

Les Caves De Pyrene

March Newsletter – Third Edition

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Christina Pickard presents... Brawn

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MCdaTc3vIU&feature=player_embedded

News of the newbies

Stéphane Bernadeau, Anjou – old vines Chenin to last forever, fruity Cab/Grolleau

Nicolas Reau, Anjou – toothsome fruity numbers from Anjou

Didier Chaffardon, Anjou – feeding the funk furiously

Jo Landron, Muscadet – terroir-ific Muscadet

René Mosse – Savennières savoir-faire

Olivier Pithon, Côtes Catalanes – Le Pilou – pur Carignan

Clos des Grillons, Côtes du Rhône – stunning whites from the Southern Rhône

Mas de la Bégude, Ardèche – Bégude to yourself and drink some scintillating Syrah

Natural Wine Fortnight

The proof of the argumental pudding is always in the drinking. Not one of my best reinventions of an aphorism but you get my drift. Holding a three day tasting for consumers and trade is fine and dandy, but when the circus moves out of Dodge, if all that remains are fond memories and a few hangovers, the impact is soon dissipated. To make the event both more pertinent and more wide-ranging we have decided to run a targeted promotion in restaurants for the fortnight topping and tailing the fair itself, to encourage restaurants to list - and advertise - a minimum of two natural wines by the glass, one white and one red, from any of the growers participating in the fair. These wines might be highlighted, for example, on a separate page in the list, tasting notes and explanations provided, or even simply chalked on a blackboard in the Parisian style; meanwhile, customers, particularly those who attend on the consumer day, will be able to look on the natural wine web site and ascertain which establishments are running the promotion.

Preaching to the converted is fine but this has never been simply a private conversation and we would like the widest possible range of restaurants to come on board, even for a brief period, and try something different. So many wine lists are not nothing if not conservative either because too many wine buyers attempt to second-guess the taste of the public, or ossified because there is a lack of desire to change things (the default syndrome). Rarely presented by the glass or hand sold enthusiastically more unorthodox wines tend to get lost in the mix yet these are the very wines that require the most exposure.

We hope that well over one hundred restaurants, bars, gastropubs and bistros take part - and take part enthusiastically. The fact that so many are prepared to make this commitment shows a gratifying openness to new things.

Such promotions extend choice and persuade restaurateurs and their customers to engage with wine in a different way. It almost goes without saying now that we expect our eggs to come from free-range chickens and our vegetables to be organically grown and our meat to be free of preservatives; we want people to understand where wine comes from, why it is made in the way it is, what goes into it and what is taken out of it. Such knowledge empowers us and helps us to be more discriminating.

We will be working with Isabelle and our fellow merchants to illuminate the world of artisan, terroir-driven, additive-free wines. By operating through different mechanisms – from the fair itself, through the press and various media, in seminars and tastings and finally at the chalk face where customer meets wine, we will have plenty of opportunities to explain why we respect the growers and love their wines so much.

Natural Wine Argumental... again

The Raw versus the Half-Baked

Gregory : "Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

Holmes: "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

Gregory: "The dog did nothing in the night-time."

Holmes: "That was the curious incident."

This whole natural wine debate is not just the incident of the dog that didn't bark in the night; it's about the people barking *at* the dog who didn't bark in the night.

The beautiful thing about momentum is that you can generate it almost by doing nothing. A small initiative here, a modest press release there, keeps the wheels turning. And if you happen to antagonise someone well-known in the wine trade they will give you all the publicity you need for yourself and possibly all the rope they need to hang themselves. By reacting disproportionately, the enemies, if that is not too strong a word, of natural wine, have created a movement in their own image – they have invented their own chimera – bless them.

When Fiona Beckett wrote a balanced blog on the Guardian web site exploring natural wines she accidentally unleashed a tumultuous (hysterical) reaction amongst her readership. There must be a breed of person who google "natural wine" or "biodynamics" so that they can have a good froth. It is probably the most exercise they get in a week.

Whereas some criticism might conceivably claim to be (scornful) scientific rationalism, most was simply offensive and offensively simple. It is interesting to observe how people extrapolate extravagant theories out of a simple premise; I wonder whether having a forum wherein one can make resonant assertions makes

people feel very important. Philosophy has evolved a long way since cogito, ergo sum; it is now “I don’t agree, therefore I am”.

Those who argue against natural wine suggest that the public is being hoodwinked. Obviously, the fact that there are hundreds of growers making it, dozens of wine bars selling it and thousands of customers glugging it suggests self-delusion on a massive scale. The explanation is simple, we don’t know what we are talking about and our palates have been warped by exposure to the noxious “natural” aromas. Methinks these people doth protest too long and too loudly to advance their arguments coherently. I don’t have a problem with anyone who does not get on with a particular wine as long as they assess that wine without fear or favour. I do have a problem with sane and rational people who over-react.

*(their) two eyes, like stars, start from their
spheres,
Their knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.*

Eviscerated in the subsequent correspondence that these articles generate poor Steiner must be spinning mind, body and soul in his theosophic universe. To condemn an entire methodology, a holistic approach to farming, just because a man had a few daft ideas – well, you might as well condemn Yeats, Conan Doyle, Goethe, Tolstoy – and why not bring Plato in as well - is intellectual myopia of the first order. Ideas are of their time and Steiner was an extraordinary man, a true visionary.

The negative reaction is also immoderate given the simple premises of low intervention – that it is probably a very good idea to respect the land by finding natural (ie non-invasive) solutions to problems, to create a healthy environment for the vine to flourish in order to acquire healthy grapes which, in turn, will be the building blocks for wines packed with flavour. It is probably a good idea to respect the quality of raw ingredient when you have it, to allow (within limits) a natural fermentation process, not to use additives, not to strip out flavour and to use the least amount of sulphur possible.

There is nothing fundamentalist or swivel-eyed about these strategies. Some biodynamic growers do stray into strange territories but I doubt they treat Steiner’s writings as gospel; much of their knowledge is derived through observation and experiment. They are farmers who are close to the land. The same goes for non-intervention in the winery – it is always about being responsive to the grapes and what they need, rather than being imprisoned by formulaic winemaking.

Beautiful thoughts from Natural Selection Theory

Think Friuli, think Hermitage, think hotpants, hear scorn, feel the love, duck the rocks and weave the punches thrown at you for feeling, understanding, believing in a work of pure true beauty. And best of all, it's now.

Follow one rule - do nothing but relax and get into the moment. Be part of life, here, now, the part of life that one day doth die - shhh and listen, this is our swan song as it cracks free from containment...

And let us say - what if you had never made a wine before? How would you do it, could you do it? What would you do? Love it we bet - but don't rule it, isolate it from yourself so that it grows into itself, have the strength to let it fail.

Filtration

If I have to run every beautiful, angry, crazy, spoken or written thought that I have by a committee that analyses it, polishes the grammar, strips it of nuance, poetry and possible offence, then I lose the very origin of the thought and the emotion that prompted it.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Virtual 3-D wine fair



Previously, we had only encountered wine longitudinally and laterally, but this unique fair will allow customers to explore wine physically – from a distance – actually, not physically at all. A fourth and fifth dimension to the conference may soon be introduced if money and a venue in an alternate reality can be found.

Making the use of the latest in interactive communications technology – two coke cans and a ball of string, visitors will enter the site through a portal into a virtual reality of pretend customers, ethereal sommeliers and faux wines, whilst sinking back into the comfort of a hard chair in their own offices.

If I tweeted any more, I would have turned into a canary, twittered one enthusiast.

One section in the fair is given over to virtual natural wines. These zero intervention wines have become infinitely possible because they don't actually exist in the temporal dimension. "This means we can get away with minimum additives", said an aerial natural wine spokesman. Biodynamics growers are also represented – a digital image of a cow's horn filled with manure is sent to a computer in which the virtual vineyard is located. Should a virus take hold the virtual vigneron is recommended to flush his software out with a program made out of the ashes of boiled rats' pelvises.

One wine company, Brew Senility, however, claimed that the wines would be virtually faulty because, without the steadying hand of the flying winemaker, these wines could never truly reflect the terroir of the laboratory and the stainless steel tank though the MD of the company did approve of the system whereby added acidity could be "dialed up" over the broadband connection.

The virtual winemakers were said to be but a shadow of their former selves, although for an extra £20,000 you could purchase a package that would allow you access their wines in high definition. For a further £5,000 you can also take up the aromavision module which recreates the feel of the fair: the smell of volatile alcohol, money and desperation to clinch deals.

Organisers of the event were delighted about the numbers. A spokesperson commented: “We expect 100% non-attendance this year which will be 0% down on last year’s event.”

The government is said to be watching the progress of the virtual wine fair with hawk-like interest. Virtual wines have less alcohol, in fact they have no alcohol, said a junior minister in the Department of Health perceptively.

Château 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 buenos nocas 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 definitely not be sky “high-de-high”, campers!

A spokesman 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 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 katie prices that don't take the mickey rourke."

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".

Marks-Schism

Every so often the venerable chestnut about grading wines is exhumed, usually as a result of a so-called "icon wine" faring below expectations in a comparative tasting or because of the perception that the trophy winning wines in major competitions are not out of the top drawer. You have to wonder what the point is. 100 times over. A recent Decanter tasting lined up about 200 Barolos from 2006. As well as paying danger money to the tasters I would have questioned the relevance of tasting and pronouncing on wines, the majority of which are probably are barely born, let alone in their nappies.

I rarely do tastings any more (probably because I am rarely asked) but when I do I find that because my personal marking criteria diverge sufficiently from the official line that even without being specially ornery it is possible to throw several spanners (or spaniels) into the works and bring the whole charade to a grinding halt. (Two strikes on the cliché front).

Medal fatigue

Because the exercise is such an artificial one – we don't taste or experience wines like this in the real world - I think one should bring certain criteria to the judging that would reflect real life experience of drinking such wines.

*If your criterion is that you look favourably on wines you would drink a bottle of then spoozy, pretentious wines would score badly. (Reverse Parker Syndrome)

*If your criterion is that wines should be as distinctive as possible then many of the wines will fall by the wayside and you will give lower marks.

*If your criterion is that each wine should be rigorously judged by every single example of this kind of wine that *you have previously experienced* then you probably tend to mark down.

*If you tend to give the benefit of the doubt and put wines into different drinking contexts (ie that person might enjoy this wine in this situation) you will probably give higher marks.

*If you mark wines mainly on objective criteria such as technical competence you will tend to score them more highly (as oenologists make wines that are clean and lacking in faults). Unobjectionable wines many not be beautiful, but mass wine tastings are closer to cattle markets than beauty pageants.

The human factor is massive, however, and the group dynamic in panels and juries sets the tone and the agenda for the tasting. A dominant personality can cajole less experienced tasters into “improving” their marks, a relentlessly downbeat personality or rogue taster can dampen the entire process. Some tasters defend their marks fiercely as they would their honour (no rowing back or second glances here), whilst others require little prompting to re-examine and re-evaluate. There can be days when certain tasters just don’t taste well and others, when not only do the wines show well, but the tasters are on each other’s wavelength and subconsciously adjust their marking to the mean.

The push-me-pull-you tactical battle over marks often means that the wines that provoke the most extreme reactions get left in limbo. I recall one tasting where a panel was split 3:3 over a Vouvray from Huet. Three of us wanted to give it scores in the mid 90s (gold medal) and three wanted it to be thrown out for being oxidised and plain undrinkable. The fault-finders won the day, but a truthful reflection of the tasting would surely have published all the scores and all the opinions. If wine tastings eliminate controversy or take the line of least resistance then they are neutered.

I believe that wine tastings exist to celebrate excellence not mediocrity.

Judgement of Berlin

It is that familiar scenario of lining up some superstar Bordeaux and their brethren, chucking in a few Chilean ringers and letting the Cabernet hit the fan. If the Chilean wines perform well or even better than expected they will have been deemed to have earned their place in the line up. If the results are totally mixed, it’s bully for subjectivity; if there is broad agreement it supposedly demonstrates that experienced tasters can apply objective criteria and find a communal yardstick for quality.

Judgements of Paris and Berlin? Fiddlesticks and poppycock! We could trump all these Olympian competitions with our Assessment of Acton, Conclusion of Colindale or Prognostication of Parsons Green. To me these wine beauty contests are like deciding who is the loudest, fattest tenor in the grand opera. The wines themselves are essentially monolithic in an opulent way and opulent in a monolithic way, bursting with inflated prices and reputations. I’m not saying that I wouldn’t mind drinking Chateau Margaux (show me the money!), but have not the greatest wines become almost defined by their pretentious price tags? I believe in an aesthetic of quality and that hierarchical judgments can be made, but my aesthetics are probably rather different to the majority of critics, so my hierarchies would be perceived as somewhat topsy-turvy.

Here are some questions that these tastings always raise for me.

**Who determines the format of the tasting?*

**What is the objective of the tasting and what are people trying to prove? Is it that certain wines are different, indistinguishable, or better than others?*

**If you put reasonably good wines in the company of great wines does that necessarily make fit them for comparison? Could you not do this with any wines?*

**If Chilean wines gain the higher marks what does that say about the taster(s)?*

**If French wines gain the higher marks what does that say about the taster(s)?*

**If the results are all mixed what does that say about the tasting? That chacun à son gout rules, and that the results cancel each other out?*

**Did the wines show well? Did all the wines show equally well? Did they show to their full potential? Should that be factored in? If not, why not? Or is the tasting purely a snapshot of a few chosen wines?*

**Are judges truly objective? What is an objective standard?*

**How does recognition of a wine affect the way one marks?*

**Does one mark on how the wine shows on the day or on the potential of the wine?*

**Does price has any relevance in the marking criteria?*

**What about the arc of development for each wine? Did the tasting take into account every single factor (when the wine was bottled, the exact nature of the vintage, how long it normally takes before it reaches the peak of drinking?)*

Other points:

**What does it say about a winemaker that they try to create an iconic wine? It is like trying to create an aesthetic using money as your primary tool.*

**These high end wines are about intensive layering and finical refinement. The layers are the building blocks of the wine; the wines are often impenetrable and certainly undrinkable in their infancy. After a few years the different elements knit together and a complex final product emerges. You hope.*

**Brilliant wines can be made without the gloss and maquillage. If you have a unique terroir that delivers beautiful nuances of flavour into the grapes why, oh why, slap it down with overt extraction and the full array of winemaker's tropes? Would these wines "disappear" in such tastings?*

The art of tasting

“Forget all rules, forget all restrictions, as to taste, as to what ought to be said, write for the pleasure of it—whether slowly or fast—every form of resistance to a complete release should be abandoned.”

Do you bite your tongue when you see someone tasting badly, by which I mean tasting through a veil of prejudice, which is the physical equivalent of coating your mouth in a mixture of cotton wool, egg yolk and coffee grounds? A closed mind saps exclusively on suppositions and saps the life from the wine. Good tasters are adaptable; they can be critical, but they can also make the necessary leap of understanding.

Who assesses the assessors? I am an imperfect taster myself but I can spot slackness and complacency in others. As I pour wines into the glasses of the tasters I watch how they approach the act of tasting. There are a variety of responses which suggest to me that many are a long way from capturing the spirit of the wine. I say spirit, because the act of appreciation yokes the ethereal and the practical, that combination of intuitive and objective qualities.

Tasting in intellectual isolation may be the done thing but I believe that you should never reject a marker. Trade tastings are not like being a member of the Decanter or International Wine Challenge panels where you operate with minimal information in order not to prejudice your judgement. No taster, however much they flatter themselves and are flattered by others, is, however, a precisely calibrated instrument whose palate can objectively assess (in absolutist terms) the quality of wine. Outside the contrived milieu of competition tastings one should want to assemble as much information as possible in order to build a complete picture of each wine as it is being tasted.

And yet there are people who turn inwards and deprecate contact in order to focus. Tasting like automatons, they give nothing of themselves and they take nothing from the wine. Wine drinking is a social activity; these self ex-communicators have mentally detached from the pleasure principle. One of my *bête-noires*, for example, is pseudo-intensity manifested as over-agitating the glass, the compulsive taster's twitch, which results in working the wine to death - classic analysis-paralysis. “Live each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each.” (Thoreau). The most receptive tasters know how to balance analysis and enjoyment. They “feel” the wine rather than score it for correctness.

I've seen tasters hold a wine up to the light, recoil, and tell me that a wine is out of condition because the colour is wrong or the wine is completely cloudy. Parroting tendentious half-digested WSET dogma indicates a taster who examines wines on a narrow spectrum and reduces everything to a standard Manichean good or bad.

Tasters become habituated by ritual. What is the rationale of tasting exclusively white wines followed by reds? You might as well taste by region (to gain an understanding of the region) or by grower. Physiologically, as well, it is important to break up the pattern of tastings. If you taste nothing but high acid whites your palate

becomes over-adapted and it becomes increasingly difficult to determine quality. The same goes for tannic reds.

Finally, there is the matter of assessment of quality. The wines at our trade tasting were made, or rather, crafted, by small growers – a few hundred bottles here, a few hundred bottles there, certainly not “manufactured” in commercial quantities. Yields are minuscule – 10-15 hl/ha would not be unusual. The élevage can be slow – some wines only released after several years in barrels. Yet I have frequently overheard mumbling about the wines being expensive. This is nothing to do with quality and everything to do with false perception. You might as well argue that none of the first growth Bordeaux represent actual value for money – they are variable in quality, they cost a minor fortune and they are fairly widely available. Marketed as a commodity they have “perceived value”. Our artisan wines are rare and unique; they represent the challenges of the vintage and an aspiration to make something truthful (and beautiful) without compromise. You shouldn’t put a price on that, and those tasters who blithely dismiss wines as being expensive have little idea of relative value and zero idea of aesthetic value.

“We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospection,” wrote Anais Nin. The truly proficient taster will be duly responsive at the time and then, later on, will recollect his or her impressions in tranquillity. The more I taste wine, the more I am reminded that I need to flip over my preconceptions and that I do not exist to have adversarial relationship with wine. On many occasions the wine has challenged and surprised me over a period of days which suggests that first encounters are not always reliable and that my judgement can sometimes get in the way of my instinct. A salutary lesson; one should always be humble.

New Wines



In Moustache we trust!

Jo Landron has been working 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. Fan-tash-tic stuff.

Domaine de la Louvetrie was established by papa Pierre Landron in 1945, and it was not until the 1980s that Jo joined him, having first finished his studies. In 1990 Pierre handed everything over to Jo. Although his centre of operation is Domaine de la Louvetrie, he also tends two other domaines, Chateau de la Carizière and Les Grand Houx, totalling roughly 50 hectares of vines in total. It was under Jo's direction that the vineyards were converted to 100% organic viticulture in 1999, gaining full certification from ECOCERT in 2002, but 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.

The fruit is harvested by hand before transport to the *cuvée* 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's wines are mostly bottled according to vineyard of origin, so that they remain true to their *terroir* as much as possible. One such site-specific wine is Amphibolite Nature, a lively wine intended for earlier drinking. The wine is named for the aforementioned amphibole, a local schistose stone of metamorphic origin.



Landron's vineyards display many of the *terroirs* that can be found across the Muscadet appellations, including gneiss and orthogneiss, and even sandstone. In the case of his Hermine d'Or cuvée (which we are not listing), the soils comprise sand, sandstone, clay and gneiss. 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.

Amphibolite Nature rings and zings 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. It has great minerality with wet stone, limestone, and riverbed pebbles coursing throughout.

Le Fief du Breuil has a shimmering mineral character making it a superb accompaniment to a mild-flavoured fish. Lemon, almond, stone and truffle aromas and stony anise-tinged flavours on the palate which is sappy and substantial, grip and evident structure. Decant this beautiful wine if drinking young, as it needs to open up.

Landron's wines are stoned, immaculate, reopening the doors of perception about the wines from this appellation.

Plageoles - L'art de le Prunelart



Robert and Bernard Plageoles – le bloc and le chip

An ancient variety from Gaillac, there is evidence of vineyards planted to this in the 16th century until phylloxera arrived in the Tarn area in 1879. It is however difficult to differentiate from Cot it shares certain names. In the texts devoted to it, the low fertility and fine quality are regularly mentioned.

Cited by Guyot as one of the original varieties of Gaillac in the 19th century it formed the red encépagement of AOC Gaillac along with fer à cheval and négrette. Presumed disappeared it was rediscovered in old vines. More recently group of viticulturists motivated by its renewal have replanted it. The wine produced was actually sold as vin de pays; indeed since the Gaillac came into AOC in 1970 it has not been registered since it was presumed that the grape had disappeared. By 2008 the area under vine was approximately 12 hectares.

As mentioned Prunelart has a very close relation to Cot and a member of famille des Cotoïdes. The first genetic tests confirmed their affiliation but it was not possible to determine which was the parent and which the descendant. This information has since been qualified by the discovery of a new, very rare cepage, the Magdeleine Noire of Charentes: in 2009 a team of researchers from INRA of Montpellier and Davis University established through genetic research that Prunelart and Magdeleine Noire of Charentes are indeed the parents of Cot.

The wine itself is very tasty – properly rustic with aromas and flavours of bitter cherries and dark plums and cooling acidity.

Olivier Pithon's Le Pilou



A man with a plan and some Carignan

Olivier Pithon was born into a winemaking family in the Valley of the Loire- his maternal grandfather was a vigneron in Anjou. then his elder brother (Jo Pithon) set himself up as a vigneron in the Coteaux du Layon when Olivier was only four years old. Olivier's childhood is therefore packed with wonderful memories of the cellars and vineyards of his family. To him it was completely natural for him to pursue a life as a vigneron and he wonders if it wasn't the wine that picked him rather than him picking wine. After working in vineyards in his native Anjou until he was eighteen he left the region, and worked in regions such as Bordeaux and Beaujolais, and also Jurancon. During his time in Bordeaux he met Stéphane Derenoncourt who changed his whole attitude to winemaking: he learnt the following from this man: "L'amour du travail bien fait, la précision dans le choix des interventions, l'importance de la dégustation dans l'élaboration des vins, le respect de la matière première. (" the love of work well done, precision in the choice of the interventions carried out, the importance of tasting during vinification, respect for the base product.")

He continues: "Ca paraît tout bête, mais c'est tout ce que l'on ne vous enseigne pas à l'école... Jamais on n'apprend que l'essentiel est de faire les vins que l'on aime, jamais on ne vous parle de poésie, d'amour, de plaisir.(= all this might seem obvious, but it is the things like that that they don't teach you at school, you never learn there that the most important thing is to make wines that you love, they never speak about poetry, love or pleasure". " For Olivier organic farming was totally natural and the only way to work, a sign of respect, a necessity in order to obtain quality, a life choice.

Olivier makes two whites and three reds. Le Pilou is pure 100 yr-old Carignan vines yielding a meagre 20hl/ha. The grapes are de-stemmed for alcoholic fermentation which takes place in foudres for twelve days. No filtration, nor fining and just a little sulphur added fifteen days before bottling. The ageing takes place partly in oak foudres and partly in demi-muids for eighteen months.

The nose of black cherry, bramble jam, chocolate, hot rocks, herbs and savoury charcuterie was enticing. The palate is juicy and supple with smoky fine grain tannins and a silky feel. A wine very much of the vintage and the region and the grape. The oak is apparent at the moment, however, with some time in a carafe, it loses some puppy fat and unveils a lingering minerality.

Clos des Grillons – Crickety Boo



Nicolas Renaud's wines come from vineyard parcels on a variety of different soils: white sands, galets stones, yellow and red clays and marls and are exclusively classed as Cotes du Rhone and Cotes du Rhone-Villages-Signargues (west of Avignon). By conviction he has practised organic viticulture since 2006 and works with minimal interventions in the winery.

In the cellar he vinifies with natural yeasts and without sulphur which is for him the only way of respecting and rediscovering terroir.

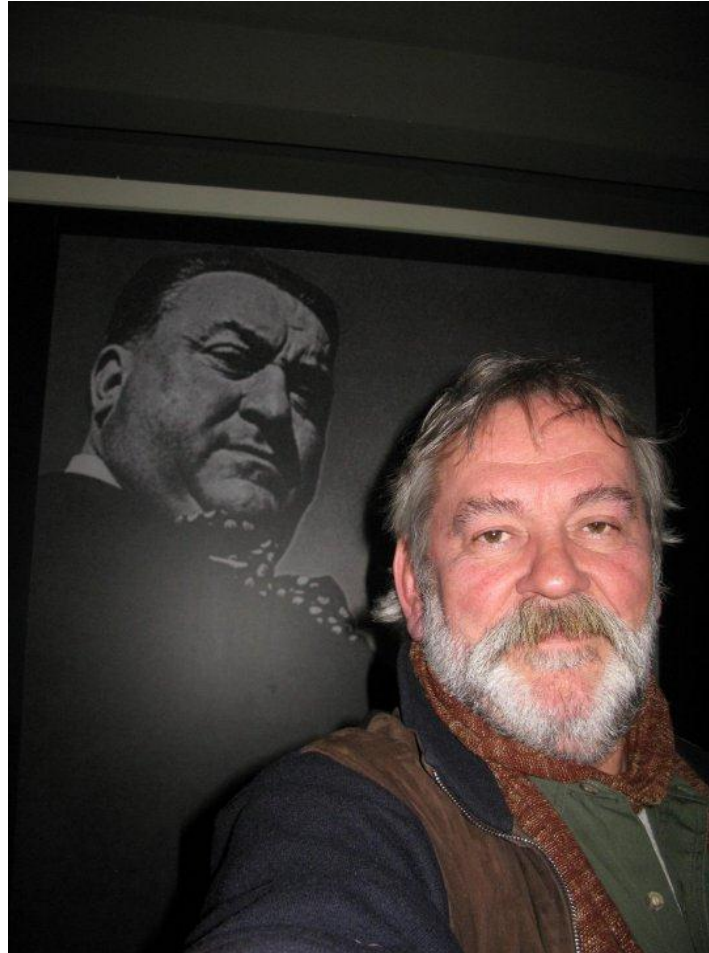
The vineyard area today comprises 15 hectares of vines most of them planted before 1960, the majority of the vines being Grenache Noir for the reds and Grenache Blanc for the white. He is also restoring the old local varieties such as Counoise and Bourboulenc and in 2011 reintroduced Picpoul Gris and Grenache Gris.

Grillons Blanc is made up of from 35 year old Grenache Blanc 70% with the balance from Bourboulenc, Clairette, Ugni blanc 30%, a blend of four different parcels on the communes of Saze and Rochefort. After the must settles over one night there is a fermentation (without temperature control) in barrels.

1901 is an old vines blend of 85% Bourboulenc and 15% Ugni Blanc from the *lieu-dit* of Le Monteil on north east facing clay soils. A rich Rhone white but not at all heavy laden with exotic notes of grapefruit and lychee and rounded off with mineral freshness.

Clos du Grillons Rouge is composed of Grenache Noir 50% - Cinsault 50% with the Grenache vines being over 60 years old. Whole bunch, carbonic maceration for twelve days. Fennel, liquorice and a touch of strawberry, a fruit-driven, savoury style of red Côtes du Rhône.

Mosse Savennières



A gathering of Mosse

...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 vigneron they met there, among them Jo Pithon 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. They work 13ha of vines, most of them planted with 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.

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 at the moment 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 2009 manifests itself in the 9.3 g/l residual sugar. Try with *ris de veau*, grilled sea bass and certain cheeses.



Goat du Rhone

“At Mas de la Bégude the grape is the infant king, the vine is the queen mother and the vigneron is the shepherd who attends them. I try to reconcile my life with my philosophy of work with respect to nature. In the first place to love nature whether

she is capricious or generous.' To handle the grapes gently by hand to protect them, to put them in small cases, to crush them underfoot and to ; by these means you have healthy grapes – no need for sulphur dioxide, no need for sugar, nothing other than the grapes. The point of these procedures is to oblige the vigneron to accompany rather than transform...”

The transformer is a man who uses the tools, the products, intended to channel the grapes in a precisely fixed direction. This is a man who elaborate a product in his image, he demonstrates an ability to understand phenomena and do the appropriate thing. The accompanier takes plenty of risk ; it is necessary to possess knowledge and not to be imprisoned by it.”

Le Raisin et L'Ange is isolated in the beautiful Ardèche mountains on shallow limestone clay soils partly on slopes and partly on river banks. Gilles Azzoni's philosophy is to accompany the grapes and the wine, not to impose a specific transformation on them. He works naturally from the vines to the bottle (no added SO₂). 9.35 ha, southern exposure. Cool temperatures at night promote gradual maturation and help to develop delicate floral aromas. Gilles grew up in Paris, went back to school for wine making, and took over his vineyard in 1983. He has augmented the density of the planting per hectare to 5500 vines/ha. In the cellar, Gilles treats the grapes and then the fermenting juice, as delicately as possible.. The "Raisin et L'Ange" "Fable." It is 100% Syrah, pure as the driven grape.

These country wines are simply delicious. Drinking them with pleasure is my tasting notes – glug, glug, glug. I don't think of the appellation, I think of young wine, impetuous, indomitable, vital, tonic and fresh – it has a complete purpose. It about nature and the grape.



Gilles Azzoni cannot imagine wine anything other than “*pur, natur et dur.*”

Gascon by Pascal Simoniutti

In 2002 when Pascal took over vineyards in Touraine-Mesland, 25 km from Blois, the domaine consists of various parcels with differing soil profiles; clay limestone+ sand interspersed with flints of which 1.2 is actually owned by Pascal.

Some of Pascal's early memories are of his grandfather (of Italian descent) who tended his beloved orchards with immense care, refusing to use chemicals either on the trees or on the soils. Pascal thinks that this might have had a subtle impact on him. As a young man he studied at a lycée for a 'Bac Pro' (= Professional diploma) in the management of an agricultural exploitation, with an option in Viticulture. For his work placement he ended up working with Bruno Schueller in Alsace, and also with Thierry Puzelat in the Loire. Regards influences in his winemaking, he comments "I am not from a family of winemakers, I worked as a chef in fact". It is destiny and my education that have led me to take up winemaking. It was Bruno Schueller who showed confidence in my first attempts, and I am indebted to him". Then Thierry Puzelat put up with me for two years while I was taking my 'Bac Pro'. Regarding his own winemaking, he says, "I could say that I learnt to make wine by instinct; *I do it in exactly the opposite way that they taught us at the Lycée.*" He displays great modesty by attributing his first successful vinifications to pure luck "I was lucky that the vinifications went well in the first few years (although the first year was disastrous weather-wise". He concludes that it is the quality of the vine plants that make the difference." the result depends on the quality of the vine plant for whoever it is making the wine, and wherever they may be located, as long as they do what is necessary, in a logical way". He also shows a delightful touch of romanticism, and further shows his modesty, by saying "without my vines, I am nothing, it's true", "and because they are old vines, the result can be good". The estate uses ORGANIC farming,, and holds a certificate dated from the creation of the domaine in 2002. Pascal works biodynamically in the vineyard from the very beginning Only wild yeasts are used

Le Gascon is a moveable feast in the sense that it was produced in 2008 but not in 2009 and 2010 and because the blend changes each year. In this case it is 25% Cot + 75% Gascon, an ancient grape variety, hardly seen any more (Courtois has some vines), but planted, in the past mostly in the centre of France, and now recommended in L'Indre and in the Loir-et-Cher.

The vines are extremely ancient- the Gascon vines were planted in 1901, and the Cot vines were planted in 1885 which makes them even older than some foyeys of the wine trade.

The topsoil lies over a layer of white pebbles with plenty of iron oxide revealed when the soil is tilled or ploughed, because it turns orange from oxidation

Ferment is whole cluster, in a cement Vat of 30hl and reaches a natural "stable" of 15°C to 19°C ". Pascal comments that the ten months spent in barrel lead to a natural sedimentation and thereafter there is no fining or sulphur added.

A digression concerning the grape variety 'Gascon'

a.k.a. 'Franc Noir de l'Yonne' (in the Aube), and a.k.a. 'Noir du Gâtinais' (in the Loiret), and a.k.a. 'arribet' or 'arrivet' in the Gironde (Lot-et-Garonne) and a.k.a. 'Rochelle Noire' (in the Seine –et-Marne other synonyms include: 'Plant de Moret', or 'Morineau' or 'Plant de Villeneuve' or 'Doyen noir' also 'Haute Plaine' (in the Gâtinais).

This grape variety is used in particular in the centre of France, It is an ancient variety from the department of Yonne(where it was grown extensively up till the Phylloxera crisis(9000 ha, (mostly in the vine-growing region of Villeneuve-Sur-Yonne) in the Aube, it used to cover 500 ha between Saint-Florentin and Troyes.

Because it is a late-ripening variety(for this region), It is a wine of low alcohol level, but it used to be sought after by the Parisian négociants to freshen up some wines from the Midi.

The growing of this variety was concentrated in the past in the Lower Burgundy, because its late-flowering characteristic means that it can avoid the spring-time frosts, which on the other hand would destroy the Pinots and the Gamays.

This variety is recommended in L'Indre and in the Loiret and in the Loir-et-Cher.

Le Gascon covered only 8 hectares in 1988, compared to 52 in 1958. Grafting and research into this variety is very limited.

Le Gascon is always pruned in the 'Taille Courte' cut(the 'short cut'), as its vine weakens when the 'long cut'courte longue' is used on it. It is affected by Oidium, and by Grey rot, but it resists quite well to Mildiou, It ripens in the 'deuxième époque tardive'.

It gives a deeply-coloured wine, with medium alcohol and is of quite a fine, elegant, character.

There is a great line in Monsters Inc where they are advertising the renewable power ethos behind frightening the bejusus out of little children "We scare because we care". Drinking Pascal Simonutti's Gascon wine one senses a wine that does not hold back from spooking the frail of heart. This wine is firmly positioned at the durian fruit end of the aromatic spectrum; if this wine were a labour of Hercules it would be the mares of Diomedes and the Augean stables rolled into one. And yet, reader, I loved it. Lurking amongst the funk is unmediated fruit and sweet earth; its lightness might charm the narrator of this piece: 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.)



Pascal standing next to a truly gigantic bottle

Les Nouvelles Couleurs du Vin

Ne vous inquiétez pas, tout est sous contrôle »
Alors, uniformisation des vins, uniformisation des goûts.
On nous dit qu'il y a trop de vins et que c'est compliqué de s'y retrouver.
Cela crée une confusion inutile qu'il faut cesser.
Et pour que le consommateur s'y retrouve facilement, il faut faire simple.
Un vin, un goût qu'on répète à l'infini.
Mais cela c'est la mort.
Car la vie, c'est la diversité, la variété, la pluralité.
La vie, c'est le plaisir des sens et de l'esprit.
La vie, c'est le plaisir de choisir au gré de l'humeur, de l'envie et des circonstances.
La vie, c'est l'attachement au patrimoine culturel, à la mémoire.
La vie, c'est des racines, des origines.
La vie, c'est la défense du naturel contre l'artificiel.
La vie, c'est devenir adulte et comprendre :
Que le vin est une substance vivante et changeante.
Et que la vie n'a pas de prix, car le plaisir n'est pas un produit qui s'achète.
La vie, c'est un acte de respect :
Respect du raisin, respect du terroir,
Respect de l'homme et de son environnement.
Et dans cet acte de respect, se définit une âme.
Il en est du vin comme de l'homme.
Les échanges entre l'âme et le corps produisent une singularité propre
Le vin naît entre la Terre et le Ciel.
A ce titre, il nous pose la question de l'éternité
Des vigneron utilisent les énergies cosmo telluriques.
Ils n'appartiennent à aucune secte.
Ils expérimentent et développent des principes en lien avec leurs propres convictions.

Ils favorisent plutôt l'élan vital à la démarche pré formatée vers laquelle chacun peut-être tenté de glisser.

Ils développent une philosophie de vie.

Pour eux, la pureté, c'est l'authenticité.

Chez ces vigneron, on »extrait des arômes « pour extraire le meilleur de soi, le meilleur de la relation à l'autre c'est-à-dire le meilleur de la vie.

Ils font preuve « d'humilité et de passion ».

Avec beaucoup de courage, ils résistent en étant sûrs et convaincus que si les consommateurs goûtent à ces vins, ils ne voudront plus des autres.

Ne disons-nous pas la même chose en se revendiquant de notre démocratie !

Le vin et cette manière de le concevoir n'est rien d'autre qu'une liberté d'expression.