

Wine Talk: July 2011

The newsletter of Living Wines: Edition 21

First a note of thanks to all of you who have sent lovely emails of support during the change to our new Living Wines name. We appreciate it very much. We're now getting used to our name and it seems so are most of you. We're grateful that most of you have started using our new email address wine@livingwines.com.au – it's all part of the process of completing the change.

The new wines that we found on our recent trip to France are now starting to arrive in Australia with the Jura wines of Michel Gahier (including a small allocation of his Vin Jaune) and the Buzet (a small appellation in South-West France) wines from Domaine du Pech now available for purchase.

This month we have four special packs for you. Due to the popularity of the Belluard wines from the Savoie and because of Cadel Evan's massive effort in the Savoie mountains we are offering the Belluard six pack again this month.

We are also offering a six pack of the new Jura wines from Michel Gahier. These are beautiful examples of what the Jura has to offer. There are two reds, one sparkling and three whites in the pack. We have had the chance to try each of these wines both at his vineyard and here in Australia and continue to be impressed by the purity and the typicity of his wines. When you try his wines you know they are from the Jura!

To accompany our story on natural wines we have made up a six pack where each of the wines has been made naturally (most of our wines are made this way – see story below). If you are curious about wines made this way the six pack is an opportunity to explore these lively, exciting wines.

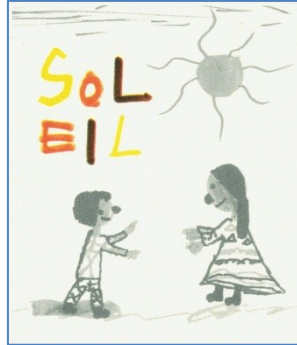
The final six pack is a warming pack of winter reds. These are wines to match the robust foods we tend to cook in winter.

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 is 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

Arrival of Domaine du Pech



Some amazing wines were dropped off at our warehouse this week. One pallet that arrived came from South West France half way between Toulouse and Bordeaux. These are the wines from Domaine du Pech where Magali Tissot and Ludovic Bonnelle tend their vines using natural, biodynamic methods and make their wines without adding any commercial yeasts, enzymes, sugar or any other of the many additives in common use.

They produce robust, Buzet reds from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc and a couple of fascinating whites from Sauvignon Blanc. The most interesting of these is called Soleil which was made in 2006, matured in barrel for 4 years then, in the summer of 2010 it spent six months in the sunlight. The result is a golden orange wine of incredible character which reminds us of the orange wines of Friuli. This is not a wine for everyone but we know that those who love Jura wines and Friuli wines will take to this one like ducks to water!

PS: This is not a great surprise as Magali Tissot is a member of the Tissot family from Arbois in the Jura.

More info here:

http://www.livingwines.com.au/wines/Domaine_du_Pech.htm

Fanny Sabre Bourgogne Rouge: Advance Notice

Last year the Fanny Sabre Bourgogne Rouge was one of our wines that disappeared from the shelves rapidly, much of it to wine bars and also to retail buyers who were searching for a Burgundy like they 'used to be' – elegant and expressing the real nature of the Pinot Noir grape.

Well, we are about to receive another shipment of this fabulous wine – we have a reasonable allocation but they will sell quickly so if you would like to reserve some let us know soon.

We totally admire the work that Fanny puts into her wines. She is an ardent supporter of natural processes and is following on the work of her mentor Philippe Pacalet who makes beautiful Burgundy wines and has taught Fanny how to do the same.

We also like the fact that her winery is within the ramparts of Beaune, the central town in Burgundy. When we visit her we walk a block or two from where we are staying, knock on the big, anonymous door and there she is!

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.

Truffle lunch at Garagistes

There is a special lunch coming up at Garagistes in Tasmania very soon. We will certainly be there. The wines on offer are just amazing even though none of them are ours!

Sunday August 7th, 1pm

For this event Garagistes will be joined by Italian wine guru Giorgio de Maria from Sydney hotspots Vini (www.vini.com.au), Berta (www.bertha.com.au) and 121BC (www.121bc.com.au) who will be matching hand selected wines from his native Piedmont to food inspired by the same region and featuring Tasmanian truffles. The cost for this event is \$275 per person for 6 courses with matched wines. Giorgio is also one of the three nominees for sommelier of the year in this year's Gourmet Traveller awards.

Call Garagistes on (03) 6231 0558 for more information or to make a reservation.

Pack 1: Domaine Belluard 6 Pack



The Savoie is one of the forgotten wine regions of France. Even in Paris it used to be difficult to find a wine from this area. However, in the last six months there has been an increasing focus on the region and the quality of the elegant white wines and the food-friendly red wines being produced in this area. We are fortunate to represent one of the leading white wine producers in the Savoie, Domaine Belluard. We are especially pleased because Dominique Belluard is the only commercial producer of Gringet, a rare grape of which only 22 hectares remain – and he has 12 of them.

This is the same pack that we offered last month, however there has been so much interest in these wines that we have kept the offer open.

This pack contains the following wines.

Domaine Belluard Vin de Savoie Ayse Brut 2007 (2 bottles) – this is a delicate yet full-flavoured sparkling wine made from the Gringet grape. It is unusual, it is rare and it is delicious!

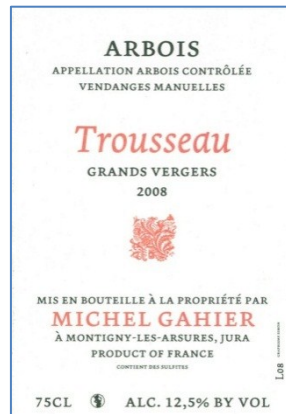
Domaine Belluard Vin de Savoie Gringet Les Alpes 2009 (2 bottles) – The Les Alpes is a still white wine made from the Gringet grape. It has been fermented with wild yeasts and very little sulphur has been added. It is a very good wine to accompany food being only 12% alcohol.

Domaine Belluard Vin de Savoie Blanc Gringet Le Feu 2009 - The Le Feu is perhaps our favourite of this stunning line up. It is particularly elegant, refined and complex with the late-maturing grapes being selected from very old, low-yielding vines on very steep slopes of morainial soil. The alcohol level is 12.8%.

Domaine Belluard Vin de Savoie Blanc Altesse Grandes Jorasses 2009 – This elegant white is made from the local grape called Altesse or, sometimes, Roussette de Savoie. The vineyard from which this wine is made lies at an altitude of 450 metres above sea level. The grapes are hand-harvested and fermented naturally. The alcohol level is 12%.

The RRP for this selection is \$270 but the pack price is ~~\$270~~ \$229.50

Pack 2: Michel Gahier New Arrivals 6 Pack



This selection of Michel Gahier's stunning wines is designed to give you an insight into the amazing wines of the Jura.



Michel Gahier in his old vineyard in the Jura

Michel Gahier Arbois Trousseau La Vigne du Louis 2009 - The vines for this wine were grown in thick gravel with a limestone substrate on a plot that Michel purchased from his brother two years ago. The vines were planted by his grandfather whose name was Louis. This is a pure Trousseau with a strong structure and a streak of acidity that will help preserve it for some time.

Michel Gahier Arbois Trousseau Grands Vergers 2009 - The vines for this wine are even older than those used for the La Vigne du Louis having been planted over 80 years ago. The wine is named after the lieu dit (parcel of land) where the vines grow. This is a very, very good example of a Trousseau wine having the delicacy that we associate with this fragile grape but also an extraordinary depth of flavour and a complexity that is intriguing.

Michel Gahier Arbois Chardonnay Les Follasses 2009 - The grapes for the Les Follasses, which benefit from limestone and clay soils in the vineyard are manually harvested and sorted prior to pressing. The wine is made in the 'ouillé' style where the barrels are topped up during maturation so that the wine does not oxidise in the barrel. This is a fresh, lively Chardonnay that is typical of this style of wine from the Jura with just a hint of those oxidative qualities that Jura aficionados just can't get enough of. Only 12.5% alcohol.

Michel Gahier Arbois Chardonnay Les Crêts 2007 - The grapes for this wine are also manually harvested and matured in old wood so that the wine can 'breathe' but so that no new oak flavour dominates the wine. There is the trademark oxidative quality to this wine which provides a nutty spiciness and umami flavour that makes you want to sip more and more of it. There are honey and pear and almond flavours in abundance and a long, lingering minerality that reflects the amazing terroir of the area around Michel's village.

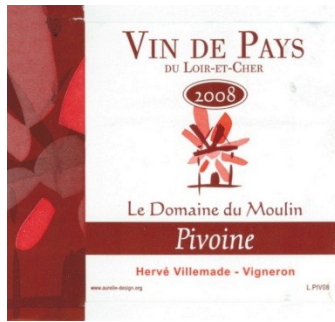
Michel Gahier Arbois Chardonnay La Fauquette 2007 - This is one of our favourite Jura wines. The grapes are sourced from the La Fauquette vineyard close to Michel's house. This is a 'sous voile' Chardonnay. This means that the barrel in which it matures is not topped up as with the other two white cuvées. Instead, as the wine evaporates through the pores of the barrel a thin veil (voile) of yeast forms on the surface of the wine and this protects the wine from excessive oxidation. The oxygen that does penetrate the veil causes it to develop an exciting nutty spiciness that is incredibly appealing. Chambers Street Wines in New York rave about this wine and call it 'mellow, pretty, exquisitely balanced and very delicious'. It makes this wine a perfect accompaniment to the great cheeses of the region especially the famous aged Comté.

Note: If you are a lover of the Bornard Les Marnes (which all got snapped up after the recent tasting in Sydney) then this wine should appeal greatly to you as it is in a very similar style.

Michel Gahier Vin de Table Vin Mousseux de Qualité - The Gahier Vin Mousseux de Qualité is a lovely sparkling wine which is made from Chardonnay in the Methode Traditionnelle style. It makes for a great aperitif and also is a very good food wine. It has a very light bead and yeasty overtones, that characteristic Jura expression and a long, lingering finish. This is a lovely example of the sparkling style of winemaking with a persistent bead and some yeasty flavours showing.

This selection normally sells for a RRP of \$220 but the pack price is **\$187.**

Pack 3: Natural wines – 6 bottle Pack



The story later in this newsletter explores the natural wine phenomenon that is sweeping out of France and Italy to all corners of the globe. This pack is designed to introduce you to their charms.

Domaine du Moulin Vin de Pays du Loir et Cher Pivoine Rouge 2008 - The Pivoine is an exciting cuvee from Herve Villemade's Domaine du Moulin range. Made from 90% Malbec (called Côt in the Loire) and 10% Gamay this wine has had no additional sulphur added so it is a fresh, lively expression of the terroir and the Malbec fruit.

Domaine la Paonnerie Muscadet Coteaux de Loire 2009 – This wine is made from 100% Melon de Bourgogne. This is a small area near the city of Angers where some delicious versions of this wine are produced. The wine is fermented with natural yeasts and is neither filtered or fined.

Philippe Bornard Arbois Pupillin Chardonnay Le Blanc de la Rouge 2007 - The Blanc de la Rouge is an intense, concentrated, very dry Chardonnay that shows characteristic mineral notes derived from the limestone soils. This wine shows how Chardonnay expresses itself differently at this higher altitude than nearby Burgundy.

Le Temps des Cerises Vin de Table Fou du Roi 2009 - Fou du Roi is a blend of 30% of each of Grenache Noir, Cinsault and Carignan and 10% of Cabernet Sauvignon and weighs in at only 12% alcohol. It displays cherry on the nose and has an elegance and vibrancy that is very appealing. It tastes alive! It has good tannin structure which will help as it ages and the finish is long, clean and lively. It comes from the Languedoc in the mountains behind Beziers.

Domaine Stéphane Guion Bourgueil Cuvee Prestige Rouge 2007 - This Loire Valley wine is 100% Cabernet Franc and some of the wine has had some oak treatment. This is a fine, savoury wine with lovely tannins and good length on the palate. It represents excellent value for money and is currently drinking very well, but will also last for a considerable time in the cellar.

Catherine & Dominique Derain St-Aubin Le Ban Rouge 2008 - The vines here thrive on an east facing slope covered in limestone derived clay and gravel. This is a lovely wine with an appealing cherry and strawberry fruit flavour, a core of acidity, great freshness, an underlying spiciness and perfect balance. Great drinking now.

The RRP for this selection of 6 wines is \$209 but the pack price is a very reasonable \$177.65

Pack 4: Winter warming reds – 6 bottle Pack



This pack has been put together as a result of the cold weather we are experiencing in southern Australia at present. These wines are designed to go with winter food such as slow cooked meat braises or hearty roasts.

Terres Dorées Bourgogne Pinot Noir 2009 - This is a Bourgogne appellation wine instead of the more usual Beaujolais from Jean Paul Brun, therefore it is a Pinot Noir rather than Gamay (although pure Gamay wines are allowed in Burgundy).

Domaine St Nicolas Fiefs Vendéens Cabaret Rouge 2006 – The Cabaret is 100% Cabernet Franc from Thierry Michon's old vines. It is a delicious wine perfect for roasts or grilled meats. Everyone who tries this wine falls in love with its purity and elegance.

Saint Jean du Barroux Ventoux La Source Rouge 2007 - This is Philippe Gimel's entry level wine. It comprises 70% Grenache, 25% Carignan and 5% Cinsault. The yields for this wine are very low and the grapes are all hand picked and then 100% destemmed.

Domaine Mosse Vin de Table Bois Rouge 2008 - This wine is produced from younger vines from the same parcels as the Anjou Rouge. It comprises 25% Cabernet Sauvignon and 75% Cabernet Franc. It shows soft, well-integrated tannins and a long finish.

Domaine Milan Les Baux de Provence Domaine Milan Rouge 2006 - The Domaine Milan Les Baux de Provence 2006 is an interesting red wine made from the whole bunch fermentation and carbonic maceration for 5 days of Grenache, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cinsault and Mourvèdre. It then spent a year maturing in used barriques to ensure that the wood does not dominate the fruit.

Domaine Catherine le Goeuil Cotes du Rhone Villages Cairanne Lea Felsch 2007 - This cuvee includes Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre, Carignan, Cinsault and Counoise - a very similar combination to those of the nearby Chateauneuf-du-Pape. The wine shows purple tints and has toasty, ripe fruit aromas. The tannins are quite fine and there are spicy notes detectable at the back of the palate. We love the long, lingering finish.

The RRP for this selection of 6 wines is \$200 but the pack price is a very reasonable \$170

What are natural wines?

Some of our readers who have joined the newsletter mailing list recently have gently taken us to task for using the term natural wine throughout the newsletter without further explanation.

We have realised that while we did expound on this topic in earlier newsletters we have not revisited it for those who are new to the fold.

The term is derived from a movement in France which has been gathering strength for a considerable period of time and which now dominates wine bars and restaurants in Paris and beyond.

The origins can be traced back to the 1950s when winemakers such as Chauvet realised the damage being caused to the soil and vegetation of vineyards through the widespread use of herbicides, pesticides, fungicides and chemical fertilisers. The poisons that were being sprayed were killing all of the beneficial insects and worms that kept the vines and the soil healthy.

So bad is the use of pesticides that the European Union commissioned a ten year study that found that grapes receive an average 4.7kg of synthetic pesticides per hectare – a higher dose than any other crop except for potatoes. They also reported that since 1993 despite a widespread conversion of vineyards to organic practices, the total use of synthetic pesticides on the remaining vineyards has increased by 22%. In the same period the use of fungicides has increased by a factor of 30!

We need to add here that visiting vineyards of natural wine producers is tantamount to a spiritual experience for us. Walking through Axel Pruffer's vineyard high in the mountains of the Languedoc was a revelation. The ground was carpeted with spider webs where the busy spiders eradicated nasty intruders such as wasps or mites or other predators that might attack the grapes. There were worms in the soil. We admired ladybirds keeping the bugs at bay and we saw signs of wild boar in the forests which almost encroached on the borders of the vines. We were witnessing biodiversity, that essential element of any form of agriculture long since forgotten in many parts of the Western world.

Chauvet, in particular, was strongly of the opinion that a healthy soil was vital for the production of good, terroir-driven wine. He influenced a number of Beaujolais winemakers who set about restoring their vineyards to a healthy state with organic and biodynamic practices.

But Chauvet also realised that there were practices in the winemaking process itself that were having a strong effect on the wine. One of these was the use of chemically-manufactured yeasts used to control the fermentation of the wines.

One manufactured yeast strain that was widely used in Beaujolais (and still is) is Lalvin 71B. This yeast is a laboratory product made in Holland and synthesised from tomatoes, which stamps a discernable banana and candy aroma on the wine. In fact, so widespread was the use of this yeast that many wine drinkers came to think that it was the Gamay grape that was responsible for these aromas!!

Slowly the natural wine movement began to emerge based on the principles laid down by Chauvet. It spread to the Loire Valley which is now one of the strongholds of natural winemaking. In areas such as the Jura the practice is widespread but this is partly because they never made wine any other way! More recently natural winemaking has become popular in Champagne where many small makers are producing some amazing wines in this style.

The natural wine movement is interesting because it is all about what doesn't happen rather than what does. No artificial chemicals are used in the vineyard so fungicides, pesticides and herbicides are shunned and vineyard practices are organic or biodynamic or, in some cases, cosmoculture. The same also must be applied to the winemaking process. No use of commercial yeasts (some of which are genetically modified) – natural yeasts from the vineyard must be used to ferment the wine. No enzymes are added – a common practice these days to improve the mouthfeel of the wine as well as 'adjusting' the wine in other ways. No reverse osmosis should be performed to reduce the alcohol levels and no sugar should be added to increase the alcohol. The use of fish products or clay for fining should also be avoided.

There is general agreement in the natural wine movement about NOT using the products mentioned above. The main area where arguments start is over the use of sulphur. Most people accept that some use of sulphur does not disqualify a wine from being called a natural wine. It is, after all, a natural by-product of the wine making process and some level of sulphur can be detected in wines where none has been added. However, most natural wine producers would make an effort to keep sulphur levels very low. Many of our suppliers add no sulphur at the rest only add minimal amounts, usually at the bottling stage and then add just enough to preserve the wine on its journey to Australia.

So why do we drink natural wines and why do we go to the trouble of importing them to Australia? The first reason is that we have made a conscious decision to reduce our intake of pesticides and other poisons. We don't like our food being contaminated and equally we don't like our wine to contain the residues of what are benignly termed 'agricultural inputs'.

Secondly we usually find that wines that have been fermented naturally are more lively and more accurately reflect the terroir of the region. Thirdly, the natural wines we drink are often lower in alcohol, tannins and sulphur than conventional wines and therefore are more enjoyable to match to food.

There are some other reasons why we like natural wines that are not directly connected to them being called natural. Most of our wines have a savoury finish rather than that sweetness that is associated with high alcohol. Also very few of our wines are matured in new oak. We find that in the New World new oak dominates the flavour of so many young wines making it impossible to enjoy them.

We freely acknowledge that there are some awful natural wines just as there are awful conventional wines. We also point out that some of France's most revered wines are completely natural and always have been.

So we like to use this term because it conveys the right information to people like us who are seeking wines made with indigenous yeasts (a very important element for us) and using organic or biodynamic vineyard practices (also important to ensure no pesticide residues).

Other terms such as 'lutte raisonnée' which is used in France to indicate that 'lower' levels of chemicals are being used or the term 'sustainable' don't tell us what we want to know.

Another way of thinking about the term is that proposed by natural wine pioneer Pierre Jancou who only offered natural wines at La Cremerie in the 6th arrondissement of Paris and then went on to set up Racines and now Vivant. His web site is www.morethanorganic.com indicating that for wines to be called natural they must indeed be 'more than organic'.

Organic viticulture is essential, biodynamic viticulture is even better but then the winemaking techniques described above including the essential use of indigenous yeasts qualify a wine to be called natural.

On a recent trip through Hong Kong we were nervous because we had rarely seen any natural wines in that city. We Googled the term and voila – up popped La Cabane a Vin a brand new wine store dedicated solely to natural wines! We were able to spend our time there enjoying the wines of Foillard from Beaujolais, Villemade from Cheverny and Peron from the Savoie among others. It transformed our time there.

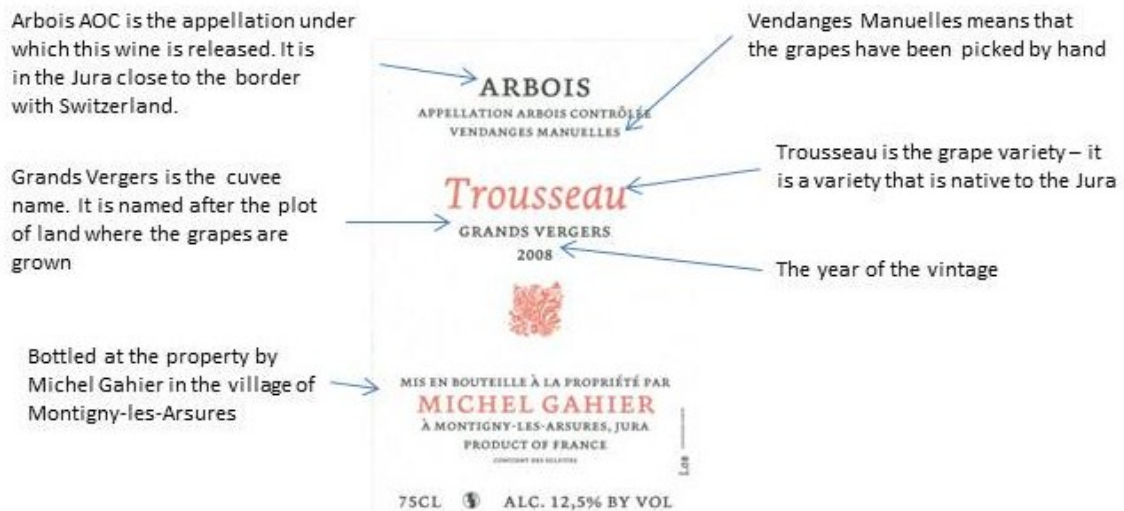
We also find that the term is widely accepted now in Europe for the same reason. Use of the term is a signal. Even restaurant critic Patricia Wells has embraced the term – in her recent review of the new, white hot Paris restaurant Agape Substance she says:

“The wine list here is strong on natural wines, and I appreciated the pairing of a 2009 Aligoté’ from Alice and Olivier de Moor, a wine that seemed to simply hold hands with Toutain’s modern, approachable fare.”

Reading that sentence immediately makes us want to go to Agape Substance on our next visit to Paris.

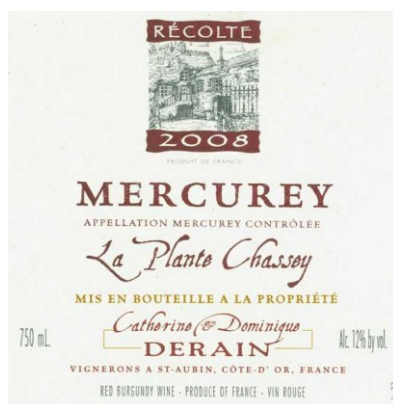
French wine labels explained: Gahier Trousseau

Michel Gahier's Jura wines are a new addition to our line up and these are wines that we are very excited about. The Trousseau grape flourishes in the soils around the small village of Montigny-les-Arsures where Michel lives. His Grands Vergers is a wine of great complexity and elegance.



Grape variety of the month: Pinot Beurot

Burgundy is well known for two grape varieties – Pinot Noir and Chardonnay but there are many other grape varieties permitted in wines from this region. Aligoté, Gamay, Melon de Bourgogne, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Blanc, César and many others share the limelight with their better known cousins.



Another that we have recently got to know is Pinot Beurot which is known to be a mutation of Pinot Noir (just like Melon le Rouge Queue in the Jura is thought to be a mutation of Chardonnay).

Pinot Beurot is known by a number of different names including Fromentau, Mavoisie and Rulander in various parts of Europe. It is characterised by its grey to brown fruit rather than the Pinot purple that we have come to know. In fact it is often compared to Pinot Gris and one Marsannay wine maker, Marc

Brocot makes a white Bourgogne wine purely from this grape.

We got to know of this grape because Dominique Derain uses it in his gorgeous Mercurey red wine because some Pinot Beurot grows in his vineyards in that appellation.

Buzet wine appellation

Buzet is a small wine appellation in the south-west of France to the west of the major city of Toulouse and to the east of Bordeaux in the Département of Lot-et-Garonne. It was established in April 1973 and covers red wines, white wines and rosé wines where the grapes are grown in some 27 communes in this area.

The red wines from Buzet share the same grape varieties as the neighbouring Bordeaux wines. These are Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cot (Malbec) and Merlot. It is also permitted to use the rare Abouriou and Petit Verdot but these together must not exceed 10% of the blend.

White wines can be made from a wide variety of white grapes. The main grapes for white wines are Muscadelle, Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Gris and Sémillon. These can be used to make single varietal wines or they can be blended together. In addition, the grape varieties Colombard, Gros Manseng and Petit Manseng can be used but together cannot exceed 10% of the blend.



The wines of Buzet are represented in our selections by Domaine du Pech who produce some lovely, reds based on Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cot (Malbec).

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