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Roussillon Part Four: Domaine Boucabeille

During my visit to Roussillon, the first producer to make a real impression was Domaine Boucabeille in Corneilla de la Rivière, nestled within an amphitheatre in the shadow of "Montes Nero" or "black mountain", so-called due to its black schist soils. Located 15km from Perpignan, it dominates the skyline, its elevation once serving as source of navigation for mariners as well as a surveillance point for the French military.

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We walk up to the vineyard along a path strewn with red schist rocks escorted by Jean Boucabeille who joined his father Régis at the domaine in 2001. Dressed in simple white t-shirt and black jeans, Jean cuts an amiable, self-effacing figure. He stops

intermittently, pointing out wild herbs for us to smell although the scent of white fennel, dill and white lavender linger in the air. "The vines were originally planted 30 years ago amongst the garrigue," he explains, breaking the stem of fennel and inhaling deeply. "But there is evidence of viticulture here over centuries and some of the vines are much older, this one probably 80 or 90 years old."

"We have approximately 18-hectares under vine. The soil here is very powerful, the Syrah located on the lower slopes, below around 350 metres. Grenache, Mourvèdre and Carignan are located further up the slope on wide, 20 metre terraces with Macabeu and a little Grenache Blanc on the top parts used for their sweet wines. The vineyard itself faces southeast as the Mourvèdre needs more sunlight than other varieties. All the vines are pruned goblet except for the Syrah. There are slightly different orientations around the amphitheatre, which protects the vines from the wind. The Grenache copes well with dryness so we do not need any treatments for it, though the Syrah does need some attention."

It takes about 10 minutes to reach the vineyard where his father Régis (pictured) greets us. He must be visible from space in his fluorescent pink t-shirt. However, the brightness of his attire is proportionate to the passion he exudes, conversing in his parochial French dialect that I find impossible to keep up with.

"We practice 18-20 day skin maceration including fermentation with a maximum temperature of 25 degrees. We make the malolactics in the cuves and sometimes add cultured yeast."

"We started producing Les Orris in



1995, a blend of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre and Carignan. Orris is the local term for a shepherd house. We make between 3,000 and 6,000 bottles per year depending upon the vintage."



Under the glade of a trellis overlooking the vines, we taste several wines from Domaine Boucabeille. The Monte Nero is sourced from the black schist soils

and is a blend of 70% Grenache Noir, 25% Syrah and 5% Mourvèdre aged in 25% new oak for 12 months. I adore their 2005: a heavenly garrigue and blueberry-tinged bouquet with a palate beautifully balanced with subtle, interwoven new oak that allows the sense of terroir to flood the senses. Powerful and persistent on the finish, this is a wonderful, natural, compelling wine that just begs to accompany a bouillabaisse.

We also taste four vintages of Les Orris, a blend of 50% Syrah, 25% each of Mourvèdre and Grenache Noir, macerated for 20-days and aged one year in French oak and another year in bottle. Again very sophisticated and refined with hints of garrigue and spice, although I felt just lacking the personality and joie-de-vivre of the Monte Nero, with the exception of the stunning 2002 that demonstrated how 3-4 years cellaring can benefit the wine.

This is a small producer that you should keep your eye on because *Jean Boucabeille*, guided by his charismatic father, has a sound approach to winemaking and married with some exceptional terroir, the glorious results are there for you to taste in bottle. They could just tone down the t-shirts though?

Address: **Domaine Boucabeille**, Route des vins, 66550 Corneilla la Rivière, France

Tasting Notes

2005 Domaine Boucabeille Monte Nero 90

A limpid ruby colour. This has a very classy nose of raspberry leaf, wild strawberry, plum and a touch of lavender. The palate is medium-bodied with a beautiful, satin-like texture with red-berried fruits sprinkled with a dash of black pepper. Cohesive and harmonious with fine definition and a restrained, understated slightly mineral finish. Superb. Drink now-2015. Tasted June 2007.

2004 Domaine Boucabeille Monte Nero 88

This is just lacking the aromatic intensity of the 2005, more open with more exuberant white fennel developing with aeration. The palate is a little more spicy but still refined, well-defined with cherry, white pepper and a touch of warm alcohol just detracting from the finish. Still a very fine, just without the sophistication of the ensuing vintage. Drink now-2012. Tasted June 2007.

2005 Domaine Boucabeille Les Orris 87

A blend of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre and Carignan, this has quite a tight, coiled nose with plum, a touch of damson, blueberry and pine cones. Good definition. The palate is elegant and harmonious with a silky smooth texture, redcurrants, cherry and fennel although less garrigues than the Monte Nero '05. Perhaps just lacking a little character? Still a commendable wine. Drink now-2012. Tasted June 2007.

2004 Domaine Boucabeille Les Orris 87

The oak is just a little too evident on the nose with a touch of dark chocolate infused into the redcurrants, raspberry leaf and a touch of tobacco. The palate is again, very smooth and well-defined with a touch of chocolate and spice. I would prefer more grip on the finish that is just a little too dry. Fine. Drink now-2010. Tasted June 2007.

2003 Domaine Boucabeille Les Orris 88

This has a very ripe nose of macerated cherries, raspberry, blood orange and some white fennel. Good lift and definition. The palate is full-bodied, plump and round with good acidity considering the vintage. White pepper and just a touch of rosemary towards the finish which like the Monte Nero 2004 is just marred with some excess alcohol. Drink now. Tasted June 2007.

2002 Domaine Boucabeille Les Orris 91

This is a wonderful wine. A lovely, ravishing nose of sweet red cherries, kirsch, a touch of dark chocolate, fennel and pine cones. The palate is beautifully balanced with real garrigue character from start to finish. Raspberry, strawberry, a touch of dried orange peel with a tart cherry aftertaste. Refined, harmonious and wonderfully well focused. Excellent. Drink now-2012. Tasted June 2007.

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