



CHATEAU DE SAINT COSME

8th Newsletter Louis Barruol 2019

When you try and improve the quality of an estate's wines, you obviously have to ask yourself questions and work on practices in the vineyards and in the winery. You have to move forward on both fronts at the same time.

Initially, the changes you make to the winemaking, maturation and bottling processes have an immediate and highly visible impact on the wines. For young winegrowers, it is very encouraging to see the results of their work quickly.

But when winery techniques have been perfected, when you have distinguished between tradition, which is often coherent, and a few new ideas, progress comes to an abrupt halt. Although work in the winery is pivotal to revealing 'terroir effect', it will never change the deep-seated nature of the grapes brought to the winery. Thus begins a journey involving detailed work on a terroir and a vineyard. In this instance, the results are years in the making, and most certainly imply the long term. But this is also the most beautiful journey because nature is fundamentally positive: if it is not sullied, it generates energy, production and diversity on its own. When a vineyard is not polluted in any way, it will give you back a hundredfold the care and respect you put into it, in the quality of the fruit and wines it produces. The results of this work take a long time to emerge, but they are much more important than the progress wrought by good practice in the winery.

Then comes the last phase - those final strides. Such precision work on the vines requires a lot of time and resources. It does not always guarantee visible progress for all, but rather belongs to the realms of subtlety. In my opinion, this is the difference between a very good wine and a wine with a soul. Wines with a soul have the unique ability to reach out to everyone with ease.

Ironically, they are the most complex but the easiest to understand. Nowadays, this is the only approach of interest to me. The rest seems somewhat futile.

As I write these lines, we are in the process of finalising the purchase of an extraordinary historic vineyard that has long been familiar to us. It boasts a stellar terroir. Over the coming weeks, I will have the pleasure of telling you more about this wonderful story.

Wines from the Southern Rhône Valley in 2017

After a mild spring, flowering of the Grenache grape variety was very challenging in 2017, and was highly reminiscent of what had happened in 2013. Unfortunately, this is one of the risks when you grow Grenache: its propensity to develop 'coulure' (shatter or poor flowering) is a well-known fact, especially on the oldest vines. In times gone by, growers used to mix Grenache with other grape varieties because mixed plantings promote better flowering. Of course, we continue this practice, but sometimes Grenache does what it pleases and little can be done.

The Syrah and Mourvèdre produced normal quantities of top quality fruit. The tiny Grenache yields shaped very intense, tight-knit wines that will develop substantial ageability. You will notice that the amount of Gigondas wine available is very small. I am sorry about that, but we have to accept that nature cannot always give us exactly what we want.

Wines from the Northern Rhône Valley in 2017

Are very challenging vintages becoming a thing of the past in the northern Rhone Valley? With the previous difficult vintage dating back to 2008, it certainly begs the question. There is no doubt that rising temperatures now produce superb ripeness every year or almost every year in this part of the valley. A similar phenomenon can be observed with Burgundy Pinot Noir.

Conversely, this trend may not be as positive for whites. Viognier and Marsanne now need to be picked at the right time, and that means not too late, just like Chardonnay in Meursault. 2017 was symptomatic of this state of affairs, with extraordinary ripe, complex and profound Syrah irrespective of the appellation - St Joseph, Crozes-Hermitage, Côte Rôtie etc. The whites are expressive and saline and display openness and aroma. More than ever, the northern Rhone Valley truly is an incredible wine region offering a plethora of good wines. Its potential for quality seems almost boundless.

Comments on the 2018 vintage

I don't dislike vintages that present certain challenges. Strangely enough, they are sometimes the ones that best express the soil. If you savour our 2008 now, nothing suggests that this was a difficult vintage. Spring 2018 created extremely difficult conditions in the southern Rhone. Never before had we experienced so many issues with mildew. When it rains every three days and the temperature peaks at 28°C,

everything becomes very difficult. It was incredible to witness the excellent performance of organic vines compared to those treated with countless chemicals. The care we gave our vines in 2018 allowed us to harvest a very good crop in a vintage where many estates produced minute quantities. The wines are very good and have that liveness that nature imparts in times of relative abundance. The whites were picked early enough to preserve all the requisite freshness. Our experience of the soils in Saint Martin improves from one year to the next and we are in that phase where progress is fast. The limestone is clearly expressed in the freshness of the wines we produce here.

In general, and I include in this comment the whites and reds of the southern and northern Rhone, maturation of the 2018s will be very interesting because the wines lean more towards minerality than towards fruit. This is often what happens when ripening does not occur too quickly.

News of Forge Cellars, our American estate, Finger Lakes NY

Our work at Forge continues. We plant new plots of Pinot and Riesling every year. Our winemaking is increasingly specialised. We are persistent in our efforts, our only guide being the constant quest for quality. Journalists are giving us credit for this as our 2017 Riesling Classique has just been rated 91 pts by the Wine Spectator. Scoring above 90 pts has now become a habit and as a reminder, our 2015 Riesling Classique was rated 32nd in the Wine Spectator's Top 100. This year we are building an office above the winery and a new building will house our bottle stocks.

The south-eastern part of Seneca Lake is a truly magnificent site for the Riesling grape variety. The combination of schist slate with the cold climate, the north-westerly winds that come straight from Canada and constantly promote healthy vines, the West-facing aspect and the diversity of Riesling plant material that has long been propagated in the Finger Lakes, make this a true 'appellation'. The natural physiological balance that makes it possible to ferment bone-dry Riesling is quite exceptional and brings out the natural freshness in the wines that characterises top white wine sites. No other region in the United States can match the potential of south-eastern Seneca Lake for white wines.

We continue to work tirelessly to understand and classify these hillside vineyards. This is why we ferment more than 20 named sites each year. By doing so, we can learn. The monks of Burgundy did the exact same thing, and their results are well-known to all of us. When we are no longer here, others will continue this work.

Louis Barruol, 31st of January 2019