



## CHATEAU DE SAINT COSME

### 7<sup>th</sup> Newsletter Louis Barruol 2018

Usually, the texts I have the pleasure of sending you every year focus on our work at Saint Cosme, the objectives we are striving to attain, news of the estate, of its past, and its future. Their aim is to give you insight, “from the inside”.

This year will be a little different – as my father passed away in 2017, I have decided to make him the focus of my literature this year. Henri Barruol took care of Saint Cosme from 1957 to 1992 with my mother, then from 1992 to 2017 with my mother and myself – this amounts to sixty years of his life devoted to this estate. It would be impossible for me to sum up his life’s story in so few words, but by recounting it through the prism of time, I am going to try and give you an account of his achievements. I would also like to describe his inner self, and will therefore start with the end. At Saint Cosme, I can see my father’s spirit in everything I set my eyes upon: in the shape of a tree he planted and pruned as he thought best, in a stone he carved with his own hands where cool spring water from the valley gushes forth, in turtledoves in flight, walking through the vineyards he planted in his youth, or tasting a wine saw in his mind’s eye then shaped with his artistic hands. He left such a personal stamp on the estate that the list is endless. His guiding principle was beauty, in the way he did things and their outcome, in form and in substance.

His life began in August 1928 in the tiny Provencal town of Apt. He was the fifth in a family of nine children. When he was just a few months old, his family moved to the village of Mazan in the Comtat Venaissin, to a beautiful, large house flanked by a garden of which he kept fond memories. In 1938, he left to go and stay with his maternal grandparents at Château de Labelotterie in Tarn and would stay there until September 1940. Surrounded by his grandfather and his aunts, he thrived in its good-hearted, rewarding atmosphere: he would develop a taste for maths and a close bond with nature that would stay with him for the rest of his life. In September 1940, he entered the first year of secondary school at the catholic college in Aix-en-Provence, where – he would recount – he had the worst time of his life. Despite this, he would discover the pleasure of music with the choirmaster who understood his sensitivity and nurtured his singing. Life in France at that time, even in the South, was governed by rationing and deprivation, but he managed to ease the suffering of everyday life by using poaching techniques taught to him by the gamekeeper at Labelotterie: with his bare

hands he would catch fish in the streams of the countryside around Aix. On May 27, 1944, he was returning to Avignon by train via Marseilles when he survived two deadly bombings in one day. The incident would leave a lasting impression on him. He did not go back to the catholic school and spent the summer with his family in the ancestral home in Revest-du-Bion. On July 28, age 16, he saved his father's life in tragic circumstances. In 1946, he started his apprenticeship as a cabinet maker in Avignon. He would learn how to draw and received comprehensive instruction, as per the traditions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: everything was done by hand and every single discipline was learnt, from cabinet making to sculpture, marquetry to turning, a technique he particularly excelled at. When his uncle Gérard de Boissésou asked him for help in restoring the property at Labelotterie, he would discover farming and animal rearing which would stand him in good stead for when he became a wine grower/farmer ten years later in Gigondas. Once again, his stay in Tarn provided an opportunity to enhance his talents. When he returned to Mazan in 1950, he set up his own independent cabinet making workshop with financial support from the Laval family. He excelled in restoring antique furniture. During the 1950s, he would develop lasting friendships that led him to ride motorcycles, go rock climbing, skiing and pot-holing. He also sang in the choir and performed the lead role in lyrical plays.

His faithful friend Jean-Paul Laval introduced him to his cousin, Claude Rolland, who would become Henri's wife in 1957. This marked his arrival at Saint Cosme in Gigondas, where initially he continued to work as a cabinet maker. But his boundless energy would spill out over life in the workshop and lead him to train as a wine grower. He became passionate about winemaking through his friend Jean-Paul Laval, a chemist and winemaker, who had just established the region's first winemaking laboratory. He soon acquired in-depth expertise which he would relentlessly combine with his ingenuity, his keen sense of observation and analysis, his flair for aesthetics, his huge ability to work and his rigour. He replanted diseased vines and promoted the terroir at Saint Cosme. He restored the buildings and extended the cellar. He pioneered organic farming and attached much importance to living equilibriums, a nod to his passion for nature and particularly for birds. Forging and eliciting beauty from the surroundings became a lifelong passion for him. At the same time, he was an administrator at the Gigondas producers' organisation from 1966 to 1985 and was a member of the team that secured growth status for Gigondas, under the chairmanship of François Ay. The idea of serving others, friendship and community spirit would be his driving force throughout his life – he steadfastly dedicated these values to his wine grower friends and the Gigondas community. From 1992 to the final months of his life, he helped me continue his achievements on the estate for which he had a deep-rooted love and which became his cherished home. He never considered himself as its owner, but as its custodian whose mission was to embellish it and pass it on. This was the spirit in which his constructive nature expressed itself at Saint Cosme. To have a father like him and a mentor of that calibre in the same person was a stroke of luck that I appreciated more and more as the years passed. For me, the learning curve was a path lined with effort, work, discipline and difficulties, but also results, laughter, shared happiness and satisfaction.

It is important to understand that when my father began his life as a wine grower at Saint Cosme, our estate was just one of many: the wines it produced enjoyed no particular recognition. Admittedly, Saint Cosme had a prime terroir but one that was undeveloped and unknown – a kind of Sleeping Beauty. We owe the characterisation of this terroir and the precise definition of the “Saint Cosme style” to our father. That style is a sense of place that perfectly mirrors these unusual soils and above all, the cool, consistent micro-climate. It is finesse, freshness, balance and length, a unique soul like the immaterial wealth of people who live in a time-honoured home.

Finding a style that encapsulates terroir effect to perfection is probably the hardest thing to achieve in this profession and it is a talent shared by all great wine growers. In his quest for beauty and truth, which takes time, my father was able to draw on his many qualities, but I can pin down four aspects of his personality that in my opinion were decisive in the course of his life.

First of all, he had an exceptional capacity for work: he could work intensely for long days. His first

life as a cabinet maker and mountaineering gave him powerful arms and excellent physical fitness. Professional rigour was a foregone conclusion for him – he abhorred tasks that were left unfinished or poorly executed. Love of a job well done was ever-present in him.

His keen sense of observation helped him significantly in progressing as a wine grower: he could make the slightest symptom in a growing flower or a fermenting wine meaningful. He could interpret the behaviour of birds, analyse weather phenomena like nobody else, using every tool of perception available to man. This constant state of awareness fuelled his analyses and knowledge – “you never stop learning”.

His interest in the technical aspects of his job came from his training as a cabinet maker, but also from his scientific mind: his ambition of studying at Vaucanson college was unfortunately put paid to by the war. In the 1960s and 1970s, his winemaking skills were advanced for the time. He was a true inventor and made his own tools and machines that can only be found at Saint Cosme. There was no greater pleasure for him than making life simple with one of the great ideas that emerged from his workshop.

His artistic talents, developed during his training as a cabinet maker, drew their inspiration from 18<sup>th</sup>-century France and Antiquity. He showed an interest in every art form, especially music, painting, sculpture and architecture. He drew his own labels and designed the Gigondas bottle with its coat of arms. “Manual work is noble: hands are the instrument of the spirit and the sensitivity which breathes life into the material”.

By combining rigour and the essential pursuit of aesthetics, my father helped Saint Cosme emerge as a superlative terroir. We owe it to him that he gave voice to our old vines – a legacy that he respected, nurtured for decades and revitalised.

After growing up surrounded by history and archaeology, he led several restoration projects at Saint Cosme chapel which held such a special place in his heart. Several times, he restored and saved the Gallo-Roman spring which shaped life on the estate. He shed light on the two thousand year-old history of Saint Cosme and is largely responsible for its beauty and that of the valley in which it sits. He taught us how to live in harmony with nature and show respect for it, and that is not the least of his teachings. He transformed Saint Cosme into an estate for sharing, open to others – all of this will continue with me.

After a life filled with work, determination and challenges to overcome, he enjoyed seeing you, our customers, come and visit Saint Cosme and taste our wines. That you should pay so much attention to our wines brought him happiness and a sense of victory, at the end of a life filled with passion. When you walk around the estate, you are contemplating his life. When you enjoy a bottle of Saint Cosme, your eyes see an etching he drew in just a few hours, but your palate savours an achievement it took him sixty years to Forge.



Henri Barruol 1928-2017

## **Wines from the southern Rhone Valley in 2016**

How many wines of this calibre does a wine grower make in his lifetime? Certainly not many, because the 2016s from the southern Rhone Valley are quite simply extraordinary. Of course, we could launch into explanations to understand the difference between a ‘very good’ vintage and an ‘extraordinary’ vintage. We can stack up weather or agronomy considerations. We can list a series of natural events by way of justification. But the truth is much more complex and we must have the humility to recognise that all of this remains fairly mysterious. Why wasn’t 2005– which produced the finest fruit a grower can hope for – an extraordinary vintage? It is impossible to give an explanation. Why was 2007 – slightly warmer and almost insignificant when we fermented it – one of the most glorious vintages Saint Cosme had ever experienced? I still cannot offer an explanation. As one great Burgundy wine grower once told me: “there are no secrets, but plenty of mystery”. As for me, I will stick to careful observation, as my father used to: 2016 Gigondas wines have a dimension that is truly out of the ordinary. They have the intensity and precision of years when yields are reasonable, they are long and expressive. They are cut out for extremely lengthy cellaring, which will give us an opportunity to speak about them often in the future. On the downside, the crop was significantly smaller than in 2015, but let’s not deny ourselves the pleasure of celebrating a true gem in our cellar. Châteauneuf-du-Pape deserves a special mention: 2016 is quite clearly the finest vintage in Châteauneuf since the glorious 2010. I even suspect that 2016 is superior to 2010. In any case, I advise you to make an effort to keep your 2016s in your cellar for a few years because their freshness resounds with promise.

## **Wines from the northern Rhone Valley in 2016**

What if the 1990-1991 scenario were to repeat itself in 2015-2016 in the northern Rhone Valley? In 1990, the vintage was superb throughout the northern Rhone. The grapes ripened effortlessly and the wines were concentrated and rich, making them very palatable. It was a very ‘understandable’ vintage – virtually everyone could grasp its magnificence as soon as they tried it, even the least knowledgeable enthusiasts. Basically, everyone was happy. Then the cooler, later 1991 vintage came along, less rich than the 1990 (or at least so it seemed). As the weeks and months passed, the devilish 1991s began to reveal unsuspected qualities, particularly in Côte-Rôtie. Ageing had worked its magic and the caterpillar had turned into a beautiful butterfly. Few industry members had foreseen that in reality, 1991 was a greater vintage than 1990 in Côte-Rôtie. I am tempted to replicate this line of thought and apply it to all red wines from the northern Rhone Valley for the 2016 vintage in comparison with their predecessors in 2015. We can see now that the 2015s have become a little ‘enclosed’ in their concentration. They struggle to express themselves in a precise, vibrant way (I have previously noticed similar reactions in (over) ripe vintages such as 1999 and 2009). The 2016s, on the other hand, are literally in the process of offering a real display. I humbly admit that, like wine growers in 1990-1991, I did not see it coming. I thought 2016 would resemble 2011 – classic, balanced, appealing and very refined. In actual fact, the 2016s show impressive pedigree: they combine freshness with complexity endowed with length. The situation is exactly the same for Hermitage, Saint Joseph and Crozes-Hermitage. It is a true revelation. In the northern Rhone wine region, everybody is starting to understand this, and all the better. 2016 is my 20<sup>th</sup> vintage for Côte-Rôtie and I am always surprised by the unsuspected resourcefulness of these wines. “You never stop learning”.

## **Comments on the 2017 vintage**

It is very rare to have two great vintages in a row – and yet that is what we had the good fortune to witness in 2015 and 2016. Of course, two vintages of a comparable standard express very different styles. Also, there inevitably comes a point afterwards when you come back down to earth, and that moment was in 2017. That year in France was marked by many extreme weather events – hail, frost and drought – which explains why our country harvested the smallest crop in its wine growing history. Personally, I had hail to contend with in some Deux Albion vineyards, and a summer that was a little too dry for comfort. The resultant crop was tiny and comparable in volume to the 2013 vintage. Wines from 2017 are certainly less majestic than the two previous vintages, but they are still very good and show the intensity that comes from small yields. They remind me a lot of wines from the 1988 vintage which aged exceptionally well. 1988 Saint Cosme is now an absolutely perfect wine. In 2017, ripening progressed in a fairly unusual way: you would have thought that it would be an early-ripening year, but not at all. When vines lack a little water, they start to slow down to protect their fruit – which can be likened to children, to add a ‘human’ touch – and to protect themselves. So we harvested in October as usual. Vines regulate the excesses of the vintage, they regulate themselves, and they regulate the ripeness of their fruit – all of which has always troubled me. It’s as if, like the good mothers they are, they could understand what the wine grower expects of them. For the white varieties, it was essential to harvest as quickly as possible to ensure good balance. 2017 heralded in the first vintage of grapes from field selections of Marsanne for the white Deux Albion. Next year, the Bourbolenc, Clairette and Ugni blanc vines will come on-stream.

In the northern Rhone Valley, this was another wonderful, or even, extraordinary vintage. The wines show amazing density and precision – the ageing process is now revealing them in all their vibrancy. We will find out more over the coming months but be prepared for the best.

2017 was also our first vintage without the reassuring and caring presence of my father in the winery. He was deeply fond of harvest time and his absence was most certainly hard to fill. I missed his remarks, his comments, his questions and his visits when the grapes arrived on the sorting table.

When nightfall came, it was time to go to the winery and check temperatures or rack off some must from a tank that was threatening to spill its contents. The silence is in sharp contrast to the bustle of harvesting during the day - the sound of tanks bubbling and barrels fermenting, both of them delivering the sweetest smells, is no more than a faint background noise. My father, who was wary of the pernicious dangers of carbon dioxide, would often join me as I worked during the night, to check I was still alive! These light-hearted conversations were an absolute delight and I am thrilled to have grasped their full meaning.

## **News of Forge Cellars, our American estate**

This is a major breakthrough year for Forge, our Finger Lakes winery – our 2015 Forge Riesling Classique came 31<sup>nd</sup> in the Wine Spectator’s Top 100 for 2017. Five Rieslings from around the world successfully entered the extremely selective rating this year. In 32<sup>nd</sup> place, our wine outperformed the other Rieslings from Germany, Alsace and South Africa. This high-level recognition confirms Forge’s leadership position in our beautiful Finger Lakes region. I am delighted with this result just five years after the estate was founded in 2011. More than ever, I

am convinced of the extraordinary potential of the East shore of Seneca Lake. The thin layers of schist clay offer a magnificent base for our Riesling. The propensity of these soils to grow vines is obvious and the climate is perfect for producing top quality wines showing balance and freshness. Every year we plant Riesling and Pinot noir. Next year, the 10 hectares of our hillside at Matthews Road will be entirely planted.

Establishing a wine estate drawing on good ideas alone is a challenging enterprise. Doing so in a region that is unknown to the public is even harder. But I have never swum with the tide. I have always thought that with quality and beliefs you could climb mountains and that the sky was the limit. We have now defined a style of Riesling that we believe perfectly encapsulates the site. The style is based on ripe grapes harvested after a lengthy hang-time. The ripeness enables us to discard the sweetness whilst adding complexity and depth. It is essential to understand that sweet Rieslings are a parody of this marvellous grape variety. Please explain this to your customers and let them taste our wines.

We have worked extremely hard at Forge to create Rieslings whose aesthetics break the mould but are extremely logical. Now I need your help to take our work out to the public and transform the sometimes 'blurred' image of Riesling. You simply need to explain that you produce a bottle of Forge like you do a bottle of white Burgundy from the Côte de Beaune – the type of balance and pleasure is exactly the same. It isn't often that I ask you to help me, but today I'm asking for your help. Join in the adventure with me, at your level, and you will see – one day, Forge will become the natural choice for everyone.

Louis Barruol, January 31, 2018