

TASTE LANGUEDOC - A BLOG ABOUT THE WINES OF THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

MONDAY, 7 MARCH 2016

Domaine Boucabeille



First we admired Jean Boucabeille's new cellar, outside the village of Corneilla la Rivière. It is partially partially underground with a visible rock face. Altogether Jean has 28 hectares, all of which has been farmed organically, since 2008, with vineyards on the lower slopes of Força Real, so the terroir is grey schist. Geologically Força Real is in layers, with schist on top, and vineyards going from 150 – 400 metres.

The historical heart of Jean's estate consists of 12 hectares of vineyards at high altitude, which have been pulled up and replanted, so that the average age of Jean's vines is now about 20 years old. Converting to organic viticulture obliged him to replant, as mechanisation was totally impractical on the higher slopes, making it impossible to control the weeds. He has now recreated the terraces, making them wide enough for machinery. It has been a very expensive exercise, clearing *garrigues*, with a lot of work by hand. And he has another twelve hectares, also on Força Real, that face the Canigou and the village of Millas. The soil there is deeper, with glacial erosion and lots of stones

ABOUT ME



ROSEMARY GEORGE MW

What qualifies me to write and comment on the Languedoc? Quite simply, I have been following its development for thirty years. I was one of the first women to pass the Master of Wine exams, back in 1979, and I became a freelance wine writer in 1981, since when I have written eleven books, covering not only the Languedoc, but also Chablis, Tuscany and New Zealand.

[VIEW MY COMPLETE PROFILE](#)

WHY THE LANGUEDOC?

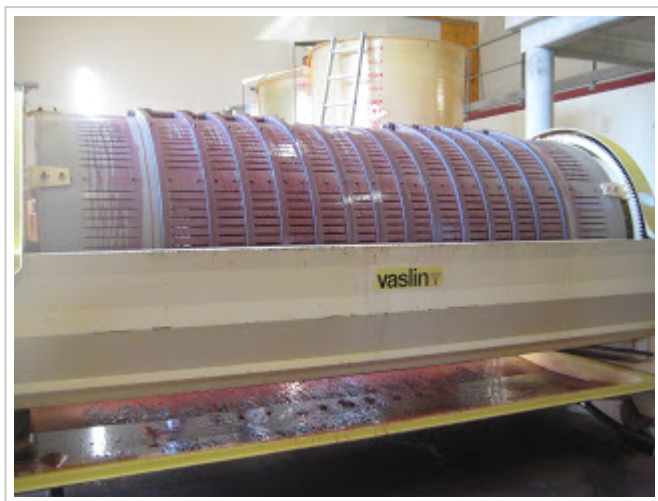
My very first visit to a wine cellar in the Languedoc was in 1979 and I have returned regularly since then, researching two books, firstly French Country Wines, and subsequently The Wines of the South of France, from Banyuls to Bellet. French Country Wines was published in 1990 and took me off the beaten track to many lost vineyards of France, but inevitably the Midi formed a large part of the book. In those days you sensed the beginnings of a revival in the fortunes of the region; some of the estates with a serious reputation today, were leading the way back in the 1980s, such as Gilbert Alquier in Faugères; Daniel Domergue in the Minervois; Domaine Cazes in Rivesaltes. Aimé Guibert had made his first vintage at

and finer schist – a *terroir de grand cru* observed Jean. The Canigou protects the area from the bad weather coming from Spain, but also has a cooling effect. And on the morning of my visit, at the end of the September, you could see the first snow of the season on the peak.

Jean has replanted Syrah and also has a lot of Grenache and Mourvèdre as well as some 40 year old Carignan. He has also planted 600 cork oaks, with the aspiration to produce his own corks in 40 years time. Catalan cork grows very slowly, with ten to fifteen years between harvests.

Jean began working with his father, whose family came from the Aude, near Narbonne. They were a family of vine growers, sending grapes to the cooperative and were very much involved in the growers' unions. Then his father, Régis, went to work in Benelux, representing the Vignerons Catalans, Sieur d'Arques and the Cellier des Templiers. So Jean was born into that milieu, but in 1990 he realised the dream of buying his own vineyards, but he had no cellar. He made his wine in various coop cellars until his own was built in 2008. His father has retired and is now a lively 80 year old, helping with the harvest.

Jean's range comprises 3 reds, 2 whites and 3 Vin Doux, Tuilé, Ambré Hors d'Age and Rancio Sec. White wines are developing in importance, and Jean sees them as the new trend.



2014 Les Terrasses, Côtes du Roussillon Blanc – 8.00€

Half Grenache Blanc and half Macabeo, kept in vat. Nicely herbal notes on both nose and palate. Some pithy fruit and a touch peachy; fresh acidity and a slightly bitter finish.

2013 les Orris, Côtes du Roussillon Blanc – 27.00€

30% Roussanne with 70% Grenache Blanc. The aim is a white *vin de garde*. Jean had considered Chardonnay and Viognier, but realised that Roussanne would be a much better bet, so planted it about seven or eight years ago. A little colour. Elegantly herbal notes. Lightly peachy. Roussanne gives acidity and freshness. Vinified in oak and *élevé* for 8 months. The oak is obvious on the palate, but there is good

Mas de Daumas Gassac in 1978 and set an unprecedented price expectation for a wine from the south of France. Alain Roux was making pace-setting wines at the Prieuré de St. Jean de Bébian. Other reputations have faded and many others were yet to be made. My visit to the Pic St. Loup focused on the cooperative at St. Mathieu de Trévières, and on that cooperative alone. The leading names such as l'Hortus, Mas Bruguière, Mas de Mortières, Clos Marie, or Domaine de Cazeneuve were as yet quite unknown. The same phenomenon applies to the village of Montpeyroux, whose wines were also represented by the village cooperative. At the time no one foresaw the enormous development that would take place in the 1990s. Nonetheless back then, the Languedoc intrigued me. On the last day of my last research trip for French Country Wines, back in October 1987, I had lunch in Narbonne with Claude Vialade, who was the export director for one of the big players of the region, les Vignerons Val d'Orbieu, an enormous marketing and export association of cooperatives and smaller wine producers. One of us said: there is a book to be written on the Languedoc. I mentally filed the idea and ten years on, and two or three books later, I embarked on *The Wines of the South of France*, which covered all the vineyards between the Spanish and Italian borders, including Provence as well as Languedoc Roussillon, and also the island of Corsica. *The Wines of the South of France* was published in 2001 and examines the vineyards of the Midi as they were on the eve of the millennium. I could write a second, comparable book, featuring only wine growers who have started making wine in this century. But these days it is impossible to keep abreast of the pace of change with the printed word; the region demands the immediacy of the web. Numerous research trips only served to fuel my enthusiasm for the wonderful region of the Languedoc. Holidays in gîtes between Perpignan

acidity, with the herbal notes of the *garrigues*, and quite a dry finish. Youthful, with considerable potential and length. There's a bit of *bâttonage*, but not too much. Jean does not want the wine to be too fat and he wants to keep the minerality and what he called the *côté tranchante* of the schist. Just four *barrisques* make one thousand bottles. Jean selects the best barrels and blends at the last minute.

2014 Orris, Côtes du Roussillon Rouge - 27€

2014 was a good vintage, but less intense than some, making for elegance. Unusually this *cuvée* is dominated by Mourvèdre, which performed particularly well in 2014. In contrast Syrah was less successful. So the blend is 30% Syrah, 45% Mourvèdre and 25% Grenache with an *élevage* in *fut*. Jean talked about *élevage* in barrel; he has 25 years experience, having started working with barrels in the 1990s. Good young colour; youthful fresh peppery fruit. Quite tight knit. Dry youthful finish. Nicely balanced. Firm black fruit.



And then we continued with a splendid vertical tasting : Orris can describe a shepherd's house in Catalan or a *capitelle*, one of the stone igloo shaped shelters that you find in the vineyards.

2010 - 60% Syrah, with 40% Grenache. The percentages changes each year, while Mourvèdre is a more recent arrival. There is quite a high proportion of Syrah, as it was particularly good in 2010, with peppery cassis fruit on the nose and palate. Quite firm fresh black fruit; medium weight with a youthful balance. Perfumed, elegant and long, and still with ageing potential. However it was drinking very well.

2009 - 50% Syrah, with 30% Grenache and 20% Mourvèdre. A very ripe year, with particularly ripe Grenache. It could be described as typically Roussillon. Very *garrigue*, and very dense on both nose and palate. Rich and quite solid with *garrigues* fruit, spice and pepper. .

2008 – The first vinification in the new cellar. Jean observed that it was not a great year, but a balanced year., and the wine is very characteristic of the vintage. A more restrained nose than 2009. Quite

and Draguignan, as well as snatched weekends in the middle of research trips, enabled my husband and I to decide on our favourite corner of the Languedoc. And in 2004 we bought a house within easy reach of the towns of Pézenas and Clermont l'Hérault, which gives me a wonderful base for visiting the local wine growers. Our village does not have a particular reputation for its wine, but many of the nearby villages do. We are in very easy reach of Faugères, St. Chinian, some of the highlights of the Coteaux du Languedoc and the new area of Pézenas, as well as the Vin de Pays des Côtes de Thongue, which is one of the more innovative of the numerous vins de pays of the region. So with this blog, I hope to keep abreast of some of the many new and exciting developments in the region

INTRODUCTION TO THE LANGUEDOC

Why the Languedoc? Quite simply, it is without doubt the most exciting and innovative wine region of France. Everything is possible; the appellations may lay down ground rules, but the parallel vins de pays allow for unlimited experimentation, creating a host of new and exciting wines. Over the last twenty years or so this vast vineyard, which stretches from the Spanish border round to the delta of the Rhone has undergone a dramatic transformation, so that the wines have improved out of all recognition. And that pace of change continues unabated, with each vintage bringing new wine growers and new wines. Those are the wines and people I want to talk about, as well as old established favourites. And since wine goes with food, I do not intend to ignore the rich gastronomy of the region. And I also reserve the right occasionally to extend this blog beyond the confines of the Languedoc, into Provence and Corsica and maybe even further afield.

a solid, firm palate, with quite dense tannins, which are taking longer than usual to come round. Some attractive black fruit.

2007 - The colour is beginning to develop, with a lighter nose and a lighter palate. The fruit was quite soft, but with a dry finish. Red ruit, but not quite enough to balance the tannins, and showing some maturity. For Jean this was not a great vintage; in fact it is the least successful vintage of the 2000s.

2006 - which Jean described as *une année atypique pour moi*. It is not Roussillon! There was more rain and the grapes are not so ripe, with less alcohol. He thought it more like a Burgundy, and so for earlier drinking. Medium colour. Elegantly spicy nose and palate. Quite fresh with some firm red fruit and a tannic streak. Medium weight. I rather liked it.

2005 - The colour is beginning to evolve. Quite firm leathery fruit on the nose. Nice depth on palate. A little leathery – *garrigues – sous bois*. Beginning to mature and drinking very nicely. Long and *nuancé*. A great vintage – in fact one of the best. And a lovely glass of wine.

2004 – No great intensity, but fluid and balanced. Medium colour. Quite a firm leathery nose with quite supple fruit on the palate, which then begins to dry a little on the finish. It could be criticised for lacking a little depth, but none the less it is a really nice glass wine, even if it has started its descent

2003 - A hot year. Jean picked Syrah at the beginning of September, as usual. And described the vintage as ‘*le vin qui me surprend. Toujours, quand je le déguste*’. The colour has evolved a little and the palate has notes of leather and garrigues with depth and complexity. A rounded palate with some elegance and quite a firm finish. It has developed and aged beautifully.

Jean considers that there are no bad vintages, but none the less there is the *effet millésime*, the vintage effect, which was beautifully illustrated in these wines.

2014 les Terrasses, Régis Boucabeille – 8.00€

Jean’s entry level red wine, with a short maceration of 12 days, compared to about 20 for Les Orris. Half and half Grenache and Syrah, kept in vat. Medium colour. Fresh young spice on nose and palate. Very drinkable with liquorice and raspberry fruit. and fresh tannins.

USEFUL LANGUEDOC LINKS - AND OTHERS

A fellow MW's experiences in the Languedoc

Creme de Languedoc - Everything you need to know about Languedoc

For customised wine courses specialising in the Languedoc, conducted by an English MW

For help in house-hunting in the Languedoc

If you are looking for self-catering accommodation

One of the best wine lists devoted to the Languedoc

To help you plan vineyard visits all over France, and much more

What's on in the Herault - and my weekly wine coup de coeur

for customised wine tours of this wonderful region.

BLOG ARCHIVE

▶ 2017 (10)

▼ 2016 (52)

▶ December (3)

▶ November (2)

▶ October (4)

▶ September (4)

▶ August (4)

▶ July (1)

▶ June (3)

▶ May (4)

▶ April (2)

▼ March (7)

Languedoc around the London tastings

An update on Gérard Bertrand Grenaches du Monde

Domaine Lafage

Domaine Boucabeille

Domaine Vial- Magnères.

Coume del Mas and Mas Cristine

▶ February (11)



► January (7)

► 2015 (44)

► 2014 (62)

► 2013 (64)

► 2012 (74)

► 2011 (72)

► 2010 (79)

► 2009 (28)

2014 Monte Nero – 14.00€

Força Real can look like a black pyramid, hence the name. 75% Grenache with 30% Syrah, élevage in wood. A 15 – 20 day maceration. Fresh peppery fruit. Medium weight. Quite tight knit, with structure and depth and a satisfying balance.

And now for Vin Doux with **2012 Rivesaltes Ambré – 17.00€**

Pure Macabeo, given three years in wood. Golden, turning to old gold. Rounded and rich; honeyed and peachy.

Hors d'Age – 50€

Kept in old barrels with average age of 20 years. And bottled into an outsize perfume bottle. Pure Macabeo. Amber colour. Lovely walnut fruit on the nose. Fresh rounded nutty nose and palate, and some red fruit and a note of torrefaction. *Figues de fleur*, honey and marzipan. Absolutely delicious.

2011 Rivesaltes Tuilé

Jean's first Tuilé, Pure Grenache Noir, bottled a year ago after ageing in wood. Rounded red fruit and spice. *Pain d'épice*. A stony note. You can see the relation with Jean's red wines. Quite youthful stony red fruit and an elegant finish. In summary, a great tasting. And a *sympa* encounter.



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