

# SÉMAPHORE\*

SPECIAL VITI  
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THE NEWSLETTER OF LE VIEUX TÉLÉGRAPH AND DOMAINE LA ROQUETTE



**V**IGNERONS FIRST AND FOREMOST!  
*As you will have noticed on several occasions while reading "Sémaphore", or talking to members of our team, our primary vocation is to be "vignerons" - at least, we do much to merit this description. Granted, we have a love of wine and of vinification, but in our view this is far from enough to make great wines. Fine healthy grapes from a great terroir, ripened naturally with no irrigation, mean more than all the world's wine makers put together. Fair enough, I hear you say, but you still need the terroir to underpin that kind of reasoning! True, but how many growers are straying from a terroir-oriented approach to ensure bigger, earlier, safer harvests, and in doing so are losing their identity and long-term strength? How many wines from great terroirs are no longer evocative of them, and - with or without their makers' realising it - are turning into humdrum products that have to jostle in the marketplace? We felt it essential to detail the responsibilities of the "vigneron's" craft; the weight on his shoulders throughout the year; the changes he must respond to in the unending search for better results, while at the same time paying the greatest respect to his produce and environment. We have therefore decided to devote all of the second part of the sixth "Sémaphore" to the vines themselves; and, in a few words, to touch on all the onerous, complex duties of the people who tend to them. For during the winter, contrary to received wisdom, only the vines rest up.*

## SEMAPHORE'S DELIGHTED!

We're delighted indeed, to announce that two exceptional vintages have been marketed: a 1995 red and 1996 white. This year's bottling got under way in highly confident mood, given the quality of the wines being handled. First off, as early as March, was the 1996 rosé Pigeoulet: pleasingly balanced and fresh. Like the whites, the 1996 rosés enjoyed climatic conditions conducive to good acidity and well-married fruit and structure - always a tricky affair in the Southern Rhône Valley. In late March it was the turn of the 1996 white Châteauneuf-du-Pape, which lived up to our initial estimates: it's a great vintage. This time round, Clos La Roquette has taken on a superior dimension (achieving complexity and volume); considering the vines are only 11 years old, we believe its future is more than promising. The nose is fresh and floral with hints of

aniseed; on the palate, the first impression is of a freshly vigorous wine, which gives way to creamy volume and ends on a long, clean, elegant finish. A faint bitterness can be detected in the central palate, denoting a wine that is still very young and on its guard. For both Vieux Télégraphe and Clos La Roquette, we would go as far as to say that this white vintage is the most successful of the past decade. Last year, it should be said, lent itself especially well to vinifying white wines: the summer was cooler, and August damper, than usual; the resulting slow, even ripening curve has enhanced the wine's elegance, fruit and nervy demeanour. Vinification still respects our basic guiding principle: to make *vins de terroir* representative of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation, while trying to avoid the pitfalls that marketing and fashion lay in the *vigneron's* path. In our view, the 1996 white Vieux Télégraphe strikes the balance between freshness, complexity and nobility that one expects from the wines of this appellation: the nose is deep and discreet, with white flowers mingling with toasty and honey aromas. In the

mouth it is fresh, full and surprisingly long. Definitely worth laying down. The 1996 Pigeoulet was the first red to be bottled, in April, much earlier than usual. The decision was forced on us as the previous vintage ran out prematurely. This one might not have the '95's volume or structure, but what a pleasure! Fresh fruit, a fullsome character and appealing harmony... to be drunk without moderation. As for the 1995 red Châteauneuf-du-Pape's, bottling of La Roquette ended on 15th May, just as that of the Vieux Télégraphe got under way; completion is planned for late June, according to what is now a well-tuned schedule. Both wines truly possess the features of a great vintage: the 1995 La Roquette is deep garnet-red in colour, with a nose of

### The 1995 Vieux Télégraphe brims with concentration of every kind

kirsch, cherry stones, and slightly smoky notes; the palate is spicy and concentrated, though not excessively so, coupled with an elegant, velvety richness. The tannins are conspicuous but not overbearing, and well-combined with very ripe fruit aromas suggestive of Morello cherries and prunes. It has good balance, which we have every reason to think will be sustained throughout its lifetime. The 1995 Vieux Télégraphe brims with concentration of every kind, without falling into the tasting-wine mould: it remains faithful to itself, a wine to be savoured with a meal, for pleasure. It is deep and intense in colour; the nose is redolent of kirsch, very ripe black berry fruit and prunes, slightly overmature and pleasantly gamy. The mouth offers good volume, concentration, richness and balance too. During tasting, there is no dip in sensation: from beginning to end, volume and intensity are sustained. The tannins are very present, but not surprising or dry. In short, it's big and *gourmand*. *Sémaphore's* (tasting) cup runneth over.

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

# THE VINEYARD

## A GENERAL PRESENTATION

Vignobles Brunier covers a total of 100 hectares, 97 of which are in the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation and three in the Vin de Pays area of the Principality of Orange. Sixty-nine hectares of Châteauneuf-du-Pape are situated on Plateau de la Crau, on the south-eastern boundary of the appellation; this is the Vieux Télégraphe vineyard. The 28 hectares of the La Roquette plantation are more scattered: 40% is located on the stony plateau called "Pied-long" in the centre of the appellation; 35% on various central and southern slopes; and 25% on the sandy soils of the adjacent *lieux-dits* Roquette and Pignan (right in the centre of the appellation).

The three hectares of Pigeoulet lie on the strip of modern alluvia that separates the River Rhône from the southern part of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation.

This land was set apart at the turn of the century from what became the A.O.C., for being too rich, sticky and damp.

This diversity of soils naturally causes difficulties in the adapting of grape varieties and methods; in addition an array of treatments must be used, and levels of maturity vary - which becomes an advantage at harvest-time, however, allowing picking to be staggered.

Besides this extensive palette of soils, we have to

## THE PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy, choice and conviction guide our work; let's call it our "reasoned culture". This involves pondering the advantages and drawbacks of all our daily acts and how they affect the quality of the grapes; and also tolerating a number of vineyard predators.

The manure used is natural organic humus; spreading, where necessary, is dictated by our observations, soil analyses, leaf diagnoses, and of course by our low yield target, which we wish to keep down naturally (our ten-year average is 30 hl/ha).

Pruning too is determined per parcel, taking into consideration the age, vigour and variety of the vines. The soils are tended using traditional methods; and some, moisture-sensitive parcels are naturally grassed in order to regulate the vines' water requirements.

In the spring, debudding by hand is performed: the young fruit-bearing shoots are selected to achieve the best-possible cluster quality and distribution. This is done both on goblet-pruned varieties and those for which the use of training wires is permitted (Syrah and the white varieties), with the aim of improved exposure and aeration.

In July a first harvest is carried out, mainly on the youngest, most productive parcels: part of the crop is sacrificed to shorten the odds of producing a quality juice.

As for treatments, years of experience have enabled us to

cope with a second substantial constraint: the range of grape varieties needed to assemble Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

We have chosen to marry three red grapes: Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre, with Grenache the most common; and in the past 15 years or so, Mourvèdre has increasingly been favoured for replanting instead of Syrah. The white varieties currently used for the fine wines are Clairette, Roussanne, Bourboulenc and Grenache Blanc. We are experimenting with Picpoul and Terret Blanc, which feature in the Vieux Mas des Papes blend.

Each of these varieties, due to age and characteristics, requires quite particular care. The average age of the vines is 50 for the Vieux Télégraphe reds, 35 for the red Roquette, 25 for the white Vieux Télégraphe, 18 for the red Vieux Mas des Papes, and 11 for the white Clos La Roquette.

To carry out all the tasks that making wine entails, a 12-strong team works day in, day out. During the most intensive periods, the permanent staff are bolstered by precious reinforcements - not to

mention, of course, the 60 pickers taken on for the three-week harvest.

But we know full well that our working philosophy and aspirations are what determine the extent of the task.



considerably cut back the amounts used, by observing far more accurately, and to include them in a holistic approach that respects the auxiliary fauna.

To fight diseases such as mildew and oidium, the traditional Bordeaux spray and sulphur

still have to be used, while in the battle against the grape-worm, sexual confusion is fast becoming a weapon: the idea is to prevent the male and female butterflies (eudemis) from mating, which in turn prevents eggs being laid and larva hatched. All that's required is the hanging, in springtime, of about 250 capsules per hectare filled with female pheromones,\* which diffuse their imperceptible scent until harvest-time: the male has terrible trouble finding the female.

Which brings us to harvesting: this is done by hand, as in all the great appellations, where the growers want to be able to sort the grapes before tanking.

One last detail (though less an operation than an AOC state of mind): we never irrigate. Maturity is reached naturally - a necessary rite of passage if the full measure and personality of the different vintages are to be respected, and the sine qua non for a soil to be granted the name *terroir*.

\**Pheromone*: glandular secretion similar to hormones, but released by the body.

• THE APPELLATION'S 3,200 HECTARES STRETCH OVER FIVE COMMUNES: BÉDARRIDES, CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE, COURTHÉZON, ORANGE AND SORGUES.

• THIRTEEN GRAPE VARIETIES ARE AUTHORISED: GRENACHE, CLAIRETTE, MOURVÈDRE, PICPOUL, TERRET, SYRAH, COUNOISE, VACCARÈSE, PICARDAN, CINSULT, MUSCARDIN, ROUSSANNE

### THE CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE APPELLATION: A FEW FIGURES

OBTAIN THE CHÂTEAUNEUF-LE-PAPE LABEL IS 12.5°.

- THE MAXIMUM AUTHORISED YIELD IS 35HL/HA.
- THE ORIGINE CONTRÔLÉE CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE (FRANCE'S FIRST AOC) WAS CREATED IN 1929.

AND BOURBOULENC.

• TWO COLOURS OF WINE ARE AUTHORISED: RED AND WHITE.

• THE MINIMUM DEGREE REQUIRED TO OBTAIN THE CHÂTEAUNEUF-LE-PAPE LABEL IS 12.5°.

## SÉMAPHORE

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