

WINE Talk: November 2014

The newsletter of Living Wines: Edition 50

We are celebrating two milestones for Living Wines this month. The first is the publication of our fiftieth newsletter! We decided to publish a newsletter to provide you with details of wines we have on offer and also to provide carefully researched information on topics related to wine in general and natural wine in particular. We have enjoyed creating these newsletters and have been delighted with the very positive feedback we have received.

The second milestone is the arrival of our first full container load of wine. Up until now we have been sharing refrigerated containers with other importers, but two weeks ago a refrigerated container crammed with 10,000 bottles of wine was delivered to our warehouse.

This month we are able to offer some special packs from the wines that arrived. We have already held industry tastings of the wines in Melbourne and Sydney and will be conducting tastings in other cities soon.

This month we have a pack of six interesting and delicious rosé wines to herald the arrival of warmer weather. We have long been fans of the Cabernet Franc grape variety and since there are so many different wines in the container made from this grape we have included a pack that highlights the different styles of wine and different area of the Loire Valley, the spiritual home of this grape. We also have a white wine pack that includes six wines made from six different grape varieties. For those of you seeking new flavours and textures in wines we have also created a pack with the tongue-in-cheek title of “Left of Centre” wines (borrowed from a section on the wine list Katrina Birchmeier created for Garagistes; which is the one we usually head to first). This pack includes a Syrah from the northern Rhone from a new producer, Jean-Michel Stephan that beautifully demonstrates that Syrah can lead to delicate, elegant wines with low alcohol levels. We also have included a delicious Sauvignon Blanc from the Loire from Les Capriades. And we also have made up a pack of our even newer arrivals with a selection of wines from the Jura. We have also included a secret pack in this newsletter!

For a full list of wines currently in stock and their prices see:

http://www.livingwines.com.au/Catalogue/Buy_wines.htm

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.

New arrivals in October

We have just received our first full container of wine which includes wines from **Jean-Pierre Robinot**, **Jean-Michel Stephan** (a new producer from Côte Rôtie) who makes beautiful, light red wines from the Sérine grape variety, another new producer, **Pascal Simonutti** (some of you may know the “scribble” labels) whose lovely wines we have been enjoying for the past few years in France, **Agnès and René Mosse** (yes, Moussamoussettes is back), a diverse selection from Burgundy producer **Yann Durieux**, a bunch of pet nats from **Les Capriades** and some more of the exciting wines from **Anne-Marie and Pierre Lavaysse** of Petit Gimios including the cult rosé wine.

We also have the beautiful, rustic white and red wines from **Nicolas Carmarans** in the Aveyron (the Selves and Maximus are extraordinary this vintage), a new supply of the no-added-sulphur wines from Axel Prüfer of **Le Temps des Cerises** in the Languedoc, more wines from **Jean-Paul Brun** in the Beaujolais including his quaffable rosé, the delicious sulphur free wines of **La Paonnerie**, another shipment from **Henri Milan**, the much-loved Vézelay wines from **Domaine de la Cadette** and **Domaine Montanet-Thoden** including the ever-popular Melon de Bourgogne, a shipment from **Fanny Sabre** in Burgundy (her Bourgogne Rouge this vintage is absolutely stunning), the good value reds from **Stéphane Guion** in the Loire and also in the Loire the wines of **Domaine de la Garreliere** (the Gamay Sans Tra La La was in the shipment and is now available!).

And further arrivals

Because it has taken us so long to write this newsletter, even more wines have arrived.

We're delighted to have Michel Gahier's wines back in stock, albeit in small quantities after the difficult 2013 vintage. There is no Ploussard this year – and we mean really no Ploussard, not even a case or two for us to secrete away. We've taken all three of his Trousseau cuvées. The three wines Le Clousot 2013, La Vigne du Louis 2013, and Les Grands Vergers 2013 are all from different vineyards, all close to Gahier's village of Montigny-Les-Arsures.

The vines in each vineyard are of varying ages and of course the aspect and soils in each are slightly different. The most intense is Les Grands Vergers, where the vines are over 80 years old, and the Le Clousot vineyard has the youngest vines.

We also have the most recently bottled vintages of his white wines Les Follasses 2012, Les Crets 2011 and La Fauquette 2010. Each is made from Chardonnay, although he says the grapes are actually Melon-Queue-Rouge, a variant of Chardonnay found in the Jura, and they are progressively more oxidative. La Fauquette, in particular, is made sous voile in the same way as Vin Jaune. We also have a very small amount of his Vin Jaune – a return supply of the 2005 vintage.

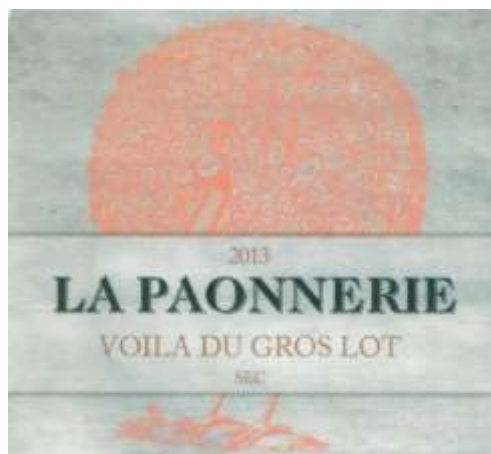
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Also from the Jura, we have another shipment from Philippe Bornard, to replenish the rapidly diminishing supply from the last shipment. We have two red wines. Le Trousseau 2012 is a unique cuvee, a reflection of the fact the yield in 2012 was so low he couldn't make his two individual vineyard wines Le Ginglet and Le Garde-corps, and so combined the grapes from both vineyards to make this delightful, light red wine. It's only 11.5% alcohol, is only lightly extracted and has the typical prickly zing that characterises Philippe's young red wines.

We also have a few bottles of a rare release of Ploussard La Chamade 2005, Philippe's first vintage under his own label. It's a rare chance to drink one of Bornard's red wines with some age. Over time the freshness gives way to a gentle earthiness. We also have his Chardonnay Les Gaudrettes 2012, and small quantities of l'Ivresse de Née, his unique late-picked Savagnin. And, sadly, absolutely no pet-nats in this shipment.

And, finally, we have a new shipment from our Vouvray producer Vincent Carême. Our allocation was severely limited this year, once again the result of poor weather, and given the appalling harvest in 2013 it's only going to get worse. We have his delicious Vouvray Ancestrale 2012 pet-nat, made with no added sulphites, and Vouvray Brut 2012, which is a méthode traditionnelle, made the same way as Champagne. Unfortunately there was no Tendre this year but we do also have a small amount of Vouvray Le Clos 2011, which is a demi-sec.

Wine of the month: La Paonnerie Voila du Gros Lot



We always look forward with anticipation to the arrival of our annual allocation of La Paonnerie's Voila du Gros Lot from the Loire Valley. The reason for our anticipation is that it is a delicious wine and it is also a gently orange wine!

Now we have written about orange wines before but for those of you who are new to the area, they are white wines that have had the skins left in the juice for some days or weeks or months. Normally with white wines the grapes are picked and then, as soon as possible, placed in a press where the juice is separated from the skins and pips and stalks.

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With orange wines the skins are left in contact with the juice and therefore the polyphenols in the skins of the grapes and in the pips are extracted into the juice. Some of these polyphenols change the colour of the juice to orange and some provide tannic structure to the wine, still others add extra flavours.



In the case of “Voila du Gros Lot” the skins have only been in contact for between 15 and 20 days. The reason why winemaker Jacques Carroget (see photo above) doesn’t like to leave the skins in contact for too long is that after about 3 weeks the polyphenols being extracted are predominantly bitter. This wine shows a nice balance of fruit and tannic structure with a hint of bitterness that is quite attractive.

The name of the wine is derived from the name of the grape it is made from. The grape variety is local to the western reaches of the Loire around Angers and Nantes and is called Grolleau Gris. However the locals write it as Groslot Gris – hence the name.

Pack 1: Exploring Rosé 6 pack



In our latest shipment we ordered a number of rosé wines that run the full gamut of styles. Rosé is such a versatile drink that you can usually drink it right through a meal and discover that it matches nicely with a wide range of foods. We have selected six rosé wines that mainly come from the Loire Valley but also one representing Beaujolais and another from Provence.

Terres Dorées Jean Paul Brun Rosé d'Folie 2013 – The Rosé d'Folie is a light pinkish-orange tinted wine that gives raspberry on the palate, an appealing freshness and a nice lingering finish. It is perfect for spring and summer sipping, but as we always say of rosé wines, there is absolutely no reason why they can't be sipped all year round.

This wine was fermented in tanks and has seen no wood at any time, therefore it remains fresh and vibrant and perfect for easy drinking. There has been no carbonic maceration as Jean-Paul prefers Burgundian methods of wine making.

Domaine de la Garrelière Le Rosé de la Cabane 2013 – This year we have ordered some of the rosé from Garreliere because, when we tasted it in February at the Angers trade show it was just so lively and interesting. It is made from Cabernet Franc.

Domaine Saint Nicolas Reflets Rosé 2013 – The Domaine Saint Nicolas Rosé is a delicate, pale pink perfumed beauty that is quite savoury with a dry finish making it perfect as an aperitif. The wine is predominantly Pinot Noir although there is a touch of Gamay and Groslot Gris as well to provide some additional complexity.

La Paonnerie Coteaux Ancenis Rosé Le Rosé d'Ancenis 2013 – The Domaine la Paonnerie Coteaux d'Ancenis Rosé 2013 is made from 100% Gamay Noir a jus Blanc. The wine is fermented with natural yeasts and is neither filtered or fined. This is a light, lively delicious, quite dark rosé, almost a light red, that is perfect for sipping at any time and is also a great match for a wide range of foods as it will not overpower them. It also has a very attractive mouthfeel and a lingering finish.

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Bainbridge and Cathcart Vin de France Les Rosbif Rosé Sec 2012 – This dry rosé-style wine is made from young red Grolleau Noir (aka Groslot Noir) grapes, a variety that is only found at the western end of the Loire Valley and rarely seen as a single variety. The grapes were macerated for five days. It tastes very fresh. The wine has a little carbon dioxide in it as a preservative so you might detect a bit of 'fizz' at the beginning when the glass is first poured.

Henri Milan Papillon Rosé Sans Soufre Ajouté 2013 – As with many of Henri's wines this intriguing rosé is made from five different grape varieties, namely Grenache Noir, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cinsault and Mourvèdre. It is a savoury rosé that is perfect for pairing with food.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$195 but the pack price is \$165.75 including freight.

Pack 2: Cabernet Franc 6 pack



Cabernet Franc is a grape variety that is revered in the Loire Valley. It particularly grows well and ripens well in the central Loire region between Tours and Angers and further towards Nantes and on to the coast. Wines made from this grape variety also represent excellent value for money. We have a number of new arrivals made from this grape variety so we thought it would be interesting to put together a pack of these wines starting in the Touraine just south of Tours and heading west towards the Atlantic.

Domaine de la Garrelière Touraine Le Rouge 2012 – This wine comes from grapes grown on the rolling hills near the village of Richelieu which lies about 40 kilometres south of Tours. It is fresh and easy to drink.

Domaine Stéphane Guion Bourgueil Cuvee Domaine Rouge 2012 – The appellation of Bourgueil lies to the west of Tours on the northern bank of the Loire. Here the soil is rich in limestone and matures in caves hewn from the limestone rocks. The Domaine cuvee is aged in stainless steel tanks and is designed to be drunk.

Domaine Stéphane Guion Bourgueil Cuvee Prestige Rouge 2012 – This wine is different to the Domaine above because it has been aged in old wooden barrels rather than the stainless steel tanks used for the Domaine.

Domaine Mosse Vin de France Bois Rouge 2013– We now travel further west and slide down to St Lambert du Lattay where Agnes and Rene Mosse craft this beautiful wine. This has a little Cabernet Sauvignon added to provide additional complexity. It is very mouth-filling and juicy.

La Paonnerie Anjou Rouge Le Rouge de la Jacquerie 2013 – Jacques Carroget has vineyards spanning some fifty kilometres from Angers to Nantes but this one comes from just one vineyard called La Jacquerie. This is a very sophisticated wine with great length and has no added sulphites.

Domaine Saint Nicolas Fiefs Vendéens Cabaret Rouge de Brem 2011 – And finally we arrive at the Atlantic Ocean near the village of Brem-sur-Mer where Thierry Michon grows Cabernet Franc on low-lying bush vines to reduce exposure to the winds that blow in from the nearby ocean. This is a very elegant expression of the grape variety.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$182 but the pack price is \$154.70 including freight.

Pack 3: Exploring White Wines 6 pack



We love white wines. Once we only drank the biggest, most brutal red wines. That was in the 1970s and 1980s. But we gradually were introduced to white wines and lighter red wines. This started us on our journey towards natural wines. So we have assembled a 6 pack of white wines with character and interest where a different grape variety is represented in each wine.

Hervé Villemade Vin de Pays du Val de Loire Sauvignon 2013 – Hervé is a master of white wines. Whether he is creating a Sauvignon Blanc or a rare Romorantin wine, he has a fine touch. It is unusual to find a 100% Sauvignon produced within the Cheverny area. This one is a great wine for becoming familiar with the real flavour of the Sauvignon grape.

Domaine de la Garrelière Le Chenin de la Colline 2012 – This delightful Chenin Blanc has hints of stone fruits such as apricots. Along with a lively vibrancy that makes it a very appealing drink. Farmed biodynamically so the label depicts the winemaker 'howling' at the moon!

Causse Marines Vin de Table Blanc Zacmau 2102 – The Zacmau is made from the Mauzac grape (the name of the grape cannot appear on the label) and is from the 2012 vintage (which also can't appear because it is a Vin de Table). This is a very old, native grape of the Gaillac area in SW France.

Terres Dorées Jean Paul Brun Beaujolais Blanc 2013 – It is rare to find a white Beaujolais as only 5% of the grapes in this region are Chardonnay. This one is a beautiful expression of Chardonnay with extended lees contact and no wood.

La Paonnerie Vin de France Rien Que Melon 2012 – Jacques Carroget has vineyards spanning some fifty kilometres from Angers to Nantes. This one comes from within the Muscadet region where white wines are made from the Melon de Bourgogne grape. The Rien Que Melon is a beautiful example of this wonderful grape variety. It is very funky, it is playful, it is delicious! We love it!

Hervé Villemade Cour-Cheverny Les Petit Acacias 2008 – Romorantin is a special grape variety and the only variety permitted in the Cour-Cheverny appellation in the Loire Valley.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$202 but the pack price is \$171.70 including freight.

Pack 4: Left-of-Centre New Arrivals 6 pack



We have just received 102 new wines, so it is impossible for us to offer specials on them all. However, we have decided to pick out a few edgy wines that represent obscure grapes or obscure regions and have textures and flavours that are very different to mainstream wines.

Nicolas Carmarans IGP Aveyron Selves 2013 – We first approached Nicolas Carmarans because we had tried his amazing, earthy red wines. However he has one secret wine that is only released in small quantities. His Selves is made from low-yielding Chenin Blanc grown on vertiginous slopes above the gorges carved by the Selves River. This is a very rare wine but this year we have held a few bottles back to allow our retail customers to sample the amazing qualities of this wine.

Le Temps de Cerises Vin de France La Peur du Rouge 2013 – We always love to offer a Chardonnay to our customers which is nothing like an Australian or Californian equivalent. This one has no new wood therefore no distracting vanilla overtones. It is grown in a walled “clos” on rocky limestone soils.

Les Capriades Vin de France Vignnasou 2012 – The Vignnasou is a still Sauvignon Blanc showing 12% alcohol only. It is a lovely wine with a great mouthful and a long lingering finish that is quite attractive. It is the only still wine we currently import from Les Capriades who are famous for their sparkling wines but also make very smart still wines when they have grapes available.

Nicolas Carmarans IGP Aveyron Maximus Rouge 2013 – This is, as they say, one out of the box! It is made from Fer Servadou which is a grape that is indigenous to the Aveyron and Gaillac regions of central and south west France. This wine is very low in alcohol (11%) but packed with flavour from this rustic grape variety. It is also a very good example of how to produce a bright, lively wine using the technique known as carbonic maceration that we have written about in a previous newsletter.

Jean-Michel Stephan Vin de France Plain de Condrieu 2013 – We are delighted to offer the wines of new producer Jean-Michel Stephan who works mainly in Côte Rôtie. The grapes for this vineyard fall just outside the boundary for Côte Rôtie near the village of Condrieu, so it is classified as a Vin de France and priced at about a third of the price of a wine from that appellation. It is made from 100% Syrah and exhibits all the spiciness you expect from that grape but has only 11.5% alcohol!

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Le Petit Gimios Vin de France Rouge de Causse 2013 – The word “causse” translates as “limestone ridge” and indeed there is a lot of limestone in this vineyard. There are at least sixteen different grape varieties on these low-pruned bush vines and they are all in this field blend. A lively, vibrant wine from the Languedoc.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$269 but the pack price is \$228.65 including freight.

Pack 5: Wines of the Jura 6 pack



This pack comprises six bottles (three reds and three whites) of the recently arrived Jura wines from master winemakers Philippe Bornard and Michel Gahier. Both of these winemakers produce absolutely delicious wines which suit a wide variety of foods. We especially love pairing oxidative Jura whites with spicy Asian foods or hard mountain cheeses.

Philippe Bornard Arbois Pupillin Le Trousseau 2012 – In 2012 the yields in the Jura were so low that Philippe did not have enough grapes to make his two normal cuvees of Trousseau, so he combined them into one wine that he called Le Trousseau. This has resulted in a beautiful, light, almost ethereal wine that literally dances in your mouth! It is very low in alcohol and almost translucent in colour, but the flavour is still there. This is a lovely wine that is drinking beautifully already.

Philippe Bornard Cotes du Jura Chardonnay Les Gaudrettes 2012 – Les Gaudrettes is a fresh-tasting Chardonnay of some complexity and with a beautiful mouth-feel. It exhibits the same characteristics as his other wines on the finish - long and lingering.

Michel Gahier Arbois Trousseau Le Vigne du Louis 2013 – Le Vigne de Louis is a Trousseau that is lighter than the Grands Vergers but richer than Le Clousot. It has Gahier's trademark vibrant freshness and hints of smokiness and, unlike the Grands Vergers, it had 15mg of sulphites added at vinification. It has good structure, very good length and is quite juicy - hence is very drinkable.

Michel Gahier Arbois Trousseau Grands Vergers 2013 – 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. Here the gentle slopes are fully exposed to the sun allowing the grapes to ripen perfectly. The marl in which the vines thrive add minerality to the wine. This is Michel's premium red wine and one that we admire deeply.

Michel Gahier Arbois Chardonnay Les Follasses 2012 – 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

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Jura with just a hint of those oxidative qualities that Jura aficionados just can't get enough of. We don't expect it to last long.

Michel Gahier Arbois Chardonnay Les Crêts 2011 – 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. This is Jura Chardonnay at its best! 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.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is **\$279** but the pack price is **\$237.15** including freight.

Grape variety: Sérine

In order to understand why we are writing about a grape variety called Sérine after a visit to our supplier Jean-Michel Stephan in the Côte Rôtie, it is first important to understand a bit about Syrah, the grape that grows so prolifically in the northern and southern Rhone regions.

Jean-Michel makes wine from Syrah which is delicate, low-alcohol and untouched by new oak. But he also makes a delightful Côte Rôtie which is also delicate, low alcohol and is untouched by new wood – but they taste different. And it is all to do with the difference between Syrah and the grape the locals call Sérine.

So we decided to look back through history to determine what really is the difference between Sérine and Syrah and which has traditionally been grown in the Côte Rôtie area.

In the Gentleman's Magazine, Volumes 156-157 of 1834 there is a distinction made between the grapes of nearby Hermitage and the grapes of Côte Rôtie:

Hermitage is made from the Shiraz grape of Persia. The Côte Rôtie comes from the serine.

We also turned to our copy of the 1834 book by Australian James Busby called "Journal of a recent visit to the principal vineyards of Spain and France" where we found that he had visited the terraces of the northern Rhone and had come across a red grape called Ciras which he noted:

In the Enologie Francaise, a very minute and correct account of the French vineyards, published in 1826, the name of this grape is spelt Scyras; and it is stated that, according to the tradition of the neighbourhood, the plant was originally brought from Shiraz in Persia, by one of the hermits of the mountain.

Cyrus Redding in "A history and description of modern wines" in 1851 repeats, with minor variation, the words we found in the Gentleman's Magazine:

Hermitage, as before observed, is produced from the Scyras, or Shiraz grape. The Côte Rôtie comes from the Serine.

And now we return to the recent past and the puzzle about the origins of Syrah, before we tackle the issue of Sérine.

Work by the famous French ampelographer Jean-Michel Boursiquot¹ at the Montpellier INRA demonstrated through DNA analysis that Syrah is probably descended from Mondeuse Blanc and Dureza (Dureze) Noir, both relatively obscure grapes from southeast France.

Dureze has always grown in the Côte Rôtie and Mondeuse Blanc² has always been associated with vineyards slightly to the east in the Savoie.

In an address to a Syrah conference, his colleague Carole Meredith³ said that the experiments with fifty different DNA markers showed that when statistical analysis was carried out on the results:

The probability that this combination is the true parentage of Syrah is 10 to the 19th power. A very, very, very, very large number. I do not even know the word to describe this number. But it is a much higher number than is ever used in legal tests of [human] parentage. So it's a very convincing case that these two varieties are the parents of Syrah.

Notice that this research has confirmed that the grape is not descended from grapes grown near the town of Shiraz in modern day Iran.

To avoid confusion, in a very confusing topic, we need to point out that in the area around Isere (which is just south of Grenoble) the red grape usually called Persan is called Serine locally. This is not the Serine we are referring to in the Côte Rôtie. The naming is further complicated by locals in the Côte Rôtie referring to Sérine as Petite Syrah (a reference to the smaller berries). This is not the same as Petite Syrah (Sirah) which is actually another name for Durif, which is grown in California (mainly) and Australia (a little).

¹ Bowers, J.E., Siret, R., Meredith, C.P., This, P. and Boursiquot, J.M. 2000. A Single Pair Of Parents Proposed For A Group Of Grapevine Varieties In Northeastern France. *Acta Hort. (ISHS)* 528:129-132

² Mondeuse Blanc is not a white version of one of our favourite grapes, the Savoie grape called Mondeuse Noir.

³ Carole Meredith: Origins of Syrah, p. 3-4 in: *The Syrah Producers' Club 19 April 2004 - Syrah Worldwide Roma.*



The leaf of the Sérine vine (Source Foodtourist.com)

The Sérine vine shares many of the characteristics of the Syrah vine but has some important differences. In the photo above you can see that the Sérine leaf has five lobes and a serrated edge. This is similar to Syrah but the serrations and the lobes are a bit more pronounced.

The second difference is that the bunches are much smaller (although still with the characteristic cone shape) and the grapes are smaller and possess thinner skins thus making the vines lower yielding and the grapes more prone to disease – which is why many vigneron in the area tend to avoid Sérine and opt for the grafted Syrah instead.

The reason that Sérine has maintained its identity is that local vigneron have always used the *selection massale* method to propagate new vines. Instead of grafting a cutting onto American rootstock (a technique that became popular to prevent the ravages of phylloxera) they have, instead, used the healthiest old vines in vineyards in the area to take targeted cuttings to produce new vines. This helps to preserve the genetic diversity of the vineyards, which in turn, reduces the exposure to disease.



The Sérine vines of Jean-Michel Stephan (Source Foodtourist.com)

The wines of Jean-Michel Stephan, a new producer for us, contain the Sérine grape variety mentioned in this article. As a special offer you can order two bottles of his lovely 2012 Côte Rôtie which normally costs \$258 for the two bottles, but we will give you our special 15% discount reducing the cost of the two bottles to \$219.30. This is a reward for you reading this far in the newsletter!

Simply send us an email asking for the secret Côte Rôtie twin pack!

Appellation: Côte Rôtie

Côte Rôtie is a Northern Rhone appellation dedicated to the production of high quality red wines primarily from the Syrah and Sérine grapes varieties. It is also permitted in this appellation to add small quantities of the white Viognier grape variety to the wine.

The grapes must be grown in the communes of Ampuis, Saint-Cyr-sur-Rhône and Tupin-Semons which all lie on the western side of the Rhone River south of the city of Lyon near the town of Vienne.



The slopes here are quite vertiginous and we found it difficult to keep up with our new supplier, Jean-Michel Stephan, as he bounded up the steep, terraced hillside using legs honed to the task through many years of practice.

The terraces usually contain a single row of high-pruned vines.

We were drawn to the Côte Rôtie appellation due to the wines made by Jean-Michel. Many of the wines from this appellation that we have tried have had new wood treatment which on our palates now find too dominating and intrusive. We prefer wines that have been matured in a neutral container such as old wood, concrete or clay, or even stainless steel or fibreglass.

Jean-Michel ferments the majority of his wines in stainless steel tanks and then, with some cuvées they are matured in old wooden barrels. The resultant wines are lively, incredibly fresh and very delicious. But even more exciting for us is the fact that they are low in alcohol with his Vin de France sourced from his vineyard on the Plain de Condrieu weighing in at only 11.5% and his Côte Rôtie at 12%!!! We also love the fact that he has not used any sulphur at all. These are extraordinary wines.



Wine containers series: Fibreglass

In this first article about different containers for fermenting and maturing wine we are going to look at fibreglass containers. In future articles we will cover stainless steel, concrete, clay amphorae, glass and wood. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

Fibreglass is essentially plastic which has been reinforced with glass fibres. It was pioneered in the automotive industry and also for boat building. Fibres of glass are either embedded randomly in the plastic or are woven into a mat which, in turn, is covered with a plastic coating made from a resin. This process is necessary to provide a smooth surface (such as in swimming pools) to protect users from the glass fibres.

Of course, the fibres can be used without the plastic surfacing in applications such as insulation or, when backed with a suitable adherent can be used as a building material for lining rooms.

Fibreglass tanks used for wine have a tap near the bottom of the tank and a lid which has a rim of rubber like the inner tube of a tyre which can be pumped up to seal it against the side of the inside of the tank. The air can be released from this tube so that the lid can be removed if required.

Many of our winemakers in France use fibreglass tanks for fermenting their grapes. They like this medium for a number of reasons. The first is that, unlike wooden barrels, it doesn't matter how much juice you get because the adjustable lid can be lowered down onto the surface of the wine thus protecting it from oxygen.

The other feature of a fibreglass tank that many of our winemakers like is that they can see the level of the wine through the tank, particularly when they use carbonic maceration and are seeing both whole bunches of grapes and juice below it.

With a wooden barrel, the container needs to be filled to the top to prevent spoilage by the air in the gap.

Mylène Bru has just built a cute winery on top of a hill overlooking her vineyards. In it she has installed both fibreglass tanks and large concrete tanks. The fibreglass

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tanks are about 3 metres high and have lids with the pneumatic rim that can be pumped up to ensure a tight fit.

In the photo below you can clearly see that the tank is not filled to the top and the lid is sitting on top of the juice just down a little from the top. On the left side of the photo you may be able to see a metal pump that is connected via a tube to the lid. This is what is used to pump up the tube around the side of the lid to make it a tight fit.



In the next photo you can see a fibreglass tank in the winery of Alice and Charles from Domaine de l'Octavin in the Jura. You can also see that they didn't have sufficient wine to fill the 1500 litre tank so the lid is quite low in this tank.

You can see the tube much more clearly in this photo.



The advantages of fibreglass tanks are:

- They are an inert medium that does not impart flavours to the wine
- They are perfect for carbonic maceration
- The lid is able to be placed directly on the wine surface regardless of how full the tank is
- Depending on the type of coating the tanks do allow some oxygen transfer into the wine to assist with the development of colour and flavour
- The smooth inner coating makes the tanks easy to clean.

How to order

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