



CHATEAU DE SAINT COSME

5th Newsletter, by Louis barruol, 2016

What is magical about being a wine grower is that, year after year, we realise that the only thing we really know is that we know nothing, or at least very little. However, we can draw on the challenge that nature offers us to find the energy and optimism needed to progress in an initiation process that usually lasts an entire lifetime. As one great wine grower for whom I have the greatest respect once told me about his wines and *terroir*: “*There are no miracles, but plenty of mysteries*”. Our era, which sets more store by science than by mystery, can sometimes have a detrimental impact: whilst it is always interesting to characterise reality using scientific protocols, how dull our job would be were it not for the joy of observing the power of place to deliver a wine that sparks emotion, even though we are at a loss to explain why. Sometimes I feel like saying to wine growers, “*put your certainties to one side occasionally and let your heart speak a little*”.

Wine growers who have an intimate and long-standing relationship with the land they farm do not need to travel or taste hundreds of wines to get closer to the truth and release these emotions. Their task is not about casting their net wide, but about gaining in-depth insight - science and ultra contemporary wisdom, in which immediacy rules, are of little help. I am not sure that an obsession with immediate gratification, which currently translates to the ‘supremacy of fruit’, is a worthwhile avenue for wine growers to explore. Time is a constant and our job is governed by the natural ebb and flow of the universe: no one can escape this. The bond between the mystery of *terroir* and the initiation of the wine grower is established over the long term: great wines, those that have a spirit and occasionally even exude spirituality, are formed at the crux of this relationship. The *terroir* of Saint Cosme has brought me more joy than ever before and I suspect it is capable of giving me even more in the future because I have yet to discover its limits.

This year, we planted a wonderful field selection of Marsanne in Saint Martin, as well as some Piquepoul blanc. It has grown very well and the selection process reminded my father of the first Syrah vines he planted at the end of the 1960s when he had to collect canes from Hermitage, quite simply because it was the only way of propagating this northern grape variety that was not widely found in the south. 2016 will be the first vintage of the white vineyards we have now been planting for three years. The large amount of limestone in the soil gives me a lot of hope and I am looking forward to tasting the wines this *terroir* has to offer. Until then, the outcome is still very much shrouded in mystery...

Wines from the southern Rhone in 2014

It is always interesting to look back over notes written a year earlier on a recently completed vintage. Last year, I wrote that the 2014s reminded me of wines from the 2000 vintage. As I write these lines, the 2014s have been aged and are ready for bottling. I am sticking by my initial judgment: they are absolutely comparable to the 2000s – round, soft and balanced with a ‘northern’ aromatic spectrum and civilised tannins. The 2014s have matured well as is often the case in cool years. Their quality improved significantly during the ageing phase and they even became more mellow.

During blending, we decided to use Valbelle in the classic Gigondas blend, as in 2000 and 1999, which are magnificent today. Hence, there will be no Valbelle in 2014 but you will undoubtedly be able to sense its presence in the classic Gigondas. We also downgraded some of the press wines that did meet standards required for the Saint Cosme Gigondas. We do this because we want to be proud of our wines and our labels, even in a year that is slightly more challenging than others. We also do it for you, our clients and ambassadors of our wines who want to share their experience with others. My judgment of my wines is not important, yours is.

In 2014, the Les Deux Albions Côtes du Rhône boasted a high percentage of Syrah (40%), imparting a lot of depth and structure to the wine. For this particular label, vintage variation is a lot harder to detect. From a cellaring perspective, have no qualms about storing 2014 Saint Cosme wines because vintages that enjoy slightly less sunshine have as much ageability as those from warmer vintages, sometimes more. Once again, follow your own opinion – that’s the one that counts.



Wines from the northern Rhone in 2014

The star of the 2014 vintage in the northern Rhone Valley is probably Condrieu. Weather conditions were superbly suited to producing white wines, promoting lengthy ripening with cool temperatures that even produced some ‘dry’ botrytis, always of great interest for the Viognier grape variety. Syrah in Côte-Rôtie, Saint-Joseph and Crozes-Hermitage experienced a lengthy growing season and late ripening, giving the vintage classic character comparable to the 2012s. Finesse is patent along with red berry fruit aromas that bear a certain resemblance to Pinot noir. Their round, feminine tannins make them suitable for early drinking but, a word of caution, Côte-Rôtie must be kept for four or five years because it goes through a dormant phase before revealing itself. For our Côte-Rôtie, this occurs around its fifth year. For example, the 2010s and 2011s have now reached peak expression. So it would definitely be a good idea to wait until 2019 for the 2014s. As the northern Rhone Valley is the ultimate home of hillside vineyards, terroir plays a critical role here. Syrah wines do not need to be plump and concentrated – their needs are not great when it comes to displaying sense of place. 2014 is a good prism through which to understand this.

A brief review of the 2015 vintage

In Gigondas, 2015 got off to a very favourable start: a long winter, a perfect spring and a good supply of water to the vineyards combined with generous sunshine. Flowering was impeccable, consistent and avoided any climatic upsets. The logical consequence of this was the formation of beautiful clusters of Grenache made up of myriad tiny grapes clinging to thin, light stems. The ratio of stems to berry size is the key to quality tannins when whole bunch fermentation is used. A good amount of juice is required to obtain civilised tannins, but you also need a decent amount of ripe skins to produce depth. That's why I really like to see good-sized clusters comprising small berries. Small clusters, like those in 2005, are appealing to the young, perfectionist wine grower, but they can often prove hazardous for balance in a wine. In July, hot weather hastened ripening, followed by a cooler August punctuated by two spates of beneficial rainfall. As always, September alternated between fine weather and intermittent rainfall which at least prevented the vintage from being too early and again imparted a little more balance to the wines. These were easy to vint, as is often the case in excellent vintages, and 2015 is just that. Fermentation was easy and consistent and low malic acid content gave the wines crucial robustness and stability. There are two moments in the life of a wine when you can easily see its inherent character: at the end of fermentation when the wine is still on the pomace and when it is aged and fully mature. These are my two favourite stages – although seemingly opposites they are actually closely related. In 2015, wines on the pomace were already clearly revealing their character as sappy, long, expressive and extremely well-structured wines. However what struck me most, as soon as fermentation started, was their elegance – there is such an elegance to them! Maybe the term has become a little hackneyed for wine nowadays, but in 2015 it regained some of its significance. The Gigondas are perhaps the best since 2010. Something slightly magical is occurring with the 2015s whose progress reminds me slightly of 1991 Côte-Rôtie. From a tasting perspective, it is not the most expressive of vintages, but in terms of emotion, it is incomparable. For my 25th winemaking season at Saint Cosme, I am discovering yet another vintage that differs from all the others. I will always be taken aback by the creativity of nature and am delighted to be doing this job.

In 2015, the northern Rhone is competing for the limelight with the south. Côte-Rôtie is demonstrating once again that it likes fairly hot summers – the clue is in the name, Rôtie (roast)! Think back to the summers of 1998, 2003 and 2009 and you realise how accurate the correlation is. With the Syrah varietal, phenolic ripening and optimum alcohol levels always occur simultaneously. In slightly warmer years, ripening is quicker but does not cause problems with balance, provided the grapes are not harvested too late which, admittedly, in our line of business is not the most difficult thing to achieve. 2015 is therefore a great vintage but do not expect to taste highly concentrated Côte-Rôtie, like the 2009s – this is more a vintage of intensity, depth and complexity.

In any event, 2015 will be a landmark vintage in both the northern and southern Rhone, particularly for Gigondas and Côte-Rôtie.

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Prowein Düsseldorf Allemagne: du 13 au 15 mars 2016 HALLE 12 – E28

Vinexpo Hong-Kong: du 24 au 26 mai 2016

Auspices du Gigondas: lundi 4 avril 2016 et Gigondas sur Tables : lundi 18 juillet 2016

The New York Wine Experience: du 20 au 22 octobre 2016