 14 days No real maceration...but partially crushed ferment. Indigenous yeast, ambient ferment and then matured in 500 L old (neutral) barrel. Only a very light clarifying filtration. No fining agents are added. Only and only a small amount (10ppm) of SO2 is used pre bottling only.

"For the Birds" range of wines is dedicated to the process of farming alongside nature, and indeed encouraging it in the vineyards. The vineyards are healthier and happier for it, and the hope is that the wine will reflect this. The "Drongo" is a very intelligent bird, which feeds largely on bees and other flying insects, is quite common in South Africa, but only appeared on the farm quite recently.

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| 2020 | FLIGHT OF THE DRONGO ~ Grenache | R |
|------|---------------------------------|---|

Jurgen worked with Eben Sadie for a vintage in Spain (at Terroir Al Limit in Priorat), and also in South Africa. He did further stints in France (at Matassa with Tom Lubbe and with Stephane Ogier at Roc d'Anglade) and in New Zealand and Russia (where he made the premium wines for a big winery during 2008 and 2009). Subsequently, he worked for 4 years at Lammershoek with Craig Hawkins, but since January 2015 has concentrated solely on Intellego and renting vineyards for his project. The philosophy is always about minimal intervention during the winemaking process, the wines being a celebration of the arduous work done in the vineyard. For Jurgen it is intuitive winegrowing, an evolution through experimentation on small pockets of land selected in the Swartland Appellation. One of the chief objectives is to create optimum soil conditions through organic practices, where the vines will be nurtured for an indefinite period, creating conditions for each block to develop their own individual character.

The first wine Jurgen made was **Intellego Chenin**. It used to be a blend of two parcels, a combination of granite and sandstone sites in the South and Southwest Swartland appellation, but now the bush vines are on a single granite site planted in 2002 and are dry farmed. The plot is situated on an east-facing slope with a lot of early morning sun during spring and summer, which assists in early ripening. The top layers of the soil are very sandy and well drained contributing to the fresher, "mineral" style.

Due to low yield, there is always a high concentration in the small bunches that give excellent texture together with poor soil that lifts the intensity of the wine. The grapes are manually harvested and whole bunch pressed, the juice fermented in old French oak 500L barrels, where it ages for 10 months. Ferment is with indigenous yeasts and ambient, the wine matures in 9-year-old 225l French oak barrels with a full malolactic fermentation. No fining, no filtration and very low sulphur addition. These bush vines Chenin yield fruit with impressive purity and firm acidity. This wine has the crunch of green apples and a fine linear quality and ages exceptionally well.

The **Elementis Skin Contact** comes from dry-farmed 38-year-old bush vines on oak leaf soil which consists of three layers: sand, gravel and deeper clay. Grapes are destemmed, fermented in a plastic 1000L tank for 13 days on the skins, once a day drained juice is used to wet the cap. The wine is aged in 500-litre old French oak barrels for 9 to 10 months where the malo completes. Elementis has a cloudy unfiltered apple-juice with the lees in suspension. Extraordinarily pretty aromatics; notes of dried fruits, flowers, dried herbs, ginger, and other spice. The palate has a weightless intensity about it and possesses layers of flavour. The finish is long with a pleasant grippiness. The label is beautiful. Elementis is a Latin word and refers to the four natural elements of earth, water, fire & air. The bottle symbolises the region from where the grapes originate while the umbrella is the contrast as it symbolises the style in which the wine is made – skin contact. The red of the hand symbolises fire, the yellow water, the green umbrella earth and the blue air.

Sleeping Co-Pilot comes from a parcel of Viognier planted in 2003 exposed to the Atlantic Ocean and receiving a constant breeze in the afternoon but also in a very dry position. Soils here are glen rosa and oak leaf. Yields are a minuscule 20 hl/ha. Grapes are manually harvested and fermented whole bunch in open tanks with 14 days maceration on skins before maturing in 7-year-old French oak barrels (300 & 500 litre) for 10 months and bottled without filtration or fining. Bold amber wine, stunning vibrancy on the nose and beautiful freshness from the stems, a Viognier that is extraordinarily light on its feet.

And so to the reds, and **Halagasha Pinotage**. Yes, Pinotage. This version comes from dry-farmed vines growing in soils of decomposed granite on a south west facing slope at 200m altitude. The whole bunches undergo semi-carbonic maceration for 8 days and ferment ambiently with indigenous yeasts before being transferred into neutral 225L French oak barrels (12 years old) for 5 months and then spending 4 weeks in stainless steel. Halagasha is the Xhosa (one of the official languages of South Africa) term for celebrating a football goal. And this is a wine worth celebrating with red fruit and peppery spice on a nice line of acidity. Like so many of Jurgen's wines, it has delightful angles.

The Pink Moustache comes in a bottle with another striking label. In this instance, facial hair symbolizes the three different styles of wine red (beard), rose (clean skin) and the light red (moustache). This wine represents the lighter red style, and the word pink describes the colour as it's a mix between a pink/light red. The wine itself is a blend of Syrah, Cinsault and Mourvèdre, the ratio changing according to the vintage from a parcel facing the ocean benefiting from an afternoon sea breeze effect in the afternoon. The Syrah bush vines were planted in 2001 in oakleaf soil with ferricrete as the top layer. The ferricrete sedimentary rock is renowned for higher levels of iron and good water retention beneficial for dry land farmed conditions. The Cinsault was planted in 1988 on a sandy site not far from the Syrah. The grapes are manually harvested. Syrah and Mourvèdre are whole bunch pressed and fermented in old French oak barrels for five months, whereas the Cinsault is whole bunch fermented for 4 days and aged in old French oak barrels for 5 months. This a delicious drink: light ruby red with aromas of red berries, flowers, herbs and pepper. The palate is light, fresh and fruity with fine acidity and a juicy long aftertaste. "After a great surfing experience in Bali, we ended on a high with the best surf at this special spot called **Kedungu** in my hungover state. This experience and energy were transferred into the wine when we bottled a few months after my trip".

The vineyard for the Kedungu is cooler and ripens a bit later than the rest with summer breezes and excellent soil water retention contributing to the wine's fresh fruit profile. Planted on a southeast facing slope at an altitude of 210m on decomposed granite with quartz as well this wine features Syrah (mainly) with a big dollop of Cinsault and a little Mourvèdre.

The grapes are semi-carbonic fermented for 8 days in closed tanks with a small percentage in open fermenters and then matured in 228l and 500l old French oak barrels for 9 months and a further month in stainless steel tanks. Bottling is without filtration and fining, just a little sulphur at bottling. Syrah, the backbone of this blend, contributes to the structure and freshness of the wine. Cinsault adds a lovely mid palate and vibrance with loads of red fruits. Mourvèdre is known for great tannin structure and depth as well as darker fruit. The result is a southern Rhône-seque red, earthy, smoky, and savoury with bramble fruit and notes of fynbos.

The final red is **Intellego Syrah**, the grapes for which come from two parcels. One has decomposed granite soils, the other iron, one on a northeast facing slope, the other looking south east. The grapes are whole bunch fermented in plastic and stainless-steel vats, then pressed after 10 days, before being racked to age in 225l and 500l old French oak barrels where they undergo malolactic fermentation. This Syrah has remarkable elegance with delicious floral varietal character (violets), currant fruits meshed with wild herbs and subtle notes of pepper and finishing with fine tannins and a flicker of saltiness.

Really fine and lovers of northern Rhône Syrah will adore this.

| | | |
|------|---|-------|
| 2023 | HEY MILA! PET NAT ~ Mourvèdre | Sp/Ro |
| 2023 | SYBILLE PET NAT ~ Pinotage | Sp/Ro |
| 2022 | THE STORY OF HARRY ~ Chenin, Chardonnay | W |
| 2021 | INTELLEGO CHENIN BLANC | W |
| 2022 | ELEMENTIS SKIN CONTACT CHENIN | Or |
| 2022 | SLEEPING CO-PILOT ~ Viognier on skins | Or |
| 2023 | THE PINK MOUSTACHE | R |
| 2021 | KEDUNGU RED | R |
| 2021 | INTELLEGO SYRAH | R |

SHERRIES & PORTS

He asked for a glass of Amontillado, but at the sight of this pale-dry wine, the English author's soothing stories and gentle lenitives gave place to the harsh revulsives and painful irritants provided by Edgar Allan Poe. The spine-chilling nightmare of the cask of Amontillado, the story of a man walled up in an underground chamber, took hold of his imagination; and behind the kind ordinary faces of the American and English customers in the Bodega he fancied he could detect foul, uncontrollable desires, dark and odious schemes.

J-K Huysmans – Against Nature

SHERRIES

Please find details of our other sherries from Bodegas Emilio Hidalgo, Cesar Florido and Sanchez Ayala in the Spanish section of the list.

PORTS

This list is often updated. Please ask.

"... Mr. Tulkinghorn sits at one of the open windows, enjoying a bottle of old port. Though a hard-grained man, close, dry, and silent, he can enjoy old wine with the best. He has a priceless bin of port in some artful cellar under the Fields, which is one of his many secrets. When he dines alone in chambers, as he has dined to-day, and has his bit of fish and his steak or chicken brought in from the coffee-house, he descends with a candle to the echoing regions below the deserted mansion, and, heralded by the remote reverberation of thundering doors, comes gravely back, encircled by an earthy atmosphere and carrying a bottle from which he pours a radiant nectar, two score and ten years old, that blushes in the glass to find itself so famous, and fills the whole room with the fragrance of southern grapes."

"'To which University,' said a lady, some time since, to the late sagacious Dr. Warren, 'shall I send my son?' 'Madam,' replied he, 'they drink, I believe, near the same quantity of Port in each of them.'"

| | |
|------|-----------------------------------|
| NV | DOW'S RUBY |
| NV | DOW'S TAWNY |
| 2009 | DOW'S LBV |
| 2004 | DOW'S QUINTA DO BOMFIM |
| NV | SMITH WOODHOUSE 10-YEAR-OLD TAWNY |
| 1998 | WARRE'S QUINTA DA CAVADINHA |
| 1980 | WARRE'S VINTAGE |

EAUX DE VIE

Claret is the liquor for boys; port, for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy.

Dr Johnson

COGNAC

COGNAC, EDGAR LEYRAT

A 54-hectare estate in Fins Bois area, Domaine de Chez Maillard produces Cognacs which are regular winners in spirit competitions. Made from organically grown grapes, Leyrat Cognacs are a unique example of fine Cognacs from the Fins Bois area, which surrounds the three central crus.

Lot 10 is a very pale 10-year-old Cognac aged in old oak and the initial nose show traces of oak with fruity notes reminiscent of plums, summer flowers and a light citrus touch. The palate is clean and elegant and naturally lively. Lot 71 is blended from three 30 plus year old

Pass the yak. You are exhorted to pass the yak by Busta Rhymes whose affinity for the 300-year-old distilled wine product is expressed in the hit song "Pass the Courvoisier", only the title of which is printable here.

Do say: "Si on veut vraiment extra 'super-ghetto fabulous', on boit le 'yak.'"

Don't say: "Enjoy the smooth, sophisticated taste of Courvoisier alone or in the company of yo b*****."

(With apologies to *The Guardian*)

Cognac tonneaux, the lot number refers to the potential year of distillation. Bronze gold in colour, one first catches complex dried fruit, spice and delicate oak, which evolves into woody notes with a touch of pine resin. The palate is full and rich with rancio Charentais, finishing with light touches of cedar wood and dried apricot.

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| VSOP – 40% | 70cl |
| XO VIEILLE RESERVE – 40% | 70cl |

COGNAC RAGNAUD SABOURIN

Domaine de la Voûte

With 50 ha in the Grande Champagne area, Cognac Ragnaud Sabourin is one of the most prestigious private estates in Cognac. Since 1850, the estate has been managed by the same family whose founder, M. Gaston Briand, was the instigator of the identification of the different terroirs of Cognac in 1909, which in 1936 led to the classification of the different Crus. At 88, his daughter, Mme Ragnaud, still welcomes visitors at the Domaine de la Voûte, but the estate is now managed by his granddaughter and great-granddaughter. Known as “Les dames de Grande Champagne”, they have always combined tradition and quality at all stages of their Cognac production.

"More Brandy wine? They were boiling it in Ireland before the snakes left!"

King Henry II in The Lion in Winter (1968)

The resulting spirits represent all the qualities of the finest Grande Champagne Cognacs. “Le Paradis” is a blend of very old spirits, some of which were distilled before the Phylloxera epidemic around 1870. This is a Cognac of exceptional length, whose incredibly complex rancio is backed by touches of dried fruit and spice.

| | |
|--|------|
| VSOP, SELECTION ANNIE – 41% | 70cl |
| ALLIANCE N° 4 – 41% | 70cl |
| ALLIANCE N° 10 VSOP – 41% | 70cl |
| RESERVE SPECIALE, ALLIANCE N° 20 – 43% | 70cl |
| FONTVIEILLE, ALLIANCE N° 35 – 43% | 70cl |
| XO | 70cl |

COGNAC MAXIME TRIJOL

A family business since 1876, Cognac Trijol is exclusively made from grapes grown in the Grande Champagne area. The Trijol Family vineyard of about 20 ha is situated in Salles d’Angles near Sigognac, the capital of the Grande Champagne arm south of Cognac. The family is also well known as a “bouilleur de cru” in Cognac and distil for most of the main Cognac Houses.

Trijol Cognacs are handsome Cognacs, rounded and well structured, with a fine and intense nose showing lots of maturity. The age of all the qualities is well above that which is legally required by law, with the VSOP being a minimum of 10 years old and the XO a minimum of 20 years old. The “Très Rare” quality is a blend of Cognacs of which the youngest one is at least 50 years old.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| ELEGANCE GRANDE CHAMPAGNE – 40% | 70cl |
| VSOP GRANDE CHAMPAGNE – 40% | 70cl |
| XO – in decanter – 40% | 70cl |
| ANCESTRALE – hand-blown bottle – 41% | 70cl |

Classic Range

These are our “house” cognacs.

| | |
|------------|------|
| VS – 40% | 70cl |
| VSOP – 40% | 70cl |
| XO – 40% | 70cl |

ARMAGNAC

ARMAGNAC BARON DE SIGOGNAC

ADEX, the company behind the Baron de Sigognac brand holds one of the most important stocks of old vintages in the whole Armagnac region. They are also growers and distillers, owning a 10ha estate near Eauze at the heart of the “sables fauves” (tawny sand) area which is typical of the best terroirs in the Bas Armagnac. ADEX specialises in sourcing and ageing old vintages that are kept at the domaines where they have been produced, until their bottling and commercialisation. These vintage Armagnacs are left to mature in local oak casks and their alcohol strength reduces naturally to about 40%, after 40 to 50 years.

| | |
|--|------|
| VS, BAS ARMAGNAC – 40% | 70cl |
| VSOP, BAS ARMAGNAC – 40% | 70cl |
| 10 ANS RESERVE, BAS ARMAGNAC – 40% | 70cl |
| 20 ANS VIEILLE RESERVE, BAS ARMAGNAC – 40% | 70cl |

VINTAGE SELECTION

Older vintages may be available on request.

| | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1952 | BARON DE SIGOGNAC, BAS ARMAGNAC - 40% | 70cl |
| 1961 | BARON DE SIGOGNAC, BAS ARMAGNAC – 40% | 70cl |
| 1964 | BARON DE SIGOGNAC, BAS ARMAGNAC – 40% | 70cl |
| 1966 | BARON DE SIGOGNAC, BAS ARMAGNAC – 40% | 70cl |
| 1972 | BARON DE SIGOGNAC, BAS ARMAGNAC – 40% | 70cl |
| 1978 | BARON DE SIGOGNAC, BAS ARMAGNAC – 40% | 70cl |

ARMAGNAC DOMAINE BOINGNERES

The 22 ha estate, which has been part of the family since 1807 is situated at the heart of the “Grand Bas Armagnac”, on sandy ferruginous soils. Half of the vineyard is planted with Folle Blanche and the rest is mainly Ugni Blanc and Colombard. All cépages are vinified and distilled separately. Blending only takes place later during the maturation period.

These Armagnacs of exceptional quality are the result of a perfect balance between tradition and innovation. Léon Lafitte, who managed the Domaine until his death in 1994, was a pioneer both in his choice of planting Folle Blanche when everyone else was replanting with the ubiquitous Ugni Blanc and in investing heavily in new stills and vinification equipment.

| | | |
|------|---------------------|------|
| 2001 | FOLLE BLANCHE - 49% | 70cl |
|------|---------------------|------|

CALVADOS

BERNEROY

Distillers and éleveurs of fine Calvados, the distillery holds and matures a large stock of Calvados between 10 and 25 years old. Careful attention through the ageing period produces very round and rich with hints of fruit and spice.

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| FINE CALVADOS– 40% | 70cl |
| CALVADOS VSOP– 40% | 70cl |
| CALVADOS XO– 40% | 70cl |

DISTILLERIE DU HOULEY

Established at the beginning of the 20th century, Distillerie du Houley is a family owned business. The Deschamps Family manages both a Calvados and a cider production plant for export markets in Europe. Their Calvados is characterised by freshness and the fruity aromas of strictly selected apples.

| | |
|-------------------------|------|
| HENRY DE QUERVILLE– 40% | 70cl |
|-------------------------|------|

DOMAINE FAMILIAL L. DUPONT

Etienne Dupont, who is currently managing the estate, is the third generation of the same family to produce Calvados from the Pays d'Auge.

The 27 ha orchard mainly consists of bittersweet apple varieties, which are exclusively picked by hand. Etienne's first move, when he took over the Domaine, was to re-plant some of the orchard and then to go to Cognac to learn the secrets of double distillation and fine spirit ageing.

Etienne Dupont represents a new generation of Calvados makers and his full commitment to quality clearly appears in the high standard of his products, unanimously recognised for their fruity aromas and delicacy.

| | | |
|------|----------------------|------|
| | VSOP – 42% | 70cl |
| | HORS D'AGE – 42% | 70cl |
| | PLUS DE 17 ANS – 42% | 70cl |
| 1977 | NON FILTRE – 45% | 70cl |

CALVADOS PAYS D'AUGE ADRIEN CAMUT

This well-established family estate offers deep mature Calvados, with great length and an endearing rusticity.

The Réserve de Semainville is a blend of 25 and 30 years old in equal proportions and the Réserve d'Adrien is made by blending 35 years old and 40 years old Calvados. How do you like them apples? The answer: in liquid form!

| | | |
|--|--------------------------|------|
| | 6 ANS– 40% | 70cl |
| | 12 ANS– 40% | 70cl |
| | PRIVILEGE 18 ANS– 40% | 70cl |
| | RESERVE SEMAINVILLE– 40% | 70cl |
| | RESERVE D'ADRIEN– 40% | 70cl |
| | PRESTIGE– 40% | 70cl |

CALVADOS DOMFRONTAIS ISIDORE LEMORTON

Although Isidore Lemorton who was known as the "Patriarch of Calvados", died a few years ago, his stock of old Calvados is still available, and his family will continue to mature and sell the highly acclaimed products distilled by their father.

The family business goes back as far as the end of the 19th century and their oldest

Calvados "Le Rareté" is a blend distilled at the end of the last century.

These unique Calvados are blended from approximately 70% pears and 30% apples and are aged in very old casks in the Domfrontais region.

| | | |
|------|-------------------|------|
| | 20 ANS D'AGE– 40% | 70cl |
| 1972 | 40% | 70cl |
| 1979 | 40% | 70cl |

OTHER BRANDIES

BODEGAS SANCHEZ ROMATE, Jerez

In 1887 the Sanchez Romate Hnos. house laid down its first brandy solera. This solera was brought into being in order to satisfy the needs of the Sanchez Romate family and a few intimate friends for a brandy of truly exquisite quality. The excellence of the product led to the commercialisation of their brandy. Sanchez Romate Hnos built up their soleras in order to meet the demand of their product, without lowering the quality in the slightest. Thus the Brandy Gran Reserva "Cardenal Mendoza" was born named after Pedro González de Mendoza (1428-1495), son of the marquis of Santillana, humanist and statesman at the time of the Catholic monarchs, who became archbishop of Toledo and primate of Spain in 1482, was confidant of the Catholic monarchs Isabelle and Ferdinand and also played a big part in the discovery of America and the reconquest of Spain in the Battle of Granada. After all that he deserved a drink!

| | | |
|--|--|------|
| | SOLERA RESERVA – 36% | 70cl |
| | CARDENAL MENDOZA SOLERA GRAN RESERVA – 42% | 70cl |

EAUX DE VIE D'ALSACE, DISTILLERIE GILBERT MICLO

The Miclo Distillerie in Alsace is a traditional family-owned distillery whose eaux de vie have been unanimously acclaimed since their first days of distilling in 1967. The present production unit is currently processing an average of 300 to 500 tons of fruits a year from at least 22 different varieties of fruits, including pineapple. Large quantities of fruit are needed to produce these fine eaux de vie: only one bottle of eaux de vie de Poire William is produced from 28 kg of pears! All eaux de vie are double distilled and then aged for a minimum of three years in stainless steel tanks.

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| POIRE WILLIAM– 40% | 70cl |
| FRAMBOISE– 40% | 70cl |
| KIRSCH D'ALSACE– 40% | 70cl |
| FRAISE– 40% | 70cl |
| COING (QUINCE) – 40% | 70cl |
| MARC DE GEWURZTRAMINER – 45% | 70cl |

Grandes Réserves

From the outset, the Grandes Réserves are made from fruits selected for their higher level of sugar and optimal ripeness. They then are aged for at least five years.

| | |
|-----------------------------|------|
| POIRE WILLIAM – 43% | 50cl |
| MIRABELLE – 43% | 50cl |
| VIEILLE PRUNE D'ALSACE– 40% | 50cl |

GRAPPA DI FRIULI, BEPE TOSOLINI

Grappa – the white grape marc is gathered within a few hours of the grapes being crushed and taken to the winery for fermentation while the red grape marc, having fermented with the wine, arrives perhaps up to thirty days later. The varietal marcs are all distilled separately in column stills and then aged briefly in oak casks before either blending or bottling.

| |
|--|
| GRAPPA CIVIDINA TIPICA– 70cl -40% |
| GRAPPA DI VITIGNO, Moscato, Cabernet, Tocai, Pinot, Ramandolo – 50cl – all 40% |
| GRAPPA AGRICOLA (RISERVA) – 50% |

Acquavite de Friuli

| |
|------------------------------------|
| MOST DI MOSCATO ROSA – magnum– 40% |
| MOST DI FRAGOLINO – magnum– 40% |

I Legni

| |
|---|
| GRAPPA EN FRASSINO BARRIQUE, 42% – 50cl |
| GRAPPA DI TOCAI STAGIONATA IN BARRIQUE DU SUSINO– 40% |
| GRAPPA DI TOCAI STAGIONATA IN BARRIQUE DI CASTAGNO– 40% |
| AMARO, 30% - 70cl |
| AMARETTO SALIZA 28% – 70cl |
| LIMONCELLO LIMONE, 28% – 70cl |
| ESPRESSO LIQUEUR, 28% - 70cl |

BRIOTTET

| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| VIEUX MARC DE BOURGOGNE – 43% | 70cl |
|-------------------------------|------|

DISTILLERS GOYARD, CHAMPAGNE

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| VIEUX MARC DE CHAMPAGNE– 40% | 70cl |
|------------------------------|------|

RUMS

RUM, n. Generically, fiery liquors that produce madness in total abstainers.

- Ambrose Bierce

R.J. SEALES, BARBADOS

| | |
|--|------|
| DOORLY'S GOLD – 40% | 70cl |
| DOORLY'S XO OLOROSO SHERRY CASK FINISH – 40% | 70cl |
| DOORLY'S WHITE – 40% | 70cl |

RHUM AGRICOLE DE LA MARTINIQUE J. BALLY

For over 70 years the Lajus plantation has been producing sugar cane for distillation and J. Bally rhum is solely made from pure cane juice with no molasses at all, thus meriting the appellation "Rhum agricole de la Martinique". The Bally rhums are much more delicate and subtle than many other dark rhums. After distillation in a patent still, similar to the one traditionally used in Armagnac, these rhums are kept for ageing in Limousin oak casks, as well as casks having previously contained Bourbon.

| | | |
|------|------------------|------|
| | RHUM BLANC – 50% | 70cl |
| | RHUM AMBRE – 45% | 70cl |
| 2000 | J. BALLY – 43% | 70cl |

MEZAN

Single Cask Golden Rums

| | | |
|------|-----------------------------|------|
| | JAMAICAN BARRRIQUE XO – 40% | 70cl |
| 2003 | JAMAICA MONYMUSK – 40% | 70cl |
| 1999 | PANAMA DON JOSE – 40% | 70cl |

SCOTCH WHISKY

Drown in a vat of whiskey? Death where is thy sting?

- WC Fields

One whisky is all right, two is too much, three is too few.

- Highland saying

| | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| BLACK SHIP PREMIUM BLEND 3yo – 40% | 70cl |
| GLENALMOND, SINGLE SPEYSIDE – 40% | 70cl |

COOPER'S CHOICE – SINGLE CASK BOTTLINGS

| | | |
|------|---|------|
| 1997 | GLENROTHES 16 Y.O. SPEYSIDE – 46% | 70cl |
| 2008 | MACDUFF 8 Y.O. SHERRY CASK FINISH, SPEYSIDE – 46% | 70cl |
| 1997 | GLENLOSSIE 17 Y.O. BOURBON CASK FINISH, SPEYSIDE – 46% | 70cl |
| 2000 | MORTLACH – 46% | 70cl |
| 1991 | CAMBUS 24 Y.O. SINGLE GRAIN, LOWLAND – 46% | 70cl |
| 1993 | ALLT A BHAINNE 22 Y.O. PORT CASK FINISH, SPEYSIDE – 46% | 70cl |

COMPASS BOX WHISKY COMPANY

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| OAK CROSS – Blended Malt – 43% | 70cl |
| THE PEAT MONSTER – Blended Malt – 46% | 70cl |
| HEDONISM – Blended Grain – 46% | 70cl |
| SPICE TREE Blended Malt – 46% | 70cl |
| ASYA DELUXE Blended Malt – 40% | 70cl |

SCOTCH WHISKY

The Hearach is the first, historic single malt whisky from the Isle of Harris, as the distilling traditions lost during the Pabbay clearances of the 1840s have been revived. Every drop of this new dram is being distilled by local people to produce a special spirit which has been matured, married, and bottled here in this elemental place, and nowhere else.

The Hearach is bottled at 46% abv, non-chill filtered, and free from artificial colouring. The water, sourced from Abhainn Cnoc a' Charrain, is one of the softest of any Scottish distillery. Only very low sodium and chlorine minerals are measured, likely derived from the sea spray that blows over the village isthmus. The rivers and streams of north Harris flow over Lewisian gneiss, some of the oldest rocks on earth, dated by radiometric techniques at between 2.4 billion and 2.6 billion years old. Its hardness helps ensure the extremely low minerality of our source water. After longer fermentations and hands-on distillation in the bespoke copper stills, the oak casks, chosen when visiting Kentucky and Spain, are brought to bear. The chaos in the casks then ensues by the shores of the Atlantic, near the west-coast village of Ardhaisaig looking towards the Clisham, the highest mountain in the Outer Hebrides. Despite the northerly latitude, the island's oceanic climate benefits from the currents of the Gulf Stream. This system keeps seasonal temperatures remain remarkably stable, which benefits the maturation process.

"The final, hard to define, element of our whisky making is our natural way of working which brings patience to what we do, from fermentation to marrying. Ours is a slow whisky and we look forward to sharing it at a different pace." Every drop of The Hearach single malt whisky is distilled, matured, blended, married, and bottled in the Isle of Harris and nowhere else. The distillers and blenders are all drawn from the local community and have been trained from scratch in the craft and science of spirit-making. This is one of the youngest teams of distillers in Scotland with an average age of 25 years with the youngest Rebekah Morrison from the village of Bowglass being 21 years old.

| | |
|----------------------------|------|
| THE HEARARCH ~ single malt | 70cl |
|----------------------------|------|

KENTUCKY BOURBON

For a bad hangover take the juice of two quarts of whiskey
- Eddie Condon

From one of the few family-owned distilleries left in Kentucky, these bourbons are double distilled, firstly through a short column still and secondly with a small custom-made pot still with an added condenser to enable most of the flavour to be extracted from the mash. The small batch bourbons are bottlings of single batches of casks (no more than 12) which have been distilled, casked, matured and aged together in the same part of the warehouse. These offer the unique chance to taste bourbon as it would have been last century and represent the finest expression of American whiskey.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| JOHNNY DRUM – 40% | 70cl |
| KENTUCKY VINTAGE, FULLY AGED – 45% | 70cl |
| ROWAN'S CREEK, 12 YEARS OLD – 50.5% | 70cl |
| NOAH'S MILL, 15 YEARS OLD – 57.5% | 70cl |
| EVAN WILLIAMS EXTRA AGE – 43% | 70cl |

AMERICAN WHISKY

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| HIGH WEST CAMPFIRE WHISKY – 46% | 70cl |
| RITTENHOUSE STRAIGHT RYE WHISKY – 40% | 70cl |

IRISH WHISKEY

I had a bad cold and a fellow told me that the best thing to do for it was to drink a quart of whiskey and go home to bed. On the way home another fellow told me the same thing. That made half a gallon.

- Mark Twain

TEELING BLENDED WHISKEY – 46%

70cl

OTHER EAUX DE VIE

CREMES DE FRUITS DE DIJON, MAISON BRIOTTET

Until 1841, crème de cassis was mainly used for its medicinal virtues and known as Ratafia de cassis. Once it became evident that, in addition to its healing properties, the consumption of this liqueur could prove to be highly enjoyable, its production rapidly increased to become a gastronomic speciality of the Dijon region. Since 1836 the Briottet crèmes have been made from 100% fresh fruits, strictly selected for their aromatic potential.

| | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| CRÈME DE CASSIS DE DIJON – 20% | 70cl |
| CREME DE PÊCHE – 18% | 70cl |
| CREME DE MYRTILLE – 18% | 70cl |
| CREME DE FRAMBOISE – 18% | 70cl |
| CREME DE MÛRE – 18% | 70cl |
| CREME DE FRAISE DES BOIS – 18% | 70cl |
| CRÈME DE MENTHE (VERTE) – 18% | 70cl |
| CRÈME DE CERISE – 18% | 70cl |
| CRÈME DE CACAO – 25% | 70cl |
| LIQUEUR DE RHUBARBE – 18% | 70cl |
| MANZANA VERDE – 18% | 70cl |
| CURACAO TRIPLE SEC – 40% | 70cl |

PINEAU DES CHARENTES & MISTELLES

Mistelles are produced by blending brandy with the unfermented fruit juice. Within 24 hours of the wine being produced, a small amount of young spirit is added to it to prevent fermentation. The blend is then aged for a few years in oak casks. Mistelles are naturally sweet and ideal as an apéritif or dessert wine to be drunk with puddings or to partner foie gras.

| | |
|--|------|
| PLESSIS PINEAU DES CHARENTES BLANC – 17% | 75cl |
| FLOC DE GASCOGNE, JUGLARON – 17% | 75cl |

PASTIS JANOT

From the heart of the Provence region Pastis Janot is the result of a long maceration of herbs and aniseed that gives the product its particular richness and distinctive aromas.

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| PASTIS JANOT – 45% | 70cl |
|--------------------|------|

TEQUILA

HACIENDA DE CHIHUAHUA, Mexico

| | |
|----------------------|------|
| SOTOL PLATA – 38% | 70cl |
| SOTOL REPOSADO – 38% | 70cl |

LUNAZUL, Mexico

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| TEQUILA BLANCO – 40% | 70cl |
| TEQUILA REPOSADO -40% | 70cl |

SACRED MICRODISTILLERY, Highgate

Sacred Gin is made by Ian Hart in the distillery at his home in Highgate. It is the first and smallest (there are only two of them!) commercial distillery of its kind and has quickly built up a loyal and enthusiastic following. It was the overall winner of its Ginmasters 2009 competition category, consistently comes top of blind tastings and is available from Fortnum and Mason and many high-end independent wine and spirit retailers. It is currently Gerry's of Old Compton St's best-selling gin and is also particular favourite of Alessandro Palazzi, bar manager of the legendary Dukes Bar, "home of the perfect martini. "Sacred Gin is unique in that all of the botanicals, including fresh cut citrus, are distilled separately in glassware under vacuum (the vacuum pump is in a former Wendy House in the garden!) at a very low temperature, eliminating the harsh marmalady and bitter flavours so prevalent in gins distilled at higher temperatures. This freshness is key to the distinctive character of Sacred Gin which can, unusually, be enjoyed straight -according to GQ magazine, it is "a stand-alone sipping marvel" - and it also makes a wonderful martini, not to mention the more traditional G&T.

There are many gins on the market at present which have been created under contract, with new entrants simply paying a distillery to create a 'new' gin which is why many of them taste so similar - in fact Ian can usually identify the distiller behind most of these contract gins. By contrast Ian painstakingly (although obviously it was a lot of fun!) developed the recipes and selects and distils all Sacred Gin's botanicals himself. The recipe is a secret, loosely based on a formula that dates back to the late 17th Century and has 12 different botanicals including juniper, cardamom, nutmeg, and the all important Frankincense.

Sacred Spiced Vodka (recently declared the best flavoured vodka on Channel 4's Sunday Brunch) is made using a similar process to the gin, minus the juniper of course, and is redistilled with 7 botanicals including cubeb, nutmeg and frankincense. It is only very gently spiced and makes a great martini or a vesper. Sacred make another vodka, Sacred Organic Vodka, which is a blend of the finest organic wheat and rye spirit.

Sacred Spiced English Vermouth is a relatively new product and is a sweet, bitter "Rosso" style vermouth made with English white wine from Chapel Down, organic thyme from the New Forest and organic wormwood from Somerset plus a combination of additional organic roots, herbs, barks, peels and spices. It's the only English vermouth currently available on the market - the spices are intended to represent English tudor spices, pommanders even, rather than chilli peppers. It's proving to be extremely popular with bartenders - it makes a fantastic Negroni - and retailers alike.

Tasting notes

Sacred Gin: Crystal clear. Lush, pine-fresh juniper-led nose with delicate violet flowers, crushed cardamom pods and cinnamon. Long zesty finish with lingering pine and peppercorns.

Sacred London Dry Vodka: Crystal clear. Clean delicately spicy nose with faint aromas of fennel, nuts, dill and aniseed. Superbly balanced, very delicately spiced palate. The spice notes are present in levels low enough to add interest and delicate flavour while integrating with grain spirit notes rather than dominating. Flavours of pine needle, lavender and brazil nuts. Peppery spirit spice sits well with the peppery cubeb berries. Yes it's spiced but delicately so. Cleansing, strangely sweet lingering peppery finish with cleansing aniseed and eucalyptus.

Sacred Spiced English Vermouth: Clear light tawny brown. Attractive orange, studded with clove and poached pear nose with rich Christmas cake, menthol and dark chocolate. Clove, concentrated orange and a bitter hint of green pine needles.

| | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| SACRED LONDON DRY GIN | 70cl |
| SACRED PINK GRAPEFRUIT GIN | 70cl |
| SACRED CARDOMON GIN | 70cl |
| SACRED LONDON DRY VODKA | 70cl |
| SACRED SPICED ENGLISH VERMOUTH | 75cl |
| SACRED ROSEHIP CUP | 75cl |

LES CAVES SEMI-CLASSIFIED MISCELLANY

***Bold** denotes new listing

HALF BOTTLES

WHITES

Sauvignon de Touraine, Domaine Guy Allion - *Loire*
Muscadet de Sèvre et Maine Sur Lie, Domaine du Verger, Pierre Luneau-Papin – *Loire*
Jurançon Sec, Clos Lapeyre – *South West France*
Chablis, Gerard Tremblay – *Burgundy*
Chablis, Domaine Colette Gros -*Burgundy*
Mâcon-Fuissé “Bois de la Croix”, Domaine Thibert – *Burgundy*
Sancerre Blanc “La Vigne Blanche”, Domaine Henri Bourgeois – *Loire*
Pouilly-Fumé, Domaine des Berthiers – *Loire*
Chablis 1er Cru Montmain, Gérard Tremblay – *Burgundy*
Pouilly-Fuissé “Les Scélés”, Domaine Thibert – *Burgundy*
Mas de Daumas Gassac Blanc, Hérault – *Languedoc*
Puligny-Montrachet, Domaine Sylvain Bzikot – *Burgundy*

REDS

Côtes-du-Rhône, Terres Mistral, Vignerons d’Estézargues– *Rhône*
Côtes-du-Rhône, Domaine de Chapoton – *Rhône*
Beaujolais-Villages, Domaine de la Plaigne– *Beaujolais*
Brouilly, Yvonne Dufaitre – *Beaujolais*
Morgon Prestige, Domaine du Calvaire de Roche-Grès – *Beaujolais*
Fleurie, Domaine du Calvaire Roche-Grès – *Beaujolais*
Château La Claymore, Lussac Saint-Emilion – *Bordeaux*
Madiran, Charles de Batz, Dom Berthoumieu – *South West France*
Cahors, Château du Cèdre – *South West France*
Crozes-Hermitage, Les Pierrelles, Albert Belle – *Rhône*
Bandol Rouge, Domaine La Suffrène – *Provence*
Château La Croix Chantecaille, Saint-Emilion Grand Cru – *Bordeaux*
Château des Annereaux, Lalande de Pomerol – *Bordeaux*
Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Cuvée des Sommeliers, Jacques Mestre – *Rhône*
Mas de Daumas Gassac Rouge, Hérault – *Languedoc*
Bandol, Château de Pibarnon – *Provence*

MAGNUMS & LARGER FORMATS

When I demanded of my friend what viands he preferred
He quoth: "A large cold bottle, and a small hot bird!"
Eugene Field 1850 - 1895
The Bottle and the Bird, st. 1

BAG-IN-BOX

Rosso IGT, Cantina Frentana *Abruzzo* - 5 Litre BIB
Les Galets Rouge, Vignerons d'Estezargues - *Rhône* - 5 Litre BIB
Sauvignon, Domaine Guy Allion - *Loire* - 5 Litre BIB
Côtes-du-Rhône "Rose D'une Nuit", Domaine de la Charite - *Rhône* - 5 Litre BIB
Muscadet La Grange, Luneau Papin - *Loire* - 5 Litre BIB
Raisins Gaulois Gamay VDF, Lapierre *Beaujolais* - 5 Litre BIB
Albizu Tempranillo, Vina Albergada - *North-Central Spain* - 10 Litre BIB
Le Lesc Blanc, Côtes de Gascogne - *Southwest France* - 10 Litre BIB
Bergerie de la Bastide Blanc, IGP - *Languedoc* - 10 Litre BIB
Bergerie de la Bastide Rouge, IGP - *Languedoc* - 10 Litre BIB
Bergerie de la Bastide Rosé, IGP - *Languedoc* - 10 Litre BIB
Roannaises Rouge, Domaine des Palais - *Loire* - 10 Litre BIB
Roannaises Rouge, Clos St Jean *Loire* - 10 Litre BIB

KEY KEGS – 20 litres

Marcotte Blanc, Laurent Cazottes– *South West France*
Bonhomme de Chenin, Nicolas Reau - *Loire*
Sauvignon, Guy Allion - *Loire*
Macon Cadoles Chardonnay, Les Cadoles - *Burgundy*
Andi Knauss Riesling - *Germany*
FKK Weiss, Bianka & Daniel Schmitt - *Germany*
Ciello Bianco, Sicilia - *Italy*
Frentana Bianco, Abruzzo - *Italy*
M & A Arndorfer Gruner Veltliner Unfiltered – *Austria*
Marcillac Lo Sang del Pais, Domaine du Cros - *France*
Côtes du Rhône Rouge, Vignerons d'Estezargues- *Rhône*
Domaine du Palais, Côte Roannaise- *Loire*
Vina Nabor Tempranillo - *Spain*
Vina Ilusion Tinto, Rioja – *Spain*
Frentana Rosso, Abruzzo - *Italy*
Judith Beck Ink, Burgenland - *Austria*
Plsaince Penavayre Rose – *SW France*
Cidre, Eric Borgelet - *Loire*

POLYKEG

Prosecco Frizzante, Cantina Bernardi NV - 20 Litre KEG

LITRE BOTTLES

Pipeno Blanco, A Los Vinateros Bravos – *Chile*
1000 ml, Andert (Zweigelt) - *Austria*

MAGNUMS

SPARKLING

Ambulle VDT, Chateau Le Roc - *Southwest France*
Prosecco di Conegliano, Casa Coste Piane di Loris Follador NV - *Veneto*
Mauzac Nature, Domaine Bernard & Myriam Plageoles, Gaillac - *South-West France*
Deville Cuvee Selection – *Champagne*

WHITES

Muscadet sur lie, Domaine du Verger - *Loire*
Masieri Bianco, La Biancara - *Veneto*
Sameiras Blanco, Ribeiro - *Green Spain*
Soave Castelcerino, Filippi Societa Agricola - *Veneto*
VN Blanco, Partida Creus, Catalonia - *Spain*
Jurancon Sec Vitatge Vielh, Clos Lapeyre - *South-West France*
Sweet Cheeks Muscat El Bandito – *South Africa*
Vino Bianco Pinot Grigio, Dario Princic - *Friuli*
Chablis Grand Cru "Vaudésir", Domaine Gérard Tremblay - *Burgundy*
Carso Vitovka, AA Zidarich, Friuli - *Italy*
Grafin, Sepp Muster, Sudsteierland - *Austria*

MAGNUMS

REDS

Gavanza Rioja Reserva, Bodega Classica- *North Central Spain*
Marcillac Vieilles Vignes, Domaine du Cros - *Southwest France*
Cuvée du Chat, Chateau Cambon - *Beaujolais*
La Bruja de Rozas, Comando G & Sierra de Gredos - *Old Castile*
Madiran, Charles de Batz, Dom Berthoumieu - *South-West France*
Cahors, Château du Cèdre- *Southwest France*
Cerasuolo di Vittoria, Cos - *Sicily*
Château des Annereaux, Lalande de Pomerol - *Bordeaux*
Pian del Ciampolo, Monteverdine - *Tuscany*
Macchiona IGT, La Stoppa - *Emilia-Romagna*
Aprutine Iskra, Gianni Masciarelli - *Abruzzo*
Ploussard Pupillin de Feule, Domaine de La Borde - *Jura*
Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Cuvée des Sommeliers, Jacques Mestre - *Rhône*
Pinot Noir, Cuvée Béatrice, Domaine Christian Binner - *Alsace*
Mas Hauvette, Coteaux des Baux - *Provence*
Mas de Daumas Gassac Rouge, Hérault - *Languedoc*
Bandol Rouge, Château de Pibarnon - *Provence*
La Sagesse, Domaine Gramenon - *Rhône*
Brunello di Montalcino, Il Paradiso di Manfredi - *Toscana*
Barolo Boschis Tenuta Cavallotto - *Piemonte*

ROSE

Coteaux Varois Rose, Chateau d'Ollières - *Provence*

Feats of Clay

In a gay jar upon his shoulder
The slave morosely carries wine.
His road is rough with bog and boulder,
And in the sky no starlights shine.
Into the dark with stabbing glances
He peers, his careful steps are slow,
Lest on his breast as he advances
The staining wine should overflow.

I bear my amphora of sorrow,
Long brimming with the wine it hides;
There poison for each waiting morrow
Ferments within the painted sides.
I follow secret ways and hidden
To guard the evil vessel, lest
A careless hand should pour unbidden
Its bitterness upon my breast.

Fyodor Sologub

Madloba Blanc, Domaine des Miquettes
Saint-Joseph Rouge, Domaine des Miquettes
Saint-Joseph Rouge, Madloba, Domaine des Miquettes
Saumur Blanc “Terres” Amphore, Thierry Germain
Saumur Rouge Outre Terre, Thierry Germain
Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil « Hurluberlu », S David
Alma Mater, Jean-Claude Lapalu, Brouilly
Benimaquia Tinajas, Finca Casa Balaguer
Traglolargo Blanco, Finca Casa Balaguer
A Pel Ancestral (Pet Nat), Loxarel
Ops, Samsó/Garnacha, Loxarel
Aphros Vinho Verde Loureiro Amphora
Aphros Vinho Verde Palhete Amphora
Sullerba 1701 Franciacorta - part
Arcaico, Andrea Occhipinti, Lazio - part
Vino di Anna Palmento Rosso – part
Vino di Anna Jeudi 15 Rosato
Vino di Anna Qvevri Rosso, Etna
Pithos Bianco, COS
Zibibbo in Pithos, COS
Pithos Rosso, COS
Okro’s Wines Saperavi Bude, Kakheti, Georgia
Sister’s Tavkveri Rose, Georgia
Pheasant’s Tears Rkatsiteli Bakurtsikhe
Pheasant’s Tears Saperavi
Iago Skin Contact Chinuri
Marina’s Rose, Georgia
Cuvee, Zorjan, Slovenia - part
Dolium, Zorjan, Slovenia
Moscatel tinajas, Mauricio Gonzalez, Bio Bio, Chile
AD Beckham Pinot Gris, Oregon
AD Beckham Pinot Noir Creta, Oregon
The Don Nelson Pinot Noir, Nelson, New Zealand
The Don Barn Block Pinot Noir, Nelson, New Zealand

PINK WINES

And by the way... which one's Pink?

Have a Cigar – Pink Floyd

Madregale Rosato - *Italy*
 Bergerie de la Bastide Rosé, Vin de Pays d'Oc *Languedoc*
 Pinot Grigio Rosa Bianca, Cantine Volpi, Veneto – *Italy*
 Réserve de Gassac Rosé, Pays de l'Hérault - *Languedoc*
 Tremendus Rioja Clarete, Bodegas Honorio Rubio – *Spain*
 Volubilia Gris, Domaine de la Zouina – *Morocco*
 Cerasuolo, Colline Teatine, Gianni Masciarelli – *Italy*
 Corbières Rosé, Château Ollieux-Romanis – *Languedoc*
 Château d'Ollières Rosé, Coteaux Varois – *Provence*
 Château Plaisance Rosé, Côtes du Frontonnais – *South West France*
 Costières de Nîmes Rosé, Château Mourgues du Grès – *Rhône*
 Beck Pink, Burgenland - *Austria*
 Côtes de Provence Rosé, Cuvée Elegance, Capvieille - *Provence*
 Txakoli di Getaria Rubentis Rosado, Bodegas Ameztot – *Spain*
 Cancelli Rosato, Iole Rabascio - *Abruzzo*
 L'Apostrophe Rose, Domaine Les Terres Promises - *Provence*
 Bandol Rosé, Domaine La Suffren – *Provence*
 Alea Rosa Rosato, Andrea Occhipinti – *Lazio*
 Sancerre Rosé “Les Baronnes”, Domaine Henri Bourgeois - *Loire*
 Canaiolo Rosato, Montenedoli - *Toscana*
 Calcarius Roz Rosato - *Puglia*
 Bandol Rosé, Château de Pibarnon - *Provence*

YELLOW/AMBER/ORANGE WINES (The Arc of Jaune)

What is pink? a rose is pink
 By a fountain's brink.
 What is red? a poppy's red
 In its barley bed.
 What is blue? the sky is blue
 Where the clouds float thro'.
 What is white? a swan is white
 Sailing in the light.
 What is yellow? pears are yellow,
 Rich and ripe and mellow.
 What is green? the grass is green,
 With small flowers between.
 What is violet? clouds are violet
 In the summer twilight.
 What is orange? Why, an orange,
 Just an orange!

A Fleur de Peau, Clos du Gravillas, *Languedoc***
 Orange a la Mer, Mas Foulaquier – *Languedoc (no skin contact but orange colour)*
 Viognier, Domaine des Miquettes – *Rhone***
 Madloba Blanc, Domaine de Miquettes – *Rhone****
 Saumur Blanc “Amphore”, Terres, Domaine des Roches-Neuves – *Loire****
 Pinot Gris Maceration V, Pierre Frick – *Alsace*** *Pink colour*
 Si Rose, Christian Binner – *Alsace*** (rose-hued)
 Pepin Orange, Achillee - *Alsace*
 Big Bang Theory Go Together, Patrice Beguet – *Jura****
 Three Views of A Secret, Patrice Beguet – *Jura/Alsace****
 Orange Was the Colour of Her New Dress, Domaine Hughes Beguet - *Arbois, France*
 Viura Macerado Edicion Limitada, Honorio Rubio – *Spain****
 Lovamor Albillo, Alfredo Maestro Tejero – *Spain**
 El Carro Moscatel, Finca Casa Balaguer Alicante – *Spain**
 Benimaquia Tinajas, Finca Casa Balaguer, Alicante – *Spain****
 Salicornio Moscatel, Finca Casa Balaguer, Alicante**
 Salicornio Malvasia, Finca Casa Balaguer, Alicante**
 BN Partida Creus, Penedes – *Spain***
 Muscat Blanc d'Argila, Pedro Olivares - *Levant, Spain*
 Arcal Blanco, Pedro Olivares – *Levant, Spain*
 Baccabianca, Tenuta Il Grillo – *Piemonte****
 VINO Bianco Pinot Grigio, Dario Princic, *Friuli**** (*reddish tint*)
 VINO Bianco Ribolla, Dario Princic, *Friuli****

Vino Bianco Jakot, Dario Princic, *Friuli****
 Carso Vitovska, Benjamin Zidarich, *Friuli***
 Vitovska Kamen, Benjamin Zidarich, *Friuli***
 Pico Bianco, Il Biancara, *Veneto**
 Procanico, Antonio Camillo, *Toscana**
 Tutti I Giorni Bianco, Antonio Camillo, *Toscana**
 Sancho Panza, Il Tufiello – *Campania**
 Fattoria Vaira Bianco – *Molise***
 Ageno, La Stoppa – *Emilia****
 Mansano, AA Denvolo – *Emilia***
 Catavela, AA Denavolo – *Emilia***
 Dinavolino, AA Denavolo, *Emilia***
 Fattoria Vaira Vincenzo Bianco – *Molise**
 Calcarius Nu Litr Orange – *Puglia**
 Baglio Bianco – *Sicilia***
 Zibibbo Integer, Marco de Bartoli – *Sicilia***
 AA Caravaglio Occhio de Terra Malvasia – *Sicilia**
 Vino di Anna Bianco G – *Sicilia***
 Rami Bianco, COS – *Sicilia**
 Pithos Bianco, COS – *Sicilia***
 Zibibbo in Pithos, COS – *Sicilia***
 Pheasant's Tears Rkatsiteli – *Georgia****
 Pheasant's Tears Vardisperi Rkatsiteli – *Georgia****
 Okro Rkatsiteli Vari – *Georgia****
 Iago Chinuri Skin Contact – *Georgia***
 Zurab Topuridze Golden Blend – *Georgia***
 Zurab Topuridze Mtsvane for Mariam – *Georgia****
 Sister's Wine Kisi – *Georgia****
 Kamara Family Ritinitis Retsina – *Greece***
 Kamara Keramos Amphora – *Greece****
 Georgas Retsina of Mesogaia – *Greece***
 Mersel Phoenix Skin Contact – *Lebanon**
 Mersel Daw al Amar – *Lebanon***
 Riesling M, Weingut DB Schmitt – *Germany**
 Zold, Weingut DB Schmitt – *Germany**
 Wild Pony, Weingut DB Schmitt – *Germany***
 Schlehe, MA Arndorder, Kamptal – *Austria***
 Erde, Sepp Muster, Styria – *Austria****
 Grafin, Sepp Muster, Styria – *Austria****
 Stagbeetle, Weingut Andreas Tscheppe, Styria – *Austria****
 Schwalbenschwanz, Weingut Andreas Tscheppe, Styria – *Austria****
 Rulander, Weingut Andert, Burgenland – *Austria****
 Gruner Veltliner Anadjucka, Weingut Andert, Burgenland – *Austria****
 PM, Andert, Burgenland – *Austria****
 Judith Beck Neuburger Bambule! Burgenland – *Austria**
 Judith Beck Traminer, Burgenland – *Austria***
 Burja Bela, *Slovenia**
 Burja Zelen, *Slovenia**
 Nando Malvazija Blue Label – *Slovenia**
 Nando Jakot Blue Label – *Slovenia**
 Nando Rebula Blue Label – *Slovenia***
 Nando Rebula Black Label – *Slovenia****
 Rebula, Valter Mlecnik – *Slovenia****
 Chardonnay, Valter Mlecnik – *Slovenia****
 Zorjan Cuvee, Stajerska – *Slovenia****
 Zorjan Laski Rizling, Stajerska – *Slovenia***
 Zorjan Renski Rizling, Stajerska – *Slovenia***
 Zorjan Dolium, Stajerska – *Slovenia****
 Ancre Hill Orange Wine – *Wales***
 Staring at the Sun, Momento Mori – *Australia****
 Fistful of Flowers, Momento Mori – *Australia****
 Bianco, Momento Mori- *Australia****
 Mauricio Gonzalez Moscatel Tinaja, Bio Bio – *Chile***
 Pol Opuesto El Otro Lado Torrontes – *Argentina****
 Ruth Lewandowski Chilion, Mendocino – *California****
 Populis Macerated Chardonnay – *California***
 Pinot Gris Amphora, A & D Beckham – *Oregon**** (red/rose)
 Kelley Fox Nerthus – *Oregon*** (rose)
 Vinu Jancu Reserve, La Garagista – *Vermont****
 Testalonga El Bandito Skin Contact Chenin, Swartland – *South Africa**

Elementis, Intellego, Swartland – *South Africa***
 Intellego Sleeping Co-Pilot – *South Africa***
 Luddite Chenin, Bot River – *South Africa**



SPARKLING WINES

"Sparkling Muscatel. One of the finest wines of Idaho."

Waiter in The Muppet Movie (1979)

Dominio de Tharsys Cava Brut Nature, Requena NV - *Spain*
 Prosecco Frizzante, Cantina Bernardi NV – *Italy*
 Tillingham PN (Pet Nat) East Sussex - *England*
 Moscato d'Asti "Lumine", Ca' d' Gal– *Italy*
 Prosecco Colfondo, Casa Belfi, Veneto– *Italy*
 Prosecco Bio Spumante, Cantina Bernardi, Veneto - *Italy*
 Garg n Go, La Biancara, Veneto - *Italy*
 Prosecco di Conegliano Valdobbiadene Spumante, AA Bellenda– *Italy*
 Trebbiano Frizzante, Camillo Donati– *Italy*
 Malvasia Secco, Camillo Donati– *Italy*
 Prosecco di Conegliano, Casa Coste Piane di Loris Follador NV – *Italy*
 Vouvray Brut, Domaine Champalou NV – *Loire*
 Malvasia Rosa Frizzante, Camillo Donati- *Italy*
 Lambrusco Frizzante, Camillo Donati - *Italy*
 Ribelle Frizzante, Camillo Donati - *Italy*
 Mas de Daumas Gassac Rosé Frizant, Vin de Pays de l'Herault NV – *Languedoc*
 Moscato d'Asti, Vittorio Bera – *Italy*
 Vouvray Methode Traditionelle, Domaine Catherine & Pierre Breton NV – *Loire*
 Mauzac Nature, Domaine Les Tres Cantous, Gaillac NV – *South West France*
 Terzavia Brut Nature, Marco de Bartoli - *Sicily*
 Spumante Metodo Classico "Sull'erba" 1701 Franciacorta - *Lombardia*
 Fuchs und Hase Pet Nat Vol 2– *Austria*
 Fuchs und Hase Pet Nat Vol 4 - *Austria*
 Fuchs und Hase Rose Pet Nat - *Austria*
 Brut DOCG 1701 Franciacorta - *Lombardia*
 Saten DOCG, 1701 Franciacorta NV - *Lombardia*
 Rose DOCG, 1701 Franciacorta NV - *Lombardia*
 Loxarel A Pel Pet Nat Loxarel, Penedes - *Spain*
 Cremant de Limoux Nature Josephine, Domaine des Hautes Terres - *Languedoc*
 Cremant de Bourgogne Nature, Celine & Laurent Tripoz - *Burgundy*
 Sokol Blosser Evolution Sparkling - *USA*
 Limney Quality Sparkling Wine, Davenport Vineyard– *England*
 Davenport Pet Nat - *England*
 Grace and Favour Pet Nat, La Garagista, *Vermont*
 Brut Intens Rosato, Recaredo - *Spain*
 Brut Nature "Terrers", Cava Recaredo- *Spain*
 "Brut de Brut" Brut Nature, Recaredo - *Spain*
 Reserva Particular Recaredo, Recaredo - *Spain*

SWEET WINES (Glycolimiacs Anonymous)

37.5cl bottles

Monbazillac, Jour de Fruit, Domaine de l’Ancienne Cure – *South West France*
Moscatel Dorada, Cesar Florido - *Spain*
Moscatel Pasas, Cesar Florido – *Spain*
Jurançon, La Magendia de Lapeyre – *South West France*
Stanton & Killeen Rutherglen Liqueur Muscat NV – *Australia*
Château Filhot, 2eme Cru Classé, Sauternes – *Bordeaux*
Pinot Gris Selection de Grains Nobles, Domaine Pierre Frick - *Alsace*
Muscat Hinteberg SGN, Christian Binner - *Alsace*
VDT Sul Q, Domaine Ganevat – *Jura*

50cl bottles

Muscat de Rivesaltes, Château de Jau – *Roussillon*
Muscat de Saint Jean de Minervois “Douce Providence”, Clos du Gravillas – *Languedoc*
Banyuls Rimage, Les Clos de Paulilles, Cazes– *Roussillon*
Rivesaltes Ambre, Château de Jau 2007 - *Roussillon*
Tokaji Late Harvest, Hetszolo - *Hungary*
Brumaire, Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh Doux, Alain Brumont– *South West France*
Monbazillac, Cuvée Abbaye, Domaine de l’Ancienne Cure– *South West France*
Oenos Idis Muscat, Sclavos -Greece
Blanc de Morgex, Vin de Glace “Chaudelune”, Valle d’Aosta– *Italy*
Marsala Vigna La Miccia, Marco de Bartoli NV - *Italy*
Malvasia Passito, Vigna del Volta, La Stoppa, Emilia – *Italy*
Bukkuram Sole Agosto, Marco de Bartoli - *Italy*
Passito Monte Sorio, La Biancara, Veneto *Italy*
Vin Santo, Tenuta di Caparsa, Toscana, *Italy*
Marsala Superiore 10-Year-Old, Marco de Bartoli, Sicily – *Italy*
Jurançon “Vent Balaguer”, Clos Lapeyre – *Southwest France*
Marsala Superiore, Marco Bartoli 1987 - Sicily
Bukkuram Padre della Vigna, Sicilia 2012 - *Italy*
Vin de Laurence Moelleux, Mas de Daumas Gassac– *Languedoc-Roussillon*
Marsala Vergine, Marco de Bartoli 1988 - *Italy*
Monbazillac, Cuvée Madame, Château Tirecul-La-Gravière 2001 – *South West France*

75cl bottles

Moscatel Dorada, Cesar Florido - *Spain*
Jurançon Moelleux, Clos Lapeyre – *South West France*
Moscatel Pasas, Cesar Florido - *Spain*
Coteaux du Layon Le Saint-Lambert, Domaine Ogereau– *Loire*
Maury Vintage Rouge, Mas Amiel –*Roussillon*
Maury Vintage Blanc, Mas Amiel - *Roussillon*
Jurançon La Magendia de Lapeyre – *South West France*
Maury Rouge, Domaine Terres de Fagayra – *Roussillon*
Maury Blanc, Domaine Terres de Fagayra - *Roussillon*
Bukkuram Sole d’Agosto, Marco de Bartoli – *Italy*

Sous-Voile & Oxidative

Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go ~ T. S. Eliot

Alquimia Vin de Voile, Roc des Anges - *Roussillon*
Savagnin Prestige, Jean-Claude Ganevat - *Jura*
Bianchdudui, Vittorio Bera, Piemonte - *Italy*

TWELVE WILFULLY OBSCURE GRAPE VARIETIES

Mauzac Noir (Gaillac)
Ondenc (Gaillac)
Gringet (Savoie)
Menu Pineau (Touraine)
Gascon (Touraine)
Ribeyrenc Noir (Languedoc)
Enfariné (Jura)
Caiño Blanco (Rías Baixas)
Albarin (Tierra del Cangas)
Molinera (Andalucia)
Pugnitello (Tuscany)
Tintore di Tramonti (Campania)
La Crescent (USA)

“BIODYNAMIC” ESTATES (Some Certified, Some Not)

Domaine du Pech, *Buzet*
Domaine Cousin-Leduc, *Anjou*
Alexandre Bain, *Pouilly-Fumé*
Alessandra Bera, *Piedmont*
Domaine Arretxea, *Irouléguy*
Domaine Saint-Nicolas, *Fiefs-Vendéen*
Domaine Jo Landron, *Muscadet*
Cascina Degli Ulivi, *Piemonte*

TEN CHILLABLE REDS

Gamay, Lo-Fi, Santa Barbara- *California*
Beaujolais, Château Cambon- *Beaujolais*
Radford Dale Thirst Cinsault – *South Africa*
Vin d’Oeillades, Domaine Thierry Navarre - *Languedoc*
Saumur-Champigny, Domaine des Roches-Neuves - *Loire*
Vino di Anna Palmento - *Sicilia*
Poulsard, Marie-Pierre Chevassu - *Jura*
La Fanfarria Tinto, Dominio del Urogallo - *Spain*
La Pepie Cot, Domaine de la Pepiere- *Loire*
Château Plaisance Rouge, Fronton – *South West France*

TEN WHITES TO DECANT

Moulin des Dames Blanc, Luc de Conti – *South West France*
Baccabianca, Tenuta Grillo– *Italy*
Trebiano d’Abruzzo, Edoardo Valentini – *Italy*
Savennières Arena, Domaine Mosse - *Loire*
Rebula Black Label, Nando - *Slovenia*
Ageno, La Stoppa – *Emilia-Romagna*

FIVE WHITES “BANG FOR BUCK”

Folle Blanche du Pays Nantais Pierre Luneau – *Loire*
Di Gino Bianco, Fattoria San Lorenzo – *Marche*
Cora, Loxarel, Penedes – *Spain*
Gruner Veltliner “Handcrafted”, MA Arndorfer– *Austria*
Mielie Green Chenin, Testalonga, Swartland – *South Africa*

FIVE REDS “BANG FOR BUCK”

Vina Almate, Alfredo Maestro– *Spain*
Bout d’Zan, Mas de Libian– *Rhone*
Dosset VINO Rosso, F Principiano – *Piemonte*
Cuvee des Gourmets, Verdier-Logel– *Loire*
La Pepie Cot, Domaine de la Pepiere– *Forez*

ONE GLASS OF WINE PER VINE (Painfully Low Yields)

L’Inattendu, Clos du Gravillas – *Minervois*
Chardonnay, Les Grandes Teppes, Domaine Ganevat – *Jura*
Vin d’Autan de Robert Plageoles – *Gaillac*
Le Grand Cèdre, Château du Cèdre – *Cahors*
Saumur-Champigny, Cuvée Marginale, Thierry Germain – *Loire*
Retsina of Mesogia, Georgas Family – *Greece*

SIX RIESLINGS, SIX COUNTRIES

Ovum Off The Grid Riesling - *Oregon*
Riesling Grand Cru Vorbourg, Pierre Frick – *Alsace*
M & A Arndorfer Riesling Strasser Weinberge, Kamptal - *Austria*
Zorjan Renski Rizling, Stajerska - *Slovenia*
Sato Riesling, Central Otago – *New Zealand*

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW-OLD

On one occasion someone put a very little wine into a glass, and said it was sixteen years old. “It is very small for its age”, said Gnathaena. – Athanaeus – The Deipnosophists

Muscadet “L d’Or” du Luneau, Pierre Luneau-Papin 1999
Savennières-Roche aux Moines, Domaine aux Moines 1998
Bourgueil Les Busardières, Domaine de la Chevalerie 1993
Chinon, Domaine Patrick Corbineau 1989
Barolo Riserva, Giacomo Borgogno 1985
Chambolle-Musigny, Remoissenet 1969
1874 Amontillado Viejo El Tresillo, Emilio Hidalgo

SEVEN BARKING ODDITIES

THE BLOOD OF THE SOIL (Earthy, Fruity, Unmediated)

Marcillac “Lo Sang del País” Domaine du Cros – *South West France*
Braucol, Plageoles Famille, Gaillac – *South West France*
Sous Les Cailloux des Grillons, Clos du Gravillas - *Languedoc*
Saint-Cirice Rouge, Pays du Gard – *Rhône*
Volcanique, Verdier-Logel - *Forez*
Barbera Le Verrane, Alessandra Bera - *Piedmont*
Teran, Benjamin Zidarich, Friuli – *Italy*
Sassolini, Podere Sassi

THIRTEEN MEDITATION WINES (Wines to be Sipped Reverently)

Amontillado Viejo Tresillo 1874, Emilio Hidalgo – *Spain*
Sagrantino di Montefalco, Paolo Bea - *Umbria*
Brunello di Montalcino, Il Paradiso di Manfredi – *Italy*
Barolo cru Boscareto, Ferdinando Principiano, Piemonte - *Italy*
Amarone La Stropa, Monte dall Ora, Veneto - *Italy*
Saumur-Champigny, Memoires, Domaine des Roches Neuves – *Loire*
Finca Capelinos, Adegas Guimaro, Ribeira Sacra - *Spain*
Cahors, Clos Jean – *South West France*
Vin de Voile, Plageoles – *South West France*
Jurançon “Vent Balaguer”, Clos Lapeyre – *South West France*
Vin Jaune Savagnin Vert, Domaine J-F Ganevat – *Jura*

LIMESTONE COWBOYS AND GRANITE-MOTHERS

THE FOUR SEASONS (Variations On A Theme)

Spring

Sauvignon, Jardin de la France, Petit Bourgeois – *Loire*
Côtes de Provence Rosé, Thomas Carteron – *Provence*
Gamay de Touraine, Domaine de la Charmoise – *Loire*

Summer

Sancerre “Le MD”, Domaine Henri Bourgeois – *Loire*
Château Ollieux Romanis Rosé – *Languedoc*
Saumur-Champigny Cuvée Domaine, Thierry Germain – *Loire*

Autumn

Sancerre “Jadis”, Domaine Henri Bourgeois – *Loire*
Château Plaisance Rosé, Fronton – *South West France*
Saumur-Champigny “Terres Chaudes”, Thierry Germain – *Loire*

Winter

Sancerre Blanc “Etienne Henri”, Domaine Henri Bourgeois – *Loire*
Chaudelune, Cave de Morgex – *Valle d'Aosta*
Bandol Rosé, Château de Pibarnon – *Provence*
Saumur-Champigny La Marginale, Thierry Germain – *Loire*

THE SEA, THE SEA (Encapsulating the “Life of Brine”)

Muscadet, Clos des Allées, Pierre Luneau-Papin – *Pays Nantais*
Picpoul de Pinet, Château de la Mirande – *Coteaux du Languedoc*
Albariño Abadia di San Campio – *Rías Baixas*
Carso Vitovska, AA Zidarich - *Friuli*
Txakoli di Getaria, Bodegas Ameztoi – *Spanish Basque Country*
Pinot Noir “Plante Gate », Thierry Michon – *Fiefs-Vendéen, Loire*

HIGHLAND ROOTS (Wines of the Hills and Mountains)

Domaine des Miquettes – 450 m
Sepp Muster, Styria – 450 m
Balgera, Valtellina – 450 m
Andreas Tscheppe, Styria – 450-550m
Zorjan, Slovenia – all at 470 m
Andrea Occhipinti – 500 m
Herve Souhaut Souteronne – 500 m
Bodegas Mengoba, Bierzo – 600 m
Dominio del Urogallo, Asturias – 500 – 750 m
Monte de Grazia, Campania – 550 m
AA Denavolo – Catavela, Emilia – 600 m
Sclavos Robola, Cephalonia – 700m
Brouilly Croix des Rameaux Lapalu – 700 m
Il Tufiello Fiano, Campania – 750 m
Zouina Syrah, Morocco – 800 m
Epicuria Chardonnay, Morocco – 800 m
I Vigneri – Aurora – 800 m – Rosso – 700 +
Bodegas Fuentenarro, Ribera del Duero - 800 m +
Okro Rkatsiteli, Georgia – 800-1000 m
Cuarenta 40/40, Argentina @ 890 m
Batlliu de Sort, – all 850-900 m
Alfredo Maestro, Ribera del Duero – 700- 1100 m (El Marciano, Valdecastrillo)
Comando G – 850-1,200 m
Pol Opuesto, Argentina - All above 1,100 m
Pedro Olivares Bobal – 1000 m
Vino d Anna, Etna –1000 ++ m (depending on cuvee)
Blanc de Morgex, Cave de Vin Blanc, Val d’Aosta – 1,200 m+
Chateau Musar white, Lebanon – 1,300 m
All the wines of Cara Sur, Argentina – 1,500 m
Phoenix Skin Contact, Mersel Wines, Lebanon -1,900 m

THE WINE NEWS HEADLINES

Randall Grahm, the man once described affectionately as “crazy as a cup of waltzing mice”, has shocked the world wine community by releasing a Chardonnay in a bottle with a conventional label. “It’s a pastiche not a parody”, he explained helpfully.

OOOoooOOO

A Californian micro-winery claims that it has created the perfect wine “in the image of God”. Robert Parker was unavailable for comment.

OOOoooOOO

A computer bug called Phylloxera has attacked all wine web sites across the world resulting in the dramatic loss of no sales whatsoever.

OOOoooOOO

A restaurant manager in London who marked up a bottle of Cloudy Sauvignon five times the cost of the bottle has apologised. “It was meant to be seven times”, he conceded.

OOOoooOOO

Industrial caterers and cleaning agencies have been complaining about the quality of *grande marque* champagnes. “They’re definitely not what they are cracked up to be. They’re just not getting those stubborn stains out.” A spokesman for one of the major champagne houses replied: “We’re very happy with the current product. Any less bottle age and the contents would be too toxic to use in a closed environment”.

OOOoooOOO

On the subject of sparkling wine, Cloudy Bay have released the new deluxe brand “Thesaurus”, as they have run out of superlatives to promote their own products.

OOOoooOOO

Still in New Zealand, the tourist authorities are evidently keen to cash in on Tolkien-mania and have brought out “The Lord of the Rings” range of wines. The Sauvignon is said to taste of elves’ pee and bilberries, the Pinot Noir is reminiscent of the stench in the darkest pits of Mordor, whilst the Riesling aromatically resembles a Gollum’s fart in a dragon’s cave.

OOOoooOOO

Riot control. Research done at Davies University has determined that hoses firing Zinfandel are by far the most effective varietal means of dispersing unruly crowds. Test victims were said to feel a hot burning sensation and an overwhelming nausea. Italian police will still continue to use the more expensive and traditional guns of Amarone.

OOOoooOOO

After pioneering the Stelvin closure Australian winemakers will be abandoning the conventional glass bottle for a plastic tube with ring-pull facility. “This will be an ergonomic advance of unprecedented proportions. Imagine how many tubes you could stack behind the bar next to the cans of Red Bull.” Reaction amongst the British press was predictably enthusiastic. “Another nail in the coffin for the French wine industry”, chortled one journalist.

OOOoooOOO

An Argentinian wine maker was found guilty of flavouring his Chardonnay with new oak staves. “It wasn’t the oak planks that the authorities didn’t like”, he confessed, “It was the fact that I forgot to remove the two-toed sloths that were still clinging to them for dear life”.

OOOoooOOO

Holy Moses!

After recent climatic travails an enterprising Victorian winery has released a cuvée called Burning Bush Shiraz which, apparently, goes very well with dishes featuring chard.

Being Savvy?

Never shy at putting technology at the forefront of marketing, New Zealand's most famous winery has introduced "Cloudy BayBook" – a kind of Facebook where people can chat to each other endlessly about their experiences of Cloudy Bay wines.

More Is More

Meanwhile, in Marlborough, developers are flattening a mountain to make way for more vine planting. "If we don't increase vineyard planting exponentially, we don't know what will happen", explained a spokesman for the region.

Green Regime

In the light of the news that Château Latour intends to convert its vineyards to organic status by 2010 there has also been a mooted label redesign which will still feature the famous castle tower motif only with the addition of a ladybird looking out of one of the windows.

We're Lovin' It

Following on from the burger joint in California where you can buy Napa Valley Merlot with your onion rings, McDonalds has got in on the act with its **De Luxe McBurgundy Meal** which it aims to pilot and then introduce into a small number of its European franchises.

Their hamburger (gherkin optional) comes with a village Burgundy, the quarter pounder is teamed with a premier cru wine, and, of course, the big Mac is accompanied by a Styrofoam wine cup of one of the Grand Cru wines.

My word is my Biondi-Santi

Italian banks will soon start to accept fine wines as collateral. Gianni Zonin, chairman of the Banca Popolare di Vicenza and head of wine producer Zonin, which owns 10 estates across Italy, proposed the idea this week.

'We've done it with cheese, so why not with good wines like Brunello di Montalcino and Chianti Classico?' he said.

'This is a great idea, it has my blessing', said agricultural minister "Pope" Vince Anto.

The bankers have just awarded themselves a massive Grana Padano. Reports that RBS and HSBC are taking on barrels of English rhubarb burgundy and tubs of Dairylea dunkers in a similar vein have not been verified.

Crack appears in Australian marketing campaign

It's a great idea, enthused a spokesperson for the Australian Wine Bureau: Buy a bottle of Aussie wine, get a ball of cocaine free.

Unbearable lightness of being

The world's lightest bottle will be released into supermarket in early January next year. Pioneered in this country, apparently, it is 50% glass and 50% hot air and will automatically rise to the top shelves of the superstores.

Twits?

The restaurant which asked its customers to vote for wines on Twitter has decided on another revolutionary method of selecting some old vintages of fine wine. They are going to hold a séance and ask the spirit of Thomas Jefferson to choose their claret list.

Lasers to overtake manual sorting in hi-tech Bordeaux

Manual sorting tables will soon be a thing of the past as the top châteaux embrace €100,000 laser sorting technology.

Grape surgeons, as they will be known from now on, will be using micro-surgery to remove individual pips. Any grape that does not measure up to expectations will be sent to the newly appointed Grapefinder General to be summarily sentenced and ceremonially burnt at the stake of Michel Rolland's opinion.

A London wine merchant has brought out a revolutionary new wine catalogue with scratch and sniff smells instead of the customary tasting notes for the wines. Unfortunately, on the first print run, the coatings reacted with a chemical compound in the paper and the catalogue was later pronounced to be corked.

OOOoooOOO

Three fine wine businesses specialising exclusively in *en primeur* offers were today sold before they set officially themselves up as companies.

OOOoooOOO

The manager of the restaurant in central London who sold six legendary vintages of Château Cheval Blanc to five wealthy businessmen admitted that it was a nerve-wracking but thrilling experience. "At one point I couldn't glue the labels onto the bottles quickly enough," he said, adding, "It was better than sex but then I don't get out much".

OOOoooOOO

The Institute of The Crooked Corkscrews have released information on how to apply for their examination. They invite applicants to send their details on the back of a sizeable cheque.

OOOoooOOO

A freak occurrence at one of the major international trade fairs has led to the inception of a major new brand. As a result of the combination of an overly efficient newly installed isothermic ventilation system and rapidly condensing alcoholic vapours, a wine said to be the aggregate of every open bottle in the exhibition centre was created in a slop bucket. "I like it. I think we could sell this!" enthused the famous supermarket wine buyer, Dr Frankenwine MW.

OOOoooOOO

The new regulatory quango "Offwine" has been described as a "corking good idea" by the Prime Minister's official press secretary.

OOOoooOOO

An Australian clone has just been grafted on to a Burgundian. The result is said to be "painful" even though the recipient was lubricated with vegemite.

OOOoooOOO

The Canadian-backed transoceanic wine super-tube (wine piped straight to your local supermarket) has once more proved intrinsically flawed when Edna the inebriated humpback whale infiltrated the system and drank Canada dry (again). A Captain Queequeg, veteran of such incidents, growled: "Give me the Horn any day".

OOOoooOOO

It's been called "the blend of blends". A new English wine called Huxelseyvalreichenthurgau has been invented. The wine is described in a press release by the Association of English Winegrowers as "a real mouthful".

OOOoooOOO

Alfred Schniedel has pioneered a glass so sensitive that it can tell when you are pouring the wrong type of wine into it. Schniedel claims that the glass has a symbiotic resonance with the individual molecules of aromas produced by different wines. He elaborates: "My glasses are now so finely attuned they can tell from the sound the cork makes when it is being pulled what grape variety is in the bottle and will automatically shatter if you try to pour the wine into the wrong type of the glass."

OOOoooOOO

Californian scientists have finally found the perfect terroir after years of painstaking research. "It's called France", one said.

RON MANAGER'S CELLAR NOTES

Hmmm... vatted Merlot, marvellous... VAT 69, Pope's phone number, wasn't it? Sweet plums and chocolate liqueur, always the last one in the box or is it the coffee cream – offering it to the lady wife with a cheeky grin – marvellous! Here's a claret. Expensive, mon cher, I should cocoa. Ah the clarets – West Ham at home, blowing bubbles, blowing games – the Happy Hammers – especially if you're auctioneer! The prices, isn't it, aren't they – tremendous? Thomas Jefferson, wine collector, cultivated footballer, two Lafite wasn't it (or was it two left feet?).

The Englishman's wine though, n'est ce pas? An Englishman's home is his château. Château Latour, but where's the Château Latrine? Privy, I know thee not, what? Bordeaux, the great port on the Gironde, although nothing to do with port. Don't ask if you can't afford it. The Aussies won't have an inferiority complex though. Whinging Pomerols! Burgundy's the thing. Forget the minor varieties – see you later, Aligote, kir today, gone tomorrow, isn't it? Ho ho! Meursault and Montrachet, the twin pillars of Chardonnay. Has a ring, like bedknobs and broomsticks, the sound of music, the sound of Musar... a great Lebanese wine made by er... Lebanese! Or the sound of Muscat, a grape escape, Julie Andrews fleeing from the Nazis on her motorbike... Or was it the other way around?

Where was I? Great reds, Burgundies, but have they lost their bottle? When is a Nuits a no-no? The label may say Savigny but would you give your dog a Beaune? Are they cutting crus according their cloth? The Côtes of myriad colours... Should we boycott Gevrey? Ah, Headingley on a July afternoon with Yorkshire's finest ambassador glued to the crease, the crowd snoring in unison - abiding image.

The French – they have a different word for everything, don't they?

Beaujolais nouveau – vieux chapeau, isn't it? Mmm, third Thursday in November... the race to get back for breakfast and have a good fry up. Un oeuf is un oeuf. Don't forget the grilled tomatoes! Carbonic maceration? – I don't mind what they do as long it doesn't frighten the horses!

Cono Sur – one for the connoisseur – ho ho – what will the Chileans think of next – they can't make Pinot in Chile, then again they can't make chilli in Pinner!

Spanish wines – are they off their Riojas? Prices soaring like a bull-market. Toro Toro Toro - like Pearl Harbour! Pearls? Before wines? Ah drying out on mats in the bodegas – and that's just the workers. Abiding image. El Tel given the Spanish archer (El bow, ho ho) by the crafty Catalans – they know what they're doing – Torres, Torres, Torres everywhere you look. Lieutenant Torres, Starship Voyager, half klingon-half woman, I know which half I would cling on to!

Italy – the cattenachio double guyot system with the sweeper picking up the grapes - enduring image. Chianti-shire, the English playground of the chattering classes, hampers for goalposts. Oh the vintage of the warmth south, drinking from the wicker flasks... wicker man... Edward Woodward built like an oak tree burned like one... Barolo... would you give someone your last one.... Just one Dolcetto give it to me! And what better way to wash down a plate of *Spaghetti Carbone* or *Vitello di Canio* than a nice glass of *Daniel Verdicchio*!

Botrytis cinerea – hardest game in the world! Misty golden autumn afternoons, mellow fruitfulness, smoke on the water, a fire in the sky. Shrivelled grapes – Ron gets that way in winter (!) - young lads and lasses picking them, purple-stained mouths, filling their baskets with the poetry of the harvest. Abiding image, isn't it?

Robert Parker, the advocate, isn't that a Dutch drink made from lawyers? No he's the man with the marks - and the dollars - and the yen. The man with the golden tongue! Incorruptible. The Bordelais want to stick their business up his nose. You can see their point – 100 times over!

And a letter! Parker Roberts of Boston writes: “Dear Ron, which wine should I drink with oysters? The wife recommends a good Muscadet.” Ron says: “Have a wine instead!”

The New World... isn't it? Hop off frogs we can teach you a thing or two, ha ha. A sea of Chardonnay... Chardonnay, Chardonnay everywhere, nor any drop to drink. The AA... Ancient Mariner wasn't he? And what have we here? Cat's Pee in A Gooseberry Bush Sauvignon – too much for Ron's sensitive nose – as the Italians say aroma was not built in a day! Not château bottled but bottled eau de chat, isn't it hmmm?

South African wine – red or white I'm colour blind. Bongo-bongo chenin though, isn't it? Better than a kick in the goolies – with a wet kipper!

Finally, Ron's piece of sage advice from the expert's corner. Remember, when you are using a corkscrew that French and Italian wines are removed with a clockwise action, while those from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have to be unscrewed anti-clockwise. Marvellous, isn't it? Happy drinking!

Ron Wine Manager

The Alternative Natural Wine Manifesto

In The Beginning Was The Word...

... And the word was natural. And for some the word was good enough in itself. And for the others the word was bad and semantically contradictory and provocative. And it came to pass that people wanted to define the word. And for some people the word was all about the spirit of an endeavour, describing the feeling of accompanying and gently nurturing a wine from the vine to the bottle. Others wanted the word to be part of the vocabulary of a new law, for it was important to them that the word be not taken in vain. And for others still the word in itself was unnatural and the practices that it advocated were also unnatural, for what the word implied could never *ipso facto* exist.

And it came to pass that many people wanted a brand-new watertight manifesto to put a stop to all the many arguments about the word. And a manifesto was written and then many other manifestos also posted on forums and web sites, and, in the end, no-one was much the wiser, and the arguments continue to rage about milligrams of sulphur - and without a single milligram of humour or humility - until the protagonists huffily retreated into their respective bunkers insisting that only they were right in their convictions.

These schisms reflect the contrary nature of human beings, the desire to be right, to be original and to have moral ownership of an issue. Here our wine world is somewhat divided into the fanciful poets and the hard-prose realists. The business of definition is always for the purpose of business; demarcating what you call a wine allows it to be placed into a specific commercial category and to be marketed in the trade and amongst the general public as such. For self-appointed guardians of the category, the idea of natural wine represents a kind of chaste purity, and the word “natural” should be the chastity belt that can only be unlocked by a silver key of precise definition. Those that agitate for defined rules justify their campaign by pointing out that any trendy movement will invariably attract its fair sprinkling of frauds, charlatans and interlopers, who will batten onto the natural body in order to reap a commercial benefit. While their presence does not in itself invalidate the good efforts of conscientious vignerons, it does tend to cast a pall over the natural wine brand as a whole. Here, I take a step backwards and disavow myself, as I never use the word “brand”, in anything other than an ironic context, but will accept that the actions of a few may well diminish the probity of the many.

To prevent natural wine being diluted as a concept, one possible course of action is to create charters, strict codes of practice that every vigneron(ne) regardless of his or her merits and reputation, must submit to. The problem here becomes one of exclusion, as charters are based on the idea that one has to belong to a particular group in order to fundamentally validate one's status. Your motivations for not wanting to have a charter mark may therefore be construed as suspicious. However, if you that natural wine is a natural way of working with wine, and that you have – say – already uncoupled yourself from appellation because you desire the freedom to work according to your conscience rather than under bureaucratic dictates – then charters are tantamount to more policing, more judgements from unelected panels, more box-ticking, in other words, another kind of conformity. Most vignerons that I talk to are not at all concerned with a natural wine designation and don't deem it necessary to describe their wines as “natural.” They do what needs to be done to make wine the best way (and least interventionist way for them) that they possibly can. They are not using natural wine as a marketing tool to sell their wines, but if others choose to do so....

Nor is there any substitute for intimate knowledge and an acquaintance with the growers and the wines. Certification and compliance with artificially-derived standards tell you nothing about the wine and who is making it. What we call natural wine is – and always has been - highly subjective - and doubtless arbitrary. Our judgement is based on an amalgam of evidence and instinct including visits to the estate, observation, talking to the grower/vigneron and asking them questions, examining the

technical data provided by them, and, in the end, having an instinctive feeling for what natural wine tastes like. When *all* this material is processed, there is, by definition, a broad spectrum of natural wines out there, of which some seem obviously “more natural” than others. However, each and every wine must surely be treated on its merits rather than subjected to a one-size-fits-all assessment. In the end, we may well argue about a few milligrams of sulphur here and there, but what matters most is the overall approach to farming and winemaking and how the vigneron treads the delicate line between transforming grapes into wine and altering/superimposing aroma and flavour in order to make the wine safer/homogenous/acceptable to certain palates.

For all this, we may examine the specifics of making wine and identify in which ways natural winemaking is distinctive and therefore deserves to be considered as a discrete category. As mentioned, there are degrees of intervention in every facet of farming and winemaking, which necessarily results in a spectrum of wine styles. The following are more like guidelines rather than actual rules, as the saying goes. We *could* argue about the minutiae until the mouse appears. So, we won't!

Farming

The entire winemaking process starts with the land and the nature of the soil. This soil is more than a piece of dirt, it provides the original living theatre for the vines. You can use any old any grapes to make wine, but a real wine comes from a vineyard that has been tended with loving care.

Natural wine must derive from organic viticulture, which entails farming without using chemical fertilisers, herbicides, pesticides, other sprays, and where possible, limiting applications of copper. In certain climates and in certain vintages it is extremely arduous and time-consuming to work organically and biodynamically, and the farmer will have to adopt a more holistic approach, setting up the vineyard in such a way that it becomes as close to a perfectly self-sustaining and efficient natural organism as possible. In other words, the vineyard is not simply a machine for grape production, but an organism which draws the energy of nature up through the soil and down from the sun, and distributes these vital energies through the vines into the grapes.

Doing without is only a small part of organic farming. The real premise behind natural wine is to find a *natural balance* which may be achieved through the following proactive (dynamic) viticultural measures:

- *Vines flourish in healthy soils which are rich in microorganisms. Promoting health by means of working the soils, sowing cover crops, using biodynamic treatments and so forth).*
- *Encouraging the vines to develop deep root systems to take up complex nutrients.*
- *Sensitive and accurate pruning and work in the vines to prevent further problems down the line. Always being responsive and adapting to what the vine/vineyard needs rather than working to the same programme every vintage.*
- *Fostering biodiversity.*
- *Employing natural solutions to natural problems.*
- *Respect and equilibrium - restoring to nature what you take out.*

Creating a balanced vineyard involves close observation and affirmative action. A good farmer will be intimately connected to her vineyard and understands that great grapes can only come from a sensitive and reasoned farming approach. With natural farming, it is also possible to work with different parcels in different ways. Some growers, for example, are now experimenting with no-pruning and zero treatments, thereby allowing the vineyard to find its own natural balance. Some vigneron(nes) appear to have an emotional/spiritual relationship with the vines; they touch them and they are touched by them and their lives become increasingly governed by the rhythms of the vineyard.

Argument: A natural wine comes to fruition as a result of the best possible interactions between humans and the vineyards they work in and thus bringing to maximum health and phenolic maturity those grapes that form the basis for the wine. Natural farming is better for the soil and for the environment, and the best organic methods result in a more efficient and productive vineyard. The use of chemicals may result in denaturing the soil, killing living organisms and yeasts, destroying bacteria, insects and worms, hobbling the vines, leaching toxins into the water table, as well as damaging the health of vineyard workers.

Natural wine is the life of the soil and the life of the soul of the vineyard.

The harvest*

Natural wine should come from grapes harvested by hand. Hand harvest is a selection. And a skill. It leads to closer, more tactile vineyard interactions, as well as the clearer understanding of the physiology of grapes.

Tasting the grapes is important. It is fine to take measurements, but to taste is to feel, as well as to imagine the wine in its final state. Instinct is important to natural winemaking, and natural winemaking involves working with all the senses and using one's experience to arrive at judgements, rather than mediating all work through machinery and computers. Finally, it is important to treat the grapes respectfully, picking undamaged healthy fruit, placing it in small cases so that it is not crushed or bruised.

*You can make an argument that natural wine should allow for machine-harvesting as utensils are made by man and wine is a man-made product. Another argument is that why make it difficult for yourself in the vineyard when easier and quicker technological options are available? Hard work is not romantic, after all. I am talking, nonetheless, about a *whole* approach to farming and winemaking which is about being in touch with nature and to do with physical endeavour, rather than finding the easiest (i.e. technological) way of making a wine without chemical additions. As one grower said: "I am uncertain on a scientific level what biodynamics achieves in comparison to other forms of farming, but on a personal level, adopting it has made me a much better farmer, more observant of nature, and made me realise that I must understand vines better."

Winemaking

Winemaking is a series of choices in terms of guiding the fermentation, the evolution and maturation of the grape juice. In natural wine, winemaking is transforming raw material into a product that tastes as natural as is "humanly" possible, in which the interventions have been physical and naturally transformative, where aromas, flavours and textures have not been created *or* altered by oenological tropes nor chemical additions to the must. There is a difference between chemical interventions (which tend to be about exerting a measure of control and to effect flavour change to a specific end) and physical interventions (racking, topping up etc) which are natural steps in the transformative process and often have uncertain outcomes.

Natural ferments occur using native (also known as ambient or wild) yeasts. In natural winemaking there is no assigned period for a fermentation. Although the fermentation may be wild there will be some controlling factors. Its temperature will depend on the ambient temperature of the winery and the nature of the container/vessel that it takes place in.

The outcome of any winemaking, as we know, depends on a thousand decisions in the vineyard and the winery. Individually, whereas each decision may only have an infinitesimal effect on the final wine, collectively they knit together to make the wine what it is. "Every time you touch the wine, it moves in a different direction", as a vigneron once said to me.

There is long list of legal additions to wine must. Rather than itemising every one of the hundred or so chemical additions and oenological processes used to transform, correct or stabilise wine, here is a broad list of what is *not* allowed in natural winemaking.

No added yeasts

No sugar

No water

No enzymes

No flash pasteurisation

No added colouring agents

No added tannins

No added tartaric acid

No added proteins

No added chemicals or substances to change the mouthfeel

No flavouring agents

No process of deacidification or dealcoholisation

No stabilising gums

No gelatin

No reverse osmosis

No chips, no staves

No strip filtering

Those who would seek to describe or define natural wine would view the above as a minimum standard by which natural vigneron should abide. These additions and manipulations are listed for the very reason that they are not listed on the label of the bottle – to illustrate that natural winemaking. Ergo, put simply, the entire premise of natural wine is not adding substances to what is not already there, and not subtracting from what is already present. Simpler still, nowt put in; nowt taken out.

Does this mean that the winemaking is a *no-intervention* process? By no means, as there are so many decisions to be made and elements of winemaking that necessarily shape the grape juice into a final product. One might put it thus: the grapes are the original genetic material and natural predisposition, whereas the winemaking is the upbringing and moulding into a complex representation of the grapes' potential.

Natural winemaking is just... winemaking. But a different approach. Or once more with feeling! Perhaps being less recipe-driven and less geared towards a consistent end-product, it is less about driving the grapes into a wine that reminds you of the wine the year before and the year before that, and more about working with what you have in front of you. You could call it lo-fi or low-intervention. Natural winemaking is the means to the end and not the end in itself. Its winemakers tend to prefer to be referred to as *vignerons*. The notion of *creating wine* is an alien one (nothing can come of nothing); they prefer to see themselves as enablers or midwives within the process.

We never deny the human element, of course. Two different vigneron can make completely different natural wines from grapes harvested on the same day from the same vineyard. The personality of the vigneron is part of the natural process. This is the least understood element of natural wine and puzzles literalists who think that natural mean wine made by nature and sans human intervention.

When does winemaking tip over into imposition? Natural winemaking, as we have said, is not seeking to add or subtract flavours during the transformation of grape juice into wine. The nature of the wine, however, will be affected by the nature of the physical intervention (or even lack of intervention). Stuff happens. Length of maceration, for example, determines the colour and phenolic texture of the wine (plus punch downs and pump overs). The use of oxygen is crucial, the effect of batonnage and lees-

ageing, temperature control and filtering. The very vessel itself plays a role in the flavour and the texture of the wine. And, of course, there is the addition of sulphur, at what juncture, the quantity used, and the reason for the addition.

On the matter of sulphur which excites way too much debate in the natural wine world, one cannot be too prescriptive or dogmatic. Every natural wine, every wine in its individual barrel or tank, has different needs. Problems may be alleviated or solved by techniques such as blending or racking, or by letting time be the great healer. Not everyone has the luxury of doing nothing though. The application of sulphur dioxide is, after all, a winemaking tool. To make wine without sulphur is to make wine without a safety net. We know it can be done, and we love the sheer brilliance and vitality of zero-sulphur wines, but we also acknowledge that natural wines can be made with the addition of a judicious (reasoned) amount of sulphur.

Too much sulphur is an unpleasant imposition and it's easy to discern which wines have been over-egged. There is a rough tipping point, and most natural wine aficionados have an idea what the maximum addition should be or the maximum total should read. Judging totals is not absolutely indicator as sulphur is present as a natural by-product of winemaking. As for additions, as a lot of sulphur may be added early in the winemaking process and the readings can turn out low in the final analysis.

When we speak of natural wine and consider flaws, faults and the nature of the liquid, we need to consider the notions of authenticity and "balance." Balance in wine is perceived harmony, the seamless integration of myriad elements that constitute the wine itself. Take oxidation. When part of the wine, it becomes a wonderful complexing secondary aromatic and textural component. It adds to the wine's voice. Yet if it dominates the wine, its presence subtracting from other important elements, then it becomes a less desirable component. Oak barrels carry, cradle and nourish a wine, give it shape, allow micro-oxygenation. The quality of the wood, the quality of the toasting is paramount. A new oak barrel will eat a weak wine; another barrel of inferior quality may confer flavours of dirty wood.

If what I am saying is that the tools are an important part in determining the outcome of a natural wine, then that is the case. Great wine can be emasculated by clumsy intervention. Natural farming which produces superb grapes can easily be undone by the work done in the winery. Composed of living elements, wine in its embryonic state is sensitive to intervention. The majority of natural vignerons pledge themselves to preserving its dynamic forces, transmitting the energetic voice of their local vineyards in the bottle.

Few people are aware that Jonathan Swift turned his satirical gaze onto the shenanigans of the wine trade. I unearthed the following diatribe in the British Library within a lesser-thumbed copy of "The Complete Bile of Swift: Divers Maledictions, Contumely and Lampoons." This is one of his briefer squibs (known in critical circles as "a swift one") where he anathematizes the wine trade ("a most noble endeavour") with his customary punctilio.

A MODERN PROPOSAL

With indefatigable pain and study, having perused soporiferous discourses and analysed *Scientific Treatises* (which thereupon I consigned to the eternal discretion of my fireplace) I have come to the conclusion that *Fine Wine* does not exist *per se*, but is withal an imposture, being the invention of a peculiar confederacy of poets and crackpot journalists, those solemn notched and cropped scriveners who suck their quills as it is said to derive inspiration in order to fill page after page with their idle musings.

Moreover, these men and women have disguised the non-existence of *Fine Wine* by cunningly differentiating and according schedules of marks to *Factitious Bottles* and exciting us to believe in the pre-eminence of certain wines by the use of *Profound Numbers* and *Subtil Gradients*.

To these systems of marking have been tagged various subaltern doctrines, those being articulated thus by the illustrious self-appointed wits, namely that the public interest is served by sewing confusion, so cheap wines are deemed good and expensive wines are bad, except when that is not the case, that tasting is subjective, but a critic's advice is wisdom born of *Crystalline Objectivity*, and that *Pinotage* and *Pleasure* can inhabit the same sentence.

In accepting that appearance is more important than content, arbiters determine that wines are garlanded with a list of trophies to attract the attention of customers, who, like eager magpies with eye for *Glittering Bauble*, will pluck the bottles from the shelves and return triumphantly to their nests for we are but *Compliant Monkeys* dancing to the organ grinders of *Contemporary Fashion*.

I therefore beg to introduce several *Modest Stratagems* with utmost deference to the great and profound majority: firstly, that the aforementioned labels be enlarged listing all the *Grades*, *Achievements* and *Critical Panegyrics* of that wine for customers do not wish to know what the wine is, but need to be reassured that others believe it to be worthy of consumption.

Secondly, as we are always being encouraged by the grave *Divines* to accede to the virtues of good husbandry, and pursue the course of least resistance, we may surely dispense with the luxury of real wine in the bottle. Henceforth, I propose that all wine shall originate from a single vast alchemical factory (transmuting base grapes into base wine) in the former *Colony of Australia* and that solely to provide a potable assemblage of *Artificial Fruit Flavours*, added ethanol and appropriate citric acids. Thus when the poets describe the flavour of wine, their *Divine Treatises* will not be some *Imaginative Whimsy*, but statements of unvarnished fact tho' the wine itself smacks of varnish pure and simple. And no longer will the *Credulous Public* suffer from the *Green-Eyed Gazungas* and worry about having to keep up with the tastes of the *Jones's*. The wine shall have some amusing nomenclature such as *Great White White* or *Wombat Creek Red* for it is proven that people set great store by such *Meagre Frivolities* and will fall upon such product like ravening hordes despite that a regular intake of such fluids has proven to *Rot Gaskins* and render a *Miasmatic After-breath*.

And I have heard it affirmed that the rational inhabitants of *Australia*, being of scientific disposition and low cunning, repeatedly reinvent the wheel and sell it back to us under a new guise. I believe, if I am not mistaken, that once they planted grapes on the surface of the sun in order to ripen and gave us *Sublime Alcohol* for our pleasure. Now they have discovered the dark aspect of the moon for a cool

climate makes a *Paregoric Potion* agreeable to critical taste. Surely this ability to adapt to the gentle *Commercial Zephyrs* displays the vigorous principle and philosophical inclination of a country of great genius and rightly do its dwellers smile at the *Anticks* of the cracked-brained daggled-tail *French Cacafuegos* who it is rumoured mutter incantations to their vines to animate the sap and claim to have invented *The Phenomenon of Terroir*, an *Arcanum* that these gilded *Antipodean Wranglers* rightly dismiss as *Aeolian Flummery* (except where it suits them to use it to advertise the distinctive qualities of their own wines) and that the disposition of vines on certain soils is but a fortuitous concourse of *Atomies*. These bushwhackers beguile us importunately with the solicitation that no man may resist the logic of (their) invention for invention's sake. Since I calculate that within ten years *Australia* shall be *One Gigantic Vineyard* criss-crossed by busy tractors, yielding a *Wine Glacier* which will melt and raise the sea level by several feet of *Chardonnay*, it would be stark insensibility to disavow the elegance of their arguments.

Moreover, I read an article in an august local pamphlet wherein a self-effacing young man, a noble modern *Paracelsus*, meekly derogated the wines of *France*, saying that they were worthy only to cook with and adducing as his evidence for this contention the vastness of the *Antipodean Continent* as to calculate inbred superiority for he said one might journey a thousand miles and taste *Identical Chardonnay* as if the wine had been made by *The Great Universal Artificer* himself. I have heard such sentiments articulated on many occasions by eximious men who are carried to their views by pure instinct such as rats are drawn to the best cheese or wasps to the fairest fruit (or so my friend JS assures me).

To return to my discourse I humbly submit that the benefits of *Industrial Refinements* shall be many. Possibly one life every century may be saved in the steep-sloped vineyards in *Germany* as when a worker who tries to harvest the last inaccessible nobly rotten berry plunges screaming to his death in the foaming *Rhine* below. Moreover, the hideous and distressing dissipation of wine during wine festivals and tastings will be eliminated for these institutions will no longer exist, allowing exhibition centres to be employed for more gainful employment such as mass displays of *Pornographic Equipment*. For the sake of the environment, tankers, which formerly carried oil, will be adapted to convey *Riesling* (and run on *Riesling*) from the vale of *Clare* for it is a noted characteristic of that wine to mimic *Petroleum*, and, should they run aground, the intoxication and consequent ardent spirits of a few thousands *Penguins or Turtles* is not too savage a price to pay. Finally, corks can be returned to the trees from which they were initially liberated and the aesthetically pleasing *Non-Biodegradable Plastic Enclosures* may be recycled to make *Sculptures* to win *The Turner Prize*.

My *Lucubrations* have furthermore revealed that just as one might extract sunbeams from cucumbers and gold from base metal, that *Critical Pomposity*, a substance more ethereal than the vapours of a *Lawyer's Breath*, may be converted into beneficial matter, that the utterances of the canterers are sufficient as to drive hundred score of *Wind Machines* to create the electricity to power the divers utensils required to manufacture wine. Thus, I have arranged for all the critics in the world to be placed in one *Talking Shop* as it were and each to be given a giant *Echoic Spittoon* to *bombinate* in.

And there shall be grand occasions to mark the *Exequies* for *Bordeaux* which, though it may have entered our millennium in through the portcullis, will leave through the oubliette, its dropsied reputation mourned by only a few *Crusted Ancients*, and also grand occasions to read the last rites for *Sarsenet-Textured Burgundies* not to mention the hyssop-scented consanguineous wines of the *Rhône* and the *Languedoc* et&c. For tradition and quality may be viewed solely as encumbrances, two *Phylloxera-Belching Albatrosses* around the single neck of the great *French Regions*.

I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I believe that all that is great and good is the product of *Scientific Contraptions* and without recourse to *Newfangledness* we would all still be *Jut-Browed Dwellers* in caves beating our brains with the *Jaw-Bone of an Ass*, for *Nature* is a rude abomination to

be broken like a wild horse just as imagination and intuition and spirit are faculties lower than reason and need reining in. Reason also dictates that diversity is madness, that people seek a simple truth in their lives and that for efficiency's sake we must demand the most consistent wine at the cheapest prices. There can be only one future for wine: one where *Science* remedies *Nature's Defects*, where liquid is made to defer to the *Great Taste of the Public*. I present with easy conscience my modest proposal for wines as *FLAVOURED ALCOPOPS* and urge my friend, the advocate, *Master Robert Parker*, to write a *Compendious Manual* extolling their merits.

Terms and Conditions

Interpretation of Terms: In these Conditions unless the context otherwise permits:

- ‘Company’ means Les Caves de Pyrene Limited Registered number 3053492 of Pew Corner, Old Portsmouth Road, Artington, Guildford, GU3 1LP
- ‘Goods’ means all or any products which the Company is to supply in accordance with these conditions.
- ‘Purchaser’ means the person to whom the Company agrees to sell the Goods

Minimum Order: Nine litres or 12x75cl. Cases may be split in multiples of six bottles.

VAT: Prices exclude VAT at 20% (subject to Government jurisdiction).

Prices: The Company reserves the right to alter prices without prior notice.

Previous Lists: The current list renders invalid all previous lists

Payment of Goods: Payment must be received **before** orders can be dispatched (by credit card, BACS or cheque*) until a credit account is established i.e. when satisfactory bank and trade references have been received for the applicant.
*Cheque payments require seven day clearance.

When account is established, payment must arrive within **30 days** from the date of delivery.

Each time the Company receives bank notification that a client’s payment has not been honoured by the client’s own bank, Les Caves De Pyrene Ltd will pass on the bank charges to the client.

Availability: All wines are subject to availability at the time of the client’s order.

Title of Goods: The Goods shall remain the sole and absolute property of the Company as legal and equitable owner until such time as the Purchaser shall have paid to the Company:

- i) the price of the Goods in full

AND

- ii) the full price of any other goods, the subject of any other contract with the Company for which payment is due.

Until title in the Goods has passed to the Purchaser, the Purchaser shall, once it has possession of the Goods:

- i) hold the Goods on a fiduciary basis as the Company’s bailee.
- ii) maintain the Goods in satisfactory condition and keep them insured on the Company’s behalf for their full price.

Title of Goods continued: The Goods shall remain the sole and absolute property of the Company as legal and equitable owner until such time as the Purchaser shall have paid to the Company:

- iii) be entitled to resell the Goods in the ordinary course of its business on its own behalf as principal (and not as agent for the Company).

- iv) account to the Company for any proceeds of sale of the Goods, including insurance proceeds, and shall keep all such proceeds separate from any other moneys or property of the Purchaser and third parties.

Until title in the Goods has passed to the Purchaser, the Company shall be entitled at any time to require the Purchaser to deliver up the Goods to the Company and, if the Purchaser fails to do so immediately, the Company reserves the immediate right of repossession of any such Goods. For this purpose, the Purchaser grants an irrevocable right to the Company and its agents to enter any of its premises where the Goods are stored to inspect and repossess the Goods.

The Purchaser shall not be entitled to pledge or in any way charge by way of security for indebtedness any of the Goods which remain the property of the Company, but if the Purchaser does so, all moneys owing by the Purchaser to the Company shall (without prejudice to any other right or remedy of the Company) forthwith become due and payable.

Deliveries:

Cut-off times apply for any orders placed. **Contact the office for details.**

Should the minimum invoice amount for free delivery not be reached, there may be a charge incurred. **Contact the office for current charge rates.**

Deliveries must be checked by means of a **case count at the very minimum** to ensure that the total number of cases received matches the total indicated on the delivery note.

Any breakages/shortages must be **clearly indicated on the delivery note**. If a delivery note is signed complete and a breakage/shortage is subsequently reported, we regret that a credit note cannot be issued.

Credit Notes & Refunds:

No credit notes or refunds will be raised for any stock purchased more than 12 months before the credit note is requested.

This list renders invalid all previous lists.