

SÉMAPHOR

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THE NEWSLETTER OF LE VIEUX TÉLÉGRAPHE, DOMAINE LA ROQUÈTE AND DOMAINE LES PALLIÈRES



MAGUY, OUR FAIRY, HAS FLOWN AWAY

She had the elegance and goodness of an elderly yet ageless lady who laughed off the passage of time – or, at least, gave the impression it made no odds to her. She had the joy of a young

girl, spreading happiness all around. She could talk to children better than anyone; listen to adults lacking a confidant; and care for people of her own age while appearing twenty years younger. No one knew that she was eighty-seven. And she left us so quickly, early this year, that it seemed, once again, as if she had not wanted to bother family and friends; she never sought attention.

That day, we lost our little fairy, the mother who departs too soon, as they always do. And very soon we realised that we were not alone in our grief; she had left a huge void, a chasm that stretched well beyond the family circle, as reflected in the wonderful and deeply moving messages we received. She was at once a link in the chain and our building's foundations, centre and pillar; a friend and confidant; always ready to enjoy the good times that beckoned, as well as caring, reassuring, and offering her affection and good cheer to anyone who silently expressed the need, whom she always heard.

Never did a message to her go unanswered. She was inter-generational like many beautiful people are. She radiated, she comforted... she quite simply loved the human race for what it is, and not a single person lucky enough to meet her could forget the sense of peacefulness that she naturally created around her. Her kitchen was in her image: refined, generous, and full of flavour. She was a link straight back to the old days, when only taste mattered. And that was her true talent: she was a marvellous blend of the old lady, who bore witness to a reassuring past, and the most modern of minds, never surprised or ill-at-ease with the issues and dispiriting aspects of today's world.

This somewhat idyllic portrait seems to have been painted through eyes too close to reality for its true details to be conveyed. But not at all: those who met her, even for just a few moments, will tell you without exception that this was truly Maguy.

Daniel Brunier

2013: A SURPRISING VINTAGE

At a time when we have barely finished bottling the 2012 vintage (after a two-month rest in bottle, it will go to market in September); and when we are preparing to receive the fruits that will become the 2014 vintage, we must look back at the origins of the 2013; adopt it once and for all, scrutinise it, and decide and conduct the blendings for the second year's ageing of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Gigondas reds.

Each vintage can typically be summed up in a short sentence containing much of the truth. For the 2013, this would be something like "a normal-rainfall, relatively cool vintage".

But we know that this kind of "normal" is expressed in mm per year. Take a closer look at the period in question and you see that autumn and winter 2012-2013 were fairly dry; that this shortage was offset by heavy rain in very late winter and early spring;

and that the summer was very dry except for July, when rainfall was three times the average. Over 12 months, this adds up to a “normal” year’s rain... Of these details, the very wet July stands out: from experience, we know that this factor heavily influences the structure of a vintage, with supple tannins and a very distinctive finesse (1996, 2001, 2011).

As for temperatures, they were mild in autumn, fairly cool in winter and spring, and then normal during summer. The important point prompting us to say that the vintage was “cool” is the fairly low temperatures when the growth cycle was beginning; these largely explain the lag observed at the start, and which continued until harvesting, which took place at the same dates as back in the ‘80s.

To be exhaustive, we must mention an exceptional phenomenon that occurred during the flowering period (middle third of June) and had dramatic consequences for the crop: very high temperatures hit the southern Rhône Valley, when the vines were less advanced than usual; they suddenly showed a growth surge, to the detriment of flowering. The outcome, coupled with other factors such as the harsh winter and a large temperature range in June, was heavily reduced fruit set in the Grenache vines.

By September, we were still waiting for the grapes to ripen, very slowly, in a vintage that was already heading for one of our lowest yields in the past 20 years. The *secateurs* began snipping on La Crau on 18 September; the harvest and vinifications went smoothly, made much easier by the small crop and the fairly cool temperatures of a late harvest. We soon saw that the Grenache had let us down: average yields were 20hl/ha in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, 15hl/ha in Gigondas and 30hl/ha in Ventoux and Vaucluse.

The Pigeolet red bears clearest witness to the coolness of the vintage. A very fresh fruity nose, and fairly vinous, but on the palate there’s a slight lack of richness, typical of the Caromb area (Ventoux) in late-harvest years. It has backbone, elegance and balance, with no sense of under-ripeness affecting the tasting experience. A feminine Pigeolet.

Moving west, we quickly find the amplitude we expect of *Mégaphone*. The nose is very well expressed, with extra depth; and on the palate the wine is winningly broad-shouldered, elegant and rich, with strong liquorice notes, very velvety, complex and well balanced. It nicely weds density and vivacity, which is definitely also a sign of this vintage.

Even further west, Les Pallières’ rosé, Au Petit Bonheur, is a great satisfaction. In its usual mealtime-rosé style, this vintage possesses the richness, freshness and grip typical of its personality. One could criticise it for behaving like a white, i.e. a discreet bouquet unusual in the rosé family, and a salinity on the finish

that allows it to be served with food, like a serious white wine; but it was never our ambition to create a fruit-led rosé as dictated by fashion.

The Pallières reds are at once dense and fresh. We have here a vintage with truly low yields, but this tension is only perceptible in the structure of the two blends.

Terrasse du Diable offers superb colour. The nose is pretty and fresh, but not very explosive. On the palate, this is a classic Pallières, with liquorice to the fore; the bitterness of youth is fairly present, while its freshness and balance reflect the distinctive northwest exposure of the vineyard. Richness is not a word that comes to mind; rather, it displays concentration and backbone, with good tannic structure and attractive length.

Les Racines offers a more velvety, vinous bouquet, deeper and less fruit-forward. On the palate it is dense and dark, with violet-flavoured liquorice candy, and also very classic in style. On the palate, the wine doesn’t open up initially, and the general impression is still that of a throwback to our ‘80s vintages: finely chiselled, classic and subtle, with elegant tannins.

The Pigeolet white is fairly true to character. A very expressive, upfront bouquet, then ample, rich and opulent on the palate. It may lack the frame of its Châteauneuf big brothers, but its fruit is agreeably and most vivaciously expressed.

Clos La Roquette this year exhibits exemplary finesse on nose and palate. An obviously floral bouquet, while on the palate it is ideally concentrated and balanced; the oak generally noted in its youth is very well integrated; a hint of aniseed, a salty edge, remarkable length... This is truly a quintessential mealtime wine.

The Vieux Télégraphe white is less immediately satisfying. The bouquet is faintly austere, while still expressing very pretty aniseed notes and a deep-set frame. On the palate: very ample, velvety and deep, with white flowers, but it’s clear that this vintage will only show itself after at least six months in bottle, as is often the case with vintages of strong character. You sense that many elements are gestating.

With the Châteauneuf-du-Pape reds, what we have is not a great wine but a handsome vintage with well-defined character.

Our “shortened” range is wonderfully – and naturally – persuasive.

Télégramme 2013 is a real charmer on the nose: pretty, fresh and vinous – and quite different from its two predecessors, which were dominated by super-ripe aromas. On the palate, pure pleasure: velvety, creamy and spicy, while a slightly bitter cocoa edge imparts balance and frame. On the finish: upbeat, slightly sweet, very Châteauneuf, very Grenache.

..one our lowest yields in the past 20 years...

Piedlong is a little more intense in colour, and this extra intensity and depth is present throughout tasting. The nose is peppery, fairly tight-knit, and deep; on the palate the wine is nicely settled, attractive, rich, elegant, silky and tinged with liquorice; its structure is well in evidence, clean-cut, not at all aggressive or drying. We are wholly within the standards of elegance of the Piedlong-Pignan terroir.

Vieux Télégraphe is, as usual, less forthcoming, but its bouquet is attractive and freshness-led, the vintage's signature. On the palate: no heaviness, good grip, and appealing length; it's salty,

with lush fruit and well-contained richness. Here we have one of those vintages that are not compellingly rich, but well organised and chiselled, and whose balance will permit very lengthy cellaring.

Overall, then, a surprising vintage: despite very low yields, the wines are well balanced and tend towards pleasant freshness, good definition, and backbone, without the slightest heaviness. They can, perhaps, be likened to the '81s and '01s.

AN OLIVE OIL BY VIEUX TÉLÉGRAPHE

We are fortunate to have in the family two extremely talented olive farmers and millers, who for more than 15 years have been working together to build the reputation of their estate, Domaine Castelas in Les Baux de Provence, on the southern flank of Les Alpilles; but also to extensively upgrade quality standards and working conditions in the AOP Baux de Provence area and, more widely, in the AOC Provence area.

Jean-Benoît Hugues and his wife, Catherine Brunier-Hugues, are now considered to be leading professionals in the cultivation of the tree of peace and in making oil from local olive varieties in historic terroirs.

We are also fortunate to have in our family some olive trees, whose crop has for many years been used in making Domaine Castelas oils.

As vines and olive trees share the same terroirs — in the full sense of the word — and as they are complementary in the local biotope and its scenic harmony, the wines of our southern Rhône Valley areas make a perfect match for the irreplaceable

taste and texture of a fine olive oil.

To come full circle taste-wise, in a sense, we have decided, starting with the 2014 harvest, in partnership with Catherine and Jean-Benoît, to create our own Vieux Télégraphe Olive Oil and package it in three recipients: 250 and 500 ml glass bottles and a three-litre BiB.

In our region, as across the Mediterranean lands, olive oil is an integral part of the daily diet. It features in the simplest through to the most sophisticated dishes, but it is also often consumed on its own — with a piece of good bread, for example, just as one often tastes a wine in its own right, in a large glass, unaccompanied.

This is the spirit in which we wish to promote our region's olive oil: as an ambassador for the flavours of a terroir shared with

our vineyards and with the culinary traditions of the Mediterranean.

It will be available to taste at Christmas 2014.



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