

SÉMAPHOR

N°4 - APRIL/MAY 1996

THE NEWSLETTER OF LE VIEUX TÉLÉGRAPHE AND DOMAINE LA ROQUETTE



VINS DE CÉPAGES OR VINS DE TERROIR ?

For a vigneron representing the fourth generation of winemakers in the same family, producing wines in the mother of all appellations d'origine contrôlée, whose prime distinguishing feature is that it allows wine to be made from a blend of 13 varieties of grape, the issue is not even open to discussion: "respect for the terroir comes before everything, let's leave the -vins de cépage- to the New World!" But why have these products enjoyed such success, when, for tasting, priority is given to the variety from which they derive and not, as we have been taught daily since childhood, to the consonance between microclimate, grape and soil? Maybe because there is a simple taste to understand, making it far easier to sell. Maybe too because some grape names have "gone international" and, associated with well-defined aromas, provide the novice consumer with clear signposts. There again, maybe it's simply a phenomenon of fashion... and of price. But when you really think about it, isn't the current success of these approachable wines both a boost for the spirit of wine and a breeding-ground for consumers of vins de terroir?

Shifting from one kind of wine to another is perhaps not as simple as it seems, but to be a good musician it's certainly advisable to take theory lessons!

WHAT'S NEW IN BOTTLE

How reassuring it is to put a fine vintage in bottle! Bottling is such a peaceful affair when you are convinced of your wines' potential - as was the case this year with the 94 and 95 vintages. It's now a habit to begin this period of work with the Pigeoulet rosé: we feel the 1995 is the most elegant and harmonious of all the Pigeoulet rosés vinified since 1989. The Grenache and Cinsault are almost perfectly balanced, between creaminess and finesse; the colour is soft, complex and slightly tile-red as we like in Provence, while the palate offers the fresh aromas and creaminess of southern rosés, counter-balanced by fine acidity.

A versatile wine, then, whose only fault this year is that there isn't enough of it.

In mid-April, it was the turn of the 95 Châteauneuf-du-Pape whites to be trapped in to the phase when their fruit begins to rise.

The 95 Clos La Roquette white is one of those vintages that offer great pleasure and work equally well as an apéritif or with a starter or fish dish, never disturbing the balance and harmony between food and wine. Subjecting its organoleptic features to in-depth scrutiny, however, proves difficult: the traditional aromas of apricots and white flowers are definitely there, but with such discreet finesse that telling them apart is exceedingly difficult.

All in all, it's pretty, shy and rich; and pleasantly straightforward on the palate, with a definite hint of vanilla.

The 95 Vieux Télégraphe white has a bouquet distinctive of its *terroir* - honey, white peaches, already-ripe aromas - which consolidate its style as a mealtime wine rather than an apéritif. On the palate, an impression of well combined freshness and creaminess; though it possesses the fleshy features of a hot-summer vintage, citrus and apricot aromas give the wine the freshness needed to keep its balance on the finish (it's

definitely more accessible than the 94, but less complex).

As for the 94 Châteauneuf-du-Pape white, as we write (14th May 1996), bottling at La Roquette has just finished, while at the Vieux Télégraphe it has just got under way and will continue until early July. It's always good to point out that the philosophy we apply to bottling of the reds is based on two main principles: there's no filtration at all, and the label's entire production is bottled at the same time.

The 94 La Roquette red has all the qualities of a "Vin gourmand": a bouquet of kirsch, blackcurrant and pine resin, while generous but not overly rich on the palate. The tannins are present but nicely mellow, the

balance is respected and rounded off by black fruit and liquorice aromas. It's forthright on the finish, though maybe slightly short of length, but doesn't it call to mind the few days of rain that punctuated the 94 harvest?

The 94 Vieux Télégraphe red has flavours of varying intensity just asking to be combined in the coming years: the bouquet is vinous, slightly *sauvage*, with notes of kirsch (its hint of "cherries in alcohol" is slightly reminiscent of the nose of the 89s).

On the palate, the taste's richness and complexity hold sway: at the same time there are fresh aromas of red berries, liquorice and spices, topped by very distinctive, slightly dry and aggressive tannins; but when you recall the crop's degree of maturity, they have every chance of acquiring a royal mellowness with age.

Were we to compare the 94 Vieux Télégraphe red with its predecessors, maybe we could situate it halfway between the 89 and 90.



**Sémaphore*: n. (from *sema-* and *-phore*). In days gone by, an arm-waving transmitter of Claude Chappe's aerial telegraphy.

VIEUX TELEGRAPHE'S CUVÉE X NOT TO BE!

When visiting the Vieux Télégraphe, some of you may have had the opportunity to taste a small vat different from the general blend, which we regularly use to experiment with different varietal proportions, mainly using more Syrah and Mourvèdre as opposed to the Grenache.

Many of you are bound to have read, in the famous review "The Wine Advocate", tasting notes on the 94 vintage of this experimental *cuvée*, which often ends up in the final Vieux Télégraphe blend- the differences not being pronounced enough to single it out with a specific bottling.

In the 94 vintage, however, we noticed a

stronger concentration of tannins and a different sensation on the palate, thus breaking with the Vieux Télégraphe's habitual balance.

That's why - particularly this year - a small amount will be bottled so that its structure can be monitored over a longer period, and the lessons we learn from it used to benefit all the red wines we make.

Of course, the tiny amounts which will be produced mean that we can only offer it to you for tasting at the vineyard and it will not be used for sales purpose worthy of the name (the amount put in bottle will be only 0.82% of the Vieux Télégraphe blend).

VITICULTURE

MATURING RED WINES IN WOOD AT THE BRUNIER VINEYARDS

Generations of vignerons know how useful wood is for maturing "vins de garde": oak is irreplaceable.

Unlike hermetic vats (stainless steel, enamel, concrete...), oak is made up of fibres more or less tightly bound which help the wine to oxygenate, breathe through the wood, mature nobly. Experience shows that time spent in wood softens the tannins, develops the aromas and naturally enhances the wine's complexity. But how can the relationship between wood and wine be kept harmonious, how can one avoid misusing those well-known smoky, toasty, vanilla-scented aromas, far removed from the personality of the *terroir*?

The southern Rhône Valley is one of the French wine-making regions where the use of wood is a most delicate affair. For the Mistral and heat take turns to create an

extremely dry climate, thus increasing its influence on the wine to a staggering degree.

In addition, the grape varieties used (mostly Grenache) are very often prone to oxidation.

Indeed this is why our ancestors went for a capacity greater than the *barrique* - the *foudre** - so the high proportion of wine to oak



slows down the maturing process, though without checking it completely.

At Brunier Vineyards, for our

Châteauneuf-du-Pape reds we stick to the tradition of a year's maturing in *foudre*, from which our wines extract much more fullness, balance and depth than they do oakiness (we know by experience that a longer period would harm their creaminess on the finish).

Put in wood two months before their first birthday, the wines are gently racked halfway through the stint, with a view to bottling a few weeks short of their second birthday.

In using this traditional (and quite unfashionable) technique we are principally seeking the true expression of the grape varieties of our *appellation* and the identity of our exceptional *terroir*.

* *Foudre*: m.n. Large capacity barrel (from 50 to 300 hl).

• IN BRIEF •

A NEW TASTING ROOM AT THE VIEUX TELEGRAPHE

We had long been aware that the Vieux Télégraphe's reception and tasting room wasn't a model of its kind. Work was done this winter to create a convivial, professional area where tasting will be a pleasure. It will be operational from about 15th June - a fine opportunity to pay us a visit...

THE BRUNIER FAMILY IS GETTING BIGGER: BABY CHARLOTTE ARRIVED ON 16TH JANUARY 1996

Up until 16th January 1996 the fifth generation of Bruniers linked to the Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe consisted of Manon (7 years old) and Nicolas (5), the daughter and son of Florence and Frédéric; and Edouard (aged 3), Sylvie and Daniel's son, who now has a delightful little four-month-old sister called Charlotte.

94 PIGEOULET RED RUNS DRY

The 1994 crop of Pigeoulet red was so meagre that such a situation was to be expected. We are no longer able to deliver any Pigeoulet red for the time being, but the 95 will be bottled in July and thus be able to step in to the breach.

1995 VIEUX PAS DES PAPES

The 95 vintage of the Vieux Mas des Papes will come on to the market in late 96 (October/November). This wine is made wholly from Grenache and Mourvèdre; the aromas are fresh and generous, and the structure quite supple for a 95. It should fulfil its role as a second-grade wine very well.

Total production is 40,000 bottles, with no magnums or half-sizes.

SÉMAPHORE

PUBLISHED BY:
Vignobles Brunier
Route de Châteauneuf-du-Pape
84370 BEDARRIDES - FRANCE
Tél. 90 33 00 31 - Fax. 90 33 18 47

EDITORS:
Maguy et Daniel Brunier
Alain Narjoux

ARTWORK:
Terre Neuve

PRINTED BY:
Imprimerie Rullière-Libecio

TRANSLATION: Birdwell Institute

For 6 people.

• Ingredients: 9 to 10 quality pure-pork sausages, 4 soup spoons of olive oil, red wine, a knob of butter.

• Put the sausages in a saucepan of cold water.

• Heat to boiling and cook for 2 mins.

• Drain and repeat once.

• Dry the sausages.

Sausages in Red Wine

by MAGUY BRUNIER

• Heat the olive oil in a thick-bottomed cooking pot, add the sausages (whole) and brown all over.

• Cut them into pieces, cover with red wine, cook briskly for a few minutes, then simmer (with the pot covered) until the juice thickens.

• Add the fresh butter and serve hot with steamed new potatoes.