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Wine Talk: December 2011

The newsletter of Living Wines: Edition 25

We have just returned from two very exciting wine tastings for sommeliers in Melbourne and Sydney and a long, leisurely public tasting in a verdant garden near Evandale in northern Tasmania. We have been delighted with the reaction of the public to our wines and appreciated the detailed questions we were asked about our wines, our winemakers and their winemaking techniques.

Many of the sommeliers who attended seemed to head straight for the complex Chenin Blancs from Loire winemaker René Mosse. His 'Initials BB' was a particular favourite. The Jean-Paul Brun Beaujolais cru wines were as popular as expected and they are selling fast, but we made sure that we ordered a lot more this year.

We have received yet another shipment since the last newsletter so we now have good stocks of the amazing Milan Le Grand Blanc and the red Sans Soufre Ajouté that sold out so quickly a few months ago.

And we are absolutely delighted that everyone's favourite, the Gamay Sans Tra La La from Domaine de la Garrelière is back in stock with the 2010 vintage. It is a bigger wine this year but it still has that appealing fruity juiciness and quaffability that makes it so popular.

To celebrate the arrival of so many interesting wines we have 3 special packs for you. The first is our **Domaine de la Garreliere 6 pack which includes a bottle of the Gamay Sans Tra La La, a couple of their delicious whites and their refined Cabernet Franc wines. This month we have a sparkling pack just in time for the holiday season and a 6 pack of wines from Provence winemaker **Henri Milan**.**

Remember that the special packs attract a 15% discount instead of a 10% discount, so if you order a special pack you really are getting a special deal (not that a 10% discount for most wines and free freight on your own selection isn't a good arrangement too)!

There is a link to our order form for these packs and any other wines at the end of this newsletter. But there's no need to use the order form. Just send us an email listing the wines and/or packs you would like to order if that suits you better. We'll confirm the price by return email before processing your order.

News from Living Wines

Since we sent out the last newsletter there has been a frenzy of activity. We have conducted wine tastings in Launceston, Melbourne, Hobart and Sydney which were very successful from our perspective. There has also been a week of intense activity in Hobart with chefs, sommeliers, wine makers and wine writers descending from interstate for activities which included a forum on natural wines and a very long and very intense tasting of natural wines. It was great to have the opportunity to exchange views and share wines with some of the leading practitioners in the country.

In amongst all this activity many new wines have arrived as well. Old favourites from Domaine de la Garrelière and Henri Milan are currently being sent out and we are about to receive another shipment which includes new vintages from Dominique Belluard from the Savoie, yet another shipment from Agnes and René Mosse, the new vintage of Stephane Guion's scrumptious Cabernet Francs and a selection of biodynamic Champagnes from a new supplier, Roland Piollot.

Garrelière shipment lands



It is always a great day when a shipment of wine from Domaine de la Garrelière arrives at our warehouse. We now have the juicy Gamay Sans Tra La La back in stock along with the 100% Sauvignon Blanc called Le Blanc and the delicious Cabernet Franc called Le Rouge.

Especially delicious this year is the 'Cinderella' wine called Cendrillon. This year it is a blend of 80% Sauvignon Blanc and 20% Chardonnay. These are great wines at a very reasonable price. If you want to explore these new releases we have assembled a special sampler pack for you which you can read about later in this newsletter.

Remember that Francois and Pascaline Plouzeau adhere to strict biodynamic practices in the vineyard and ferment their wines naturally, thus achieving more complexity in the wines.

We are constantly amazed by the complexity and elegance of their wines even though we are able to offer them at a very reasonable price.

The wines of Henri Milan



Henri Milan is a highly respected wine maker from the tiny Les Baux de Provence appellation. His vineyards are within the inner areas of the famous village of Saint Remy de Provence. If you stand among his vines you can see the backdrop of the rugged Alpilles and you know that you are only minutes away from the famous coffee houses and restaurants in the very centre of the old Roman town.

And now to his wines! Le Grand Blanc is one of the most exciting white wines in our line up. We have good stocks of this blend of Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, Rolle (Vermentino), Chardonnay and Muscat a Petit Grains. Henri likes to use a lot of different grape varieties in his wines so that there are 'layers' of flavours and textures. This is quite evident in this white which Jancis Robinson calls a '*very "intellectual" wine; it makes you think and yet is wonderfully enjoyable too*'.

We have also received another shipment of the amazing Sans Soufre Ajouté red wine. As the name implies this has had no sulphur added at any time during the winemaking process or in the bottle. It is fresh, delicious and also has five different red grape varieties.

We have a special pack this month to allow you to sample these fascinating wines. See the details later in the newsletter.

Christmas Vouchers

We are once again offering our very popular Christmas vouchers. We offer vouchers in increments of \$50 starting at \$150 and rising in increments of \$50 to \$200, \$250, \$300 and so on.

The only rules are that you must order in multiples of 6 bottles. And if you do you will be eligible for a 15% discount on the total price.

You can order any combination of wines you like.

So here is how it works. If the person you gave a \$200 voucher to ordered 6 wines worth \$210 at recommended retail price we would apply a 15% discount bringing the total to \$178.50. This would mean that if you gave them a \$200 voucher they would still have \$21.50 credit for a future purchase.

Out with new oak, in with cement

Reading an old article in Wine Business Monthly by John Intardonato recently reminded us just how many of our wineries use cement tanks for fermenting their wine.

Cement tanks have been used for centuries in winemaking because they allow the wine to breathe, unlike stainless steel tanks. They also do not impart flavour to the wine like new oak does – a flavour that we find overpowers the flavour of the grapes.

Concrete tanks can either be square, egg-shaped or pyramid shaped (popular with wineries that practice cosmo-culture). Sometimes they are lined with an epoxy-resin but this is not popular as it inhibits the ability to breathe.

The tanks are kept clean by washing with a solution of tartaric acid.

We don't want to leave the impression that this is some sort of strange experimental vessel that only a few people are using, even the famous Domaine de la Romanee Conti in Burgundy and Lafite-Rothschild in Bordeaux use concrete fermenters.

We are about to receive the 2010 vintage of Domaine Belluard's lovely Le Feu Gringet. This vintage was the first at this vineyard to be fermented in large egg-shaped concrete tanks.

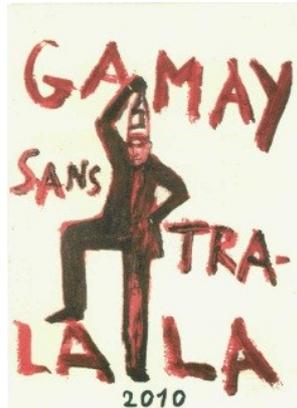
Philippe Gimel from Saint Jean du Barroux in the Ventoux region has always used concrete to make his extraordinary reds and whites.

Let us choose

Over 60% of our retail customers are content to sit back and let us choose a pack for them. They simply send us an email (wine@livingwines.com.au) saying how many bottles they would like, the average price and the style and colour of wines they prefer and we do the rest!

We choose a selection of the wines that we think are delicious and which fit within your price range. We'll give you a 10% discount on any 6 pack we invent for you.

Pack 1: Garrelière 6 Pack



Francois and Pascaline Plouzeau maintain an immaculate vineyard near the fascinating village of Richelieu which lies south of Tours quite close to the Chinon region. Here they implement strict biodynamic vineyard practices which are certified by Ecocert.

Domaine de la Garrelière Vin de France Gamay Sans Tra La La 2010 (2 bottles) – The Gamay Sans Tra La La is one of the most popular wines we stock. It is a dark, brooding, juicy quaffable Gamay of considerable intensity.

Domaine de la Garrelière Touraine Le Blanc 2010 – This wine from the Touraine appellation is made from 100% Sauvignon Blanc. This vintage is particularly delicious with clean, fresh, vibrant flavours and a long finish. We think that the Le Blanc represents excellent value for money - and it is biodynamic and fermented naturally.

Domaine de la Garrelière Touraine Cendrillon 2010 – This lovely wine is made from 80% Sauvignon Blanc and 20% Chardonnay. Just 30% of the Sauvignon Blanc spent some time in oak to provide additional complexity.

Domaine de la Garrelière Touraine Le Rouge 2010 – This entry-level wine from the Touraine appellation is made from 100% Cabernet Franc. The Touraine Le Rouge is a biodynamic wine that shows why people in the Loire drink Cabernet Franc. The wine is smooth and elegant, has a beautiful perfume and is very low in sulphur.

Domaine de la Garrelière Touraine Cuvee Cinabre Rouge 2008 – This flavoursome red is made from a small plot of biodynamically-tended Cabernet Franc vines that are more than 25 years old. The wine is smooth and elegant and weighs in at 12.5% alcohol. Only minimal sulphur has been used.

The RRP for this selection is \$174 but the pack price is only \$147.90 which includes freight.

Pack 2: Holiday sparklers – 6 bottle Pack



With the holiday season upon us our thoughts turn to celebration and celebration means sparkling wine. We have assembled a pack of some the wines we will be drinking in the coming month.

Terres Dorées Crémant de Bourgogne Charme Blanc de Blancs 2009 – Crémants are sparkling wines made outside the Champagne region of France. This is a particularly fine example of the genre being made from Chardonnay. The Crémant has a fine bead, yeasty aromas and a long, dry savoury finish. This is a great substitute for Champagne during the holiday season.

Philippe Bornard Crémant du Jura NV – The Bornard Crémant is a sparkling wine made from 100% Chardonnay. It is full of stone-fruit aromas and has an appealing minerality and savouriness on the palate. The baked apple aromas and dry finish of this delicious and affordable alternative to Champagne make it a perfect aperitif.

Philippe Bornard Vin de Table Pétillant Naturel En Go-guette NV – The Bornard En Go-guette is a lovely white sparkling wine made in the Pétillant Naturel style from the Chardonnay grape. The wine completes its fermentation in the bottle and no sugar is added. Nor is it disgorged so you will find some residual yeast remaining in the bottle. It is very low in alcohol at around 10%.

Domaine du Moulin Vin de Table Bulle – This Petillant Naturel sparkling wine is made using an ancient method and the fermentation is completed in the bottle. It is made from the local Loire Valley grape called Menu Pineau and, unlike some pet nats, is uncompromisingly savoury. It is closed with a crown seal.

Domaine Mosse Vin de France Moussamoussettes – This cult wine is made from Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon (70%), Gamay (10%) and Grolleau Gris (20%) grapes which have been co-fermented. It was bottled at 35g residual sugar and fermentation continued in the bottle until the sugar levels fell to around 20g making a pleasant sweetness to match the acidity in the wine.

Domaine de la Garreliere Vin de Table Milliard d'Etoiles - Petillant Naturel – Francois Plouzeau loves to experiment and he also loves the Loire tradition of making sparkling wines. This is a great example of what can be done with the grapes of the Loire to produce an harmonious, lightly-sparkling wine of considerable charm. The grapes used in this 'petillant naturel' are Cabernet Franc and Chenin Blanc in equal parts.

The RRP for this selection of 6 wines is \$206 but the pack price is a very reasonable \$175.10.

Pack 3: Henri Milan 6 pack



Le Grand Blanc

We introduced the wines of Henri Milan earlier in this newsletter. His wines are very special and his vineyard is also a very special place.

Here we offer a six pack made up of two of his delicious wines.

Domaine Milan Sans Soufre Ajouté Rouge 2010 (3 bottles) – Sans Soufre Ajouté means no added sulphur because no sulphur has been added at any stage during the winemaking process. Grenache, Shiraz, Mourvedre, Cinsault and Cabernet Sauvignon all go into this lively and delicious wine that spends 8 months in old barriques. No filtration or fining has been applied to this wine and only indigenous yeasts have been used to ferment the grapes. It is only 12.5% alcohol. This is a great wine for people who have developed a reaction to sulphur or for those addicted to the freshness of natural wines

Domaine Milan Le Grand Blanc 2008 (3 bottles) – The 2008 vintage is a particularly fine example of this blended wine. This vintage sees Grenache Blanc, Rolle (the local name for Vermentino), Roussanne, Chardonnay and Muscat à Petit Grains used in the blend. The wine was raised in old barrels on the lees for twelve months. This is a beautiful wine that is fresh and lively now but will continue to change character and improve well into the future.

The RRP for this selection of 6 wines is \$237 but the pack price is a very reasonable \$201.45.

Cinsault grape variety

A number of our red wines sourced from southern France, such as the delicious Henri Milan Sans Soufre Ajouté, use the Cinsault grape – a variety that is not very common in Australia where it is sometimes called Blue Imperial or Oeillade.

It is widely planted in the south of France due to its resistance to heat and its ability to survive without water. The French also planted it widely in Algeria for the same reasons.

Other characteristics of this grape variety are the soft tannins and pleasant perfume of wild strawberries.

It has also been shown through DNA testing that the very rare Ottavianello which is found near Brindisi in southern Italy is, in fact, Cinsault. It is also used in Lebanon where it is one of the grapes blended into the famous Chateau Musar reds.

Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

The vine leaves have the common Vinifera 5 lobe structure with a fairly deep lateral sinus as shown in the photo below:



Photo courtesy Vitis International Variety Catalogue (VIVC)

Wines that we currently stock that use this grape variety include the Henri Milan reds, the juicy Fou du Roi from Le Temps des Cerises, the red wines from Philippe Gimel called Oligocene and La Source and the Cuvée Lea Felsch from Catherine Le Goeuil in Cairanne in the southern Rhone.

Sulphur and natural wines

One of the natural wine topics that seems to excite discussion and arouse passions more than most others is the role of sulphur in winemaking. Sulphur is widely used in Australian wines both as a preservative and to kill off natural yeasts that are on the grapes and in the air at harvest time. Winemakers do this so that they can ensure that fermentation is only carried out by the commercial yeasts that they inject into the must to control the fermentation process.

Sulphur has been used in winemaking for a very long time with reports that the Romans used to burn sulphur candles in barrels so that the wine would be better preserved. While the authenticity of this claim is open to question there is written evidence that sulphur was used in barrels in Germany in the late 15th century¹.

In natural winemaking sulphur additions are usually kept to a minimum and many use none in the winemaking process or at bottling.

However there will always still be some sulphur in the wine as the production of sulphur compounds is a natural part of the winemaking process.

¹ The use of sulphur dioxide in Wine by Richard Gawel

Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

So what is our view on the use of sulphur and can a wine with added sulphur be called a natural wine?

Sulphur is used for two purposes in winemaking as we mentioned in the opening paragraph. The first is that it is used as an anti-microbial agent killing off yeasts and bacteria on the harvested grapes.

We don't like the dousing of grapes in sulphur after harvest to kill off naturally-occurring yeasts because we firmly believe that naturally fermented wines more clearly reflect the local terroir than those wines that rely on commercial yeasts which often add foreign flavours and aromas.

We particularly notice this effect when manufactured yeasts such as 71B are used to ferment the Gamay grape, especially in the Beaujolais region of France. The result is the production of aromas such as banana and candy which diminish the wines made this way. If you have drunk the wines of Foillard or Lapierre or Jean-Paul Brun where only natural yeasts are used to ferment the wines then none of these aromas exist, only the bold exciting aromas of the Gamay grape.

So we don't like this first use of sulphur in the winemaking process as it means that natural fermentation is less likely to occur.

Sulphur is also a preservative and a little sulphur added to the bottle can help preserve the freshness of the wine, particularly in white wines. We would prefer a winemaker who is uncertain about the preservation of the wine to use some sulphur as a preservative in the bottle rather than letting it spoil.

The best results, however, come when the winemaker learns to control the winemaking process in such a way that they do not need to add sulphur to preserve it.

As far as we can tell, Chauvet (one of the intellectual forces behind the natural wine movement) never espoused not using sulphur to preserve wine once it is in the bottle. However most natural wine proponents prefer to keep the level of sulphur very low to ensure that the freshness and vibrancy of the fruit flavours shine through. Some add none at all.

We sell a number of natural wines where no sulphur has been added. Examples are the Point Barre from Philippe Bornard – a wonderfully vibrant and delicious wine that is as fresh as the day it was bottled. We also love the Pivoine from Hervé Villemade, a blend of Cot (Malbec) and Gamay. Another very special wine that we love is the Henri Milan Sans Soufre Ajouté Rouge. This is a stunning red wine where the brilliance of the winemaking overcomes the necessity to add sulphur.

The wines mentioned above are examples where no sulphur at all has been added. However all of our wine makers are judicious in the addition of sulphur. Most of them use a little in the bottle but at very low levels – levels that are a fraction of the sulphur added in Australia or the United States.

For example, in the United States it is permitted to add up to 350 mg per litre to white wines – an enormous amount compared to the 10-20 mg per litre that are commonplace in many natural wines.

However there are other views. The respected winemaker from California, Paul Draper in a thoughtful piece published on Alice Feiring's Web site addresses a number of issues relating to natural fermentation (the subject of a future article) and the use of sulphur. In this article he claims that without the use of sulphur a wine cannot truly reflect its terroir.

While he does not make it entirely clear why, others have said, on his behalf, that it is because sulphur binds any acetaldehyde (which is a by-product of the fermentation process) in the wine which might otherwise mask the expression of terroir and give a sherry-like aroma to the wine.

Well, we can only comment that we have on a number of occasions tried exactly the same wine with low levels of added sulphur (around 20 mg per litre) and the same wine without any added sulphur and the no-sulphur version is invariably livelier and more expressive.

So we are happy to call a wine with low levels of sulphur (say, 0-30 mg per litre) a natural wine because this amount could occur naturally. However once the figure gets higher then we have reservations.

Appellation: Coteaux du Layon

French food and wine experts love their sweet wines. Outside France some people know about Sauterne, some know about Beaufort de Venise and even fewer know about the stunning sweet wines of Jurançon and Gaillac in South-West France.

But the complex, long-lasting, fabulous sweet wines of the Loire are even less well known. One of the reasons why these wines are so sought after is that they are based on the Chenin Blanc grape – this is a grape that is capable of producing wines of extreme longevity and amazing complexity.



Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

You need to drive for about half an hour south of the city of Angers to find the course of the Layon river. Here amid the rolling hills of Anjou are the vineyards of Coteaux du Layon with their gnarled, ancient Chenin vines. Coteaux du Layon is an appellation reserved for sweet, white wines made exclusively from Chenin Blanc.

The grapes here are picked very late (into November) to ensure that they have the required sugar levels, but not too late to ensure that they also have some of the trademark acidity which balances the sweetness.

The **Domaine Mosse Coteaux du Layon Le Champ Boucault 2009** is a great example of a wine from this appellation which overlaps the Mosse vineyards. The soils here are sand and quartz-laden gravel over schist. The vineyard is quite close to the Layon river. The grapes are left on the vine to concentrate the flavour and the final yield is an exceptionally low 12 hectolitres per hectare.

The grapes are picked by hand and are left to ferment naturally. The wine is aged in wooden fûts for 12 months prior to bottling. The sugar level is moderate for this appellation at 115.6 grams per litre. These wines are capable of lasting a long time but are perfectly ready to drink now as well. Drink as an aperitif or team this wine with a range of desserts or with a blue cheese such as Roquefort. The sweetness in the wine is offset by a good streak of acidity. It is a complex, lovely wine of great charm.

Living Wines Order Form

You can simply send us an email to order wines, but if you would like to use the form to check prices or availability, click on the link below.

http://www.livingwines.com.au/Catalogue/Order_Form_Current_2011.pdf