

New World Wines

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Newsletter

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This summer's wine adventure took me to Burgundy and the Rhone Valley. Although I have been importing Rhone wines for some time I had never visited the area, rather having tasted most of the producers' wines in London prior to purchase. Travelling with me was friend and fellow wine-lover Michael Bolt.

The first visit was to *Domaine Vincent Girardin* whose wines I have carried for three years now. They have just moved from Santenay to Meursault and are housed in a state-of-the-art winery just outside the village. Although lacking in charm the new facility will allow Girardin to expand production (he has just acquired an additional 20 acres of prime vineyards on a long lease) and function more efficiently.

In the company of his wife and manager Veronique we tasted a few wines and discussed the purchase of some of the few cases of white wines left over from the 1999 and 2000 vintages. The tasting notes:

Puligny Montrachet Les Combettes 2000

Lovely straw gold colour, firm acidity. Long finish. Will require patience but excellent.

Chambolle Musigny Village 2000

Good colour but a little herbaceous on the nose with not much fruit. Not bad for the vintage.

Gevrey Chambertin Lavaux St. Jacques 1er Cru 2000

Good colour, but lacking a bit of fruit and quite tannic. Although quite good it reinforced my view that the 2000 vintage was much much better for whites than reds.

Girardin's wines continue to get excellent reviews from the Wine Spectator and Robert Parker among others. The Corton Charlemagne 00 (95 points), Chassagne Montrachet Morgeot 99 (93 points) and Chassagne Montrachet La Truffiere 00 (93 points) are but a few examples.

Next stop was a new producer for me in the Pouilly Fuisse appellation, *Domaine Saumaize-Michelin*, a producer whose wines I had tried in London earlier. This was one of several "cold" calls during the trip. We drove into the village of Vergisson, located the winery on the village map and knocked on the winery door. She had no idea who we

were but with great kindness invited us to the cellar and proceeded to taste with us about twenty barrel samples of Pouilly Fuisse from different vineyards they managed.

They look after four distinct parcels but what made their approach interesting is that wines from the same parcels are matured in barrels ranging from two to eight years old, thus giving different tastes and sensations. All of the wines were from the 2001 vintage, which based on this tasting will be a bit leaner than their 2000 equivalents. She then pulled the cork on a bottle of Vigne Blanche 2000 and which reinforced my views on the quality of their efforts. I will be bringing in the 2000 vintage Vigne Blanche, which will retail for about \$20 a bottle.

After a stopover in Lyon we headed for Cote Rotie and Hermitage in the Northern Rhone. I have only just started to purchase small lots from these areas, in Cote Rotie from *Michel Ogier* and in Hermitage from *Domaine de Remizieres* (red and white) both from the 2000 vintage, and we did not visit any wineries. We did however drive up to the famous chapel on the hill overlooking Hermitage amidst some of the greatest vineyards (syrah) in the world.

As we traveled south the next stop was Cornas. I import the wines of *Alain Voge* but had not made an appointment as I had heard his tolerance for poor French was legendary. However on seeing that his Cave has open we decided to stop and say hello. We tried his village wines, red and white, which were sound and enjoyable. However when I mentioned that I had purchased some of his wines through an English wine merchant he immediately trumpeted that all the merchant wanted were his reds and not his whites and he wasn't happy about it. Although the whites play second fiddle to reds in the Rhone we did drink several lovely Hermitages and Crozes Hermitages over dinner.

Cornas is the last district heading south where Syrah is king. Gigondas is a pretty wine village set underneath the Dentelles, a strip of jagged mountains dominating the area. *Domaine La Boussiere* has vineyards relatively high in the hills in a stunning location. We drove up to look at them and the park from where some magnificent vistas are available. Back at the winery we were greeted by Thierry and escorted to their new cellar to taste through a number of wines.

The domaine has two principal cuvees, the Font de Tonil made from the oldest vines and a regular cuvee. The blend for both is approximately 70% Grenache and 30% Mourvedre, although the Font de Tonil has some Syrah (up to 10%) as well.

There is no destemming or filtration and production amounts to about 7,000–8,000 bottles of the Font de Tonil and 23,000 bottles of the regular cuvee in a good vintage. In an off vintage no Font de Tonil is produced. Younger oak barrels are used for the Font de Tonil.

Font De Tonil 2000

Solid core of fruit with quite a lot of alcohol on the nose. Good colour with spice and pepper notes. Some tannins but thick and juicy. Best in about 3-5 years.

Gigondas 2001 (barrel sample)

Still in its early stage but promising nose, with some alcohol present. Alcohol levels will be about 14.5%.

These are “old fashioned” wines made with modern methods. Because there is no destemming the tannins are present in young wines. They need some bottle age to show their best.

I stock the 1998 Gigondas and will soon have the 1998 Font de Tonil in stock. Both wines received 90+ points from Robert Parker. The Gigondas is currently available at Port O’Call.

After Gigondas it was on to Chateaneuf de Pape where we had an appointment with *Bosquet de Papes*.

I met with Nicolas Boiron and Madame Boiron, his mother. Some months earlier I had sought additional stock of the 1995 and 1998 wines but was advised that nothing was available. Remembering a story in Kermit Lynch’s book *Adventures on the Wine Route* (essential reading) I decided that I would pay special attention to Madame as it was clear that, as in many family wine concerns, she kept the accounts and allocations. Bosquet make three red cuvees (all Grenache based) and one white.

We tasted the following:

Grenache 2000

Lovely wine with balance and an element of sur-maturite. Ripe tannins – delicious.

Chantermerle 2000

Full of fruit, balanced but with some tannin, will require 2-3 years minimum before drinking.

White 2001

Made from Grenache Blanc and several other grape varieties. 10% of the whole fermented in oak. Dry and pleasant.

Tradition 2001 (barrel sample)

Nicolas indicated this would be another good year. Wine has not fully fleshed out yet but the flavours and balance were very good. Very traditional (again no destemming) and not extracted.

Chantermerle 2001

Higher in alcohol than the 2000 because of the heat, but the grapes were not picked until late September because they were slow in obtaining full ripeness.

Tradition 1998

Very classic “old style” Chateaneuf. The wine spent 15 months in oak barrels. An excellent vintage.

Tradition 1997

A lighter version of the '98.

Tradition 1996

Another lighter year, but good colour and aromatics.

Tradition 1995

Very drinkable and at its peak now.

Tradition 1994

More tannin than the '95. It seems unlikely that the tannin will disappear before the fruit does.

Chantermerle 1994

Quite a big wine, with more stuffing than the Tradition.

At the end of the tasting Madame and I chatted for a while following which I broached the subject of further cases of the 95 and 98 vintage. She thought for a few seconds and then agreed that a further 30 cases of each could be found from their "reserve". Of course the price would be a bit higher than before! It was a fair bargain and I am delighted that the 95 and 98 vintages will continue to be available. The 95 can be found at Horizons, the Reefs and Fourways Inn.

For a tourist the Rhone has much to offer as well. We had a number of good meals, but the wine lists, other than at the top restaurants are generally unexciting. Our penultimate meal was on a terrace at the village of Les Baux in Provence, looking out over the gorgeous countryside. July and August are perhaps not the best months to visit, not because of the heat (Bermuda is far more oppressive) but rather because there seem to be large numbers of tourists attending the many festivals that are taking place throughout the region, making traveling less peaceful.

Prior to going to France I had the opportunity to participate in a vertical tasting of Trimbach Clos Sainte-Hune Rieslings from Alsace with Clive Coates. This is the top cuvee from perhaps the greatest producer in Alsace. We tasted nine wines from 1976-1996. My favourites were the 1990 and 1996 vintages, although 1983 and 1995 were also outstanding.

I bring in the Marc Kredenweiss Kastelberg (Grand Cru) 1999 (also available in Miles Market). There is some residual sugar in the wines, but tasted with Thai food recently it was superb.

News

Four Deerfield Ranch wines were recently reviewed in the Wine Enthusiast magazine. The Syrah (Ladi) 2000 received 94 points while the others were all 90+ points.

New value priced additions this October include:

Domaine de la Janasse

Excellent wines from this Chateauneuf producer, including a sumptuous Vin de Pays (Merlot Syrah blend). At around \$13/bottle this wine is superb value.

Magpie Estate

The Beak, a blend of Mourvedre and Grenache, is priced at \$12/bottle.

Girard

One of the better producers in the Savigny Les Beaune appellation. I have a lovely fragrant 1999 red at \$20/bottle.

I am currently working on a few dinner possibilities for the winter months, details to follow.

John M. Sharpe

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