

SÉMAPHOR

N°5 - JANUARY 1997

THE NEWSLETTER OF LE VIEUX TÉLÉGRAPHE AND DOMAINE LA ROQUETTE



TO THE CHILDREN OF THE TASTELANDS
It's almost a refrain these days, a question constantly on the lips of lovers of authentic produce who are fighting the creeping standardisation of taste; as laws and regulations become international, will products of the terroir, with all the imperfections that make them the genuine article, be able to survive?

To raise the issue is a platitude, but if it crops up so often it's because there is real cause for concern. How much longer will we be able to buy cheeses, at our village markets, which are no longer made (nor have been for a long time) in compliance with the hygiene measures decreed by the international authorities? Charcuterie is in the same predicament: we'll soon need a parallel network to obtain saucisson that actually tastes of saucisson. For us winemakers, filtration and sterilisation are the twin swords of Damocles hanging over our heads. Fortunately, the sediment in our bottles is not deemed harmful... for now. But how long will that last?

Perhaps they are also thinking of imposing a maximum percentage of alcohol in wines, which would be quite in keeping with the current anti-alcoholism laws.

But the more questions we ask ourselves, the more questions come to mind and you realise that it is important to make our children aware that their role in the matter will be essential, for the day when all this doubting is no longer part of our daily struggle... then maybe it will be too late.

1996 VINTAGE: NATURE TAKES A BREATHER

Nineteen-ninety-six was a year of contrasts in the Rhône Valley; the seasons, disrupted by frequent rainfall, had trouble coming into their own.

From January to April there were no truly cold spells, but a wet winter and the first signs of spring, shy and cool. Bud burst came a week later than usual. From 6th April onwards, it was well and truly springtime; temperatures began picking up, while the rain persisted (highly positive at this stage of vegetation). Then came a period when temperatures stayed above normal, and which continued until 21st June. Indeed the highest temperature of the year was recorded on 12th June - an exceptional event.

Summer shyly made its entrance, with relatively cool temperatures until 14th July. Only then could the heat really be felt, and it lasted only up to 10th August. The summer rain fell little and often, and when September came there was already a feeling of autumn in the air; in all the terroirs, the grapes were struggling to reach maturity.

The first Syrah grapes were cut around the 17th, followed by the Cinsault, then some white-grape varieties. After a week of changeable weather, the cold set in until mid-October and the Mistral blew.

This is where the vintage was lucky: the sources of rot stopped developing right then, and the Grenache and Mourvèdre were finally able to attain full maturity, enabling the vigneron to vinify some fine vintages. From the north to south of the Valley, the reds have bags of fruit and appealing volume, but generally lack tannic structure. The whites are very fine overall, and some are excellent.

At Châteauneuf-du-Pape, one finds exactly the same features: attractive reds albeit with limited ageing potential, and superbly well-balanced whites with fresh, vigorous fruit. At the Vieux Télégraphe and La Roquette the

small crop, coupled with stringent sorting during the harvest, resulted in an average yield of 28 hl/hectare, 20% down on a typical year (and the same as in '94). The reds have now barely completed their malolactic fermentation, the colours are generally fairly decent, and the various varieties do not differ excessively, as in years of hot weather, but are well-harmonised and offer fairly similar palettes of aromas; there is good volume and the tannins are not very prominent, even in the Mourvèdre. To sum up, a feminine, well-balanced vintage that will reach maturity before the '94 and '95; a wine for the table that calls to mind the '81 vintage.

There will definitely be a '96 Vieux Mas des Papes red, and this is where the philosophy of a second wine makes perfect sense, for it allows the first wine to be concentrated.

The '96 whites benefited from the lack of heat: they are simply beautiful, fresh, elegant, rich, with good balance and the traditional aromas of white flowers, honey, apricot, citrus fruits and

The Châteauneuf-du-Pape White is a great vintage.

grilled almonds. These are complex wines with the balance that long maturing demands.

The Pigeolet rosé also enjoyed the lower temperatures: it is abundantly fresh, fruity and elegant, and is following the quality curve plotted for it a few years back.

The Pigeolet red, less sensitive to the differences in vintages, is what one would expect: pleasantly fruity, appealing, though maybe a shade less concentrated than its predecessor.

But generally speaking the '96 vintage, while possessing the great quality of vintages that have to be drunk young, will always suffer the misfortune of arriving after such a fine '95!

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

LIEU-DIT: LA CRAU

You may have noticed that on the Vieux Télégraphe label, Châteauneuf-du-Pape has, since early October, been joined by another name, that of the *lieu-dit* (a hamlet or, if uninhabited, simply a place) where the vineyard is located: La Crau.

Unlike some wine-producing regions in France, it is not the custom in Châteauneuf-du-Pape to give the name of the *lieu-dit* on the labels.

There are several reasons for this: many of the estates have vineyards that are extremely scattered and therefore lie in more than one *lieu-dit*. Most of the estates in a single parcel already use the name of the *lieu-dit* in the name of the Château or Domaine (as in, Domaine La Crau), and the habits and customs of the appellation have always meant that it is "one and indivisible", without classification or *lieu-dit*: this is the strength and weakness of the mother of all Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée.

But the people who work there daily well know that from north to south, and from east to west, there are substantial variations in soil, subsoil and microclimate.

La Crau is situated in the south-east of the appellation at an altitude of about 130

metres (one of its highest points), at the boundaries of three *communes* - Bédarrides, Courthézon and Châteauneuf-du-Pape - which it covers in roughly equal proportions. It's a vast, stony terrace, gently south-sloping, where the vine settled several centuries ago.

Its roots stretch down into chalky-clay soil, which is protected by a layer of pebbles on the surface and lies on a thick stratum of impermeable red clay. This means that heat is accumulated at the surface and evaporation reduced, and the subsoil retains the spring rainfall in order to supply the roots at the opportune moment.

This complete terroir, naturally suited to the climatic demands of the southern Rhône Valley and the local production rules, often serves as a control in the various experiments conducted on the growing of vines "*en terres castel-papales*", as Châteauneuf-du-Pape was called in the Roman era.

As the vignerons of historic Appellations, our first task is to give life to the terroir, to help it express itself, and to show respect for it; for everyone knows that the terroir is the essential element in creating a noble, characterful wine.

For the wines of the Vieux Télégraphe, La Crau is this essential element, and well deserves a nod of recognition.

LA ROQUETTE / VIGNOBLES BRUNIER IS TEN YEARS OLD

SEPTEMBER '86 TO SEPTEMBER '96:
TEN YEARS AND 11 HARVESTS.
THAT'S HOW MUCH EXPERIENCE

WE HAVE ALREADY NOTCHED
UP BY PURCHASING
DOMAINE LA ROQUETTE,
JUST A DECADE AGO.

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING,
WE FOCUSED OUR EFFORTS ON ANALYSING
THE DIFFERENT TERROIRS
THROUGH THE RESULTS OF
VINIFICATION, AND ESPECIALLY
ON RESTORING SOME PARCELS
OF VINES WHICH HAD NOT BEEN
WELL CARED FOR. NO HUGE
INVESTMENT HAS BEEN MADE
IN THE CELLAR, BUT THE
EQUIPMENT IS NOW BEING
USED DIFFERENTLY, THUS
ENABLING US TO ENHANCE
THE QUALITY OF THE WINES
IN LINE WITH OUR EXPECTATIONS:
THE STAINLESS STEEL VATS
ARE NOW USED FOR VINIFICATION,
WITH PRECISE TEMPERATURE
CONTROL; PRESSING IS
PERFORMED BY A PNEUMATIC
PRESS, AND THE WINE NOW
MATURES BETTER IN WOOD.

WE SOON NOTICED THAT
THE PERSONALITY OF THE

DOMAINE'S

SOILS WOULD LEAD US TO

MAKE FEMININE WINES - HARMONIOUS

AND REFINED, ALTHOUGH RICH - AS OPPOSED

TO THE TRADITIONALLY MASCULINE CHATEAUNEUF-

DU-PAPE. THIS IS BECAUSE THE DOMAINE CONSISTS OF

FOUR TERROIRS. WE WERE ALSO QUICK TO ANALYSE THESE

TERROIRS' WEAKNESSES: THEY LIE MAINLY IN THE DELAY IN

MATURING EVIDENT IN CERTAIN VINTAGES, WHICH REQUIRES US

TO BE PARTICULARLY ATTENTIVE AND TO TAKE QUITE A SIZEABLE

RISK WHEN DECIDING ON HARVESTING DATES. IN 1988 THE

PIGEOULET - VIN DE PAYS LABEL WAS CREATED, AND A SEARCH FOR

BALANCE (BETWEEN FRAGRANCE, TANNINS AND VOLUME) WAS

UNDERTAKEN, ENDING IN THE 1993 AND 1994 RED AND ROSÉ

VINTAGES. IN 1991, THE DOMAINE'S OFFICES WERE TRANSFERRED TO

NEW PREMISES IN BÉDARRIDES GROUPING ALL VIGNOBLES BRUNIER'S

SALES AND ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENTS. JANUARY 1994 SAW

ALAIN NARJOUX TAKE CHARGE OF THE CELLAR TEAM AND IMPLEMENT

VARIOUS PROJECTS INVOLVING VINIFICATION EXPERIMENTS, WHICH

HAD A HIGHLY POSITIVE EFFECT ON THE NEXT THREE CROPS. THE

VINTAGE OF THE DECADE EMERGED IN 1995: SLIGHTLY MORE

COMPLEXITY, FULLNESS AND BALANCE THAN THE '90. IN 1996, A

NEW LABEL WAS CREATED TO CONVEY THE DEGREE OF MATURITY THE

WINE HAS NOW REACHED. THE 31 HECTARES (28 IN THE

CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE APPELLATION AND THREE FOR VIN DE PAYS)

ACQUIRED TEN YEARS AGO ARE NOW TEN YEARS OLDER TOO,

PROVIDING GREATER POTENTIAL QUALITY IN ADDITION TO THE

UNSTINTING EFFORTS OF THE VARIOUS WORKTEAMS. WHILE ON

THE SUBJECT, WE WISH TO THANK THE ENTIRE LA ROQUETTE

STAFF, WHO HAVE PROVED HIGHLY ADAPTABLE; AND

PARTICULARLY HÉLÈNE AND GILBERT FALGON, WHOSE

SKILL AND PROFESSIONALISM HAVE ENABLED THE

MARRIAGE BETWEEN THE DOMAINES VIEUX

TÉLÉGRAPHE AND LA ROQUETTE TO

DEVELOP PRODUCTIVELY.

• IN BRIEF •

VIEUX MAS DES PAPES BLANC

With the '96 vintage, the Vieux Mas des Papes white came into being. Blended from Clairette, Grenache Blanc, Bourboulenc, Terret Blanc, Picpoul and

VIEUX MAS DES PAPES



Roussanne, all young Vieux Télégraphe vines (planted in 1991). This is an easy-drinking wine, fresh and creamy, to be tasted in 1997.

THE LECLERC-SOUTHEAST AFFAIR

Those of you based in south-east France are sure to have seen the 1994 Vieux Télégraphe red in the Leclerc hypermarkets' catalogue for September/October. There was a photo in the literature but no wine on the shelves. Only two or three stores had managed to obtain six or 12 bottles to avoid being liable to charges of deceptive advertising, and most of them had not even bothered. They stop at nothing.

• PRESS •

CUISINES ET VINS DE FRANCE N°34 - NOV. 1996

"1994 Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe red: An intense bouquet of spice and blackcurrant; full, solid and well-structured on the palate, with the pungent flavour of fresh truffles on the finish. It sums up the inimitable style of the Vieux Télégraphe. To be laid down for 6-8 years."

DECANTER - OCT. 96, PAGE 48

The 1990 red vintage of the "Les Galéans" label, used to market Domaine La Roquette wines in some countries, won the only five-star award at *Decanter's* October 1996 tasting of Châteauneuf-du-Pape wines.

SÉMAPHORE

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TRANSLATION: Birdwell Institute

For six people.

Ingredients: 6 pears, 1 bottle red wine, 150 g sugar, 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon, 1 liqueur glass pear brandy. • Peel the pears, stand them upright in a saucepan.

- Add the sugar and cinnamon.
- Cover completely with wine.
- Cover the saucepan, simmer gently for 40-

Pears in Red Wine

by MAGUY BRUNIER

50 mins, checking the pears' tenderness with a needle (it should easily run through them).

- Take the pears out with a skimmer and arrange on the serving dish. • Reduce the juice, and allow to cool to lukewarm before adding the brandy. Then pour over the pears.
- Serve cold.