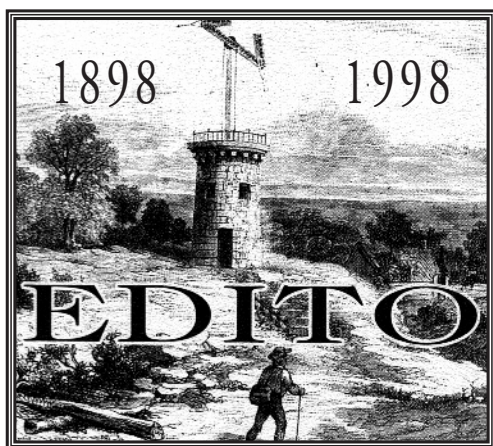


SÉMAPHOR

N°7 - FEBRUARY 1998

THE NEWSLETTER OF LE VIEUX TÉLÉGRAPHE AND DOMAINE LA ROQUETTE



LE VIEUX TELEGRAPHE IS A HUNDRED YEARS OLD, AND NOTHING HAS REALLY CHANGED!

Nothing has changed, in truth, since 1898...

It's a figure of speech, naturally, a way of saying in a few words that just about everything has been tried, that several times there has been total upheaval, that people have been and gone, with their qualities, their characters and their goals, all of them quite different.

It's a way of saying that just about all the work of grape-growing has been mechanised, that horses have given way to increasingly efficient tractors, that machine tools have replaced human hands in the doing of many tasks, and that our wines, once drunk locally, are now distributed around the world.

It's also a way of saying that, in a sense, we have come full circle; after a great many internal revolutions, silent yet inevitable, a certain wisdom has now filtered through, so that we can now address, with quiet serenity, the issues and the changes that lie ahead.

And, most of all, it's a way of reaffirming that the philosophy founded on a *vin de terroir* - no tricks, no substitutes -, as made by our ancestors at the start of the century, remains instilled in us today: respect for the soil, for the grapes and for the local traditions.

1997: A GOOD VINTAGE, CONSIDERING

In 1997 alone, the Rhône Valley was visited by a number of climatological rarities.

While January followed on uneventfully from autumn '96, with high rainfall allowing the soil to build up reserves, in early February we entered a long period of intense drought, which only broke in the first days of May.

Drought is a phenomenon virtually unheard of at this time of year; modest, vine-sustaining rains are the norm.

During this spell, we also recorded temperatures markedly higher than average, which fostered vegetation almost a fortnight ahead of a normal year's schedule. Unfortunately, in mid-April the temperature plummeted for several days, causing widespread damage to the vegetation. More than 8000 ha of vines were hit by frost, and the crop would be heavily reduced as a result.

Even so, the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation was spared the worst of the cold snap, thanks to a light northerly wind which continued to blow on the heights.

After the long drought, June and July brought an excess of rain and further surprises. A heavy hailstorm driven by furious winds pelted the southern Rhône Valley on 18th June, taking its toll on a strip of vines, including about 800 ha in the north of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation.

These two months alone set the tone of the 1997 vintage, leaving August and September to bear the hefty responsibility of offsetting or underscoring the trend.

Indeed the early gain observed in the spring was partly lost at this time.

August was fairly hot, with normal rainfall, while September treated us to the finest indian summer of the past decade, as if to make amends for the harsh vagaries suffered earlier in the year.

It was, in short, a year full rich in drama - and hardly soothing stuff for the vigneron, who tackled the harvest somewhat breathless but reassured that clear blue skies had, finally, settled on the Valley.

Harvesting got off to a slightly later start than forecast due to the large reserves of water in the ground, which upset the process of concentration.

All in all, from north to south the

wines contain very nice fruit, pleasantly fresh and with good volume on the palate, but generally lack tannic structure.

In the Châteauneuf-du-Pape appellation, these features are in evidence to varying degrees, depending on the soil.

At Le Vieux Télégraphe and La Roquette harvesting finally began on 10th September, although planned on 1st September (counting from the date of full flowering), and the summertime heat stayed unfailingly with us to the last day.

The reds are attractive without being big; they offer a very interesting palette of fruit, and particularly fresh aromas; they have a good presence on the palate, full and fat; and it ends in a hint of sweetness, typical of the vintage, which considerably subdues the tannins.

Indeed on the finish, the vintage feels a little easy: *gourmand* rather than severe. Which, this tells us, points to ageing potential of about ten years.

The reds are attractive without being great...

We would liken it to a '85 but with greater balance.

The white is most interesting, benefiting from a year of intense fruit and a climate conducive to gradual ripening and to reined-in nerviness. It's very fresh and fleshy, with good volume and complexity; after the '96, then, another fine year for the white.

There will of course be a 1997 Vieux Mas des Papes red and white; the blends are not yet finalised, but we have a good idea: bags of fruit and a relatively easy structure.

The Pigeoulet rosé, meanwhile, is the reflection of a year notable for its freshness and fruit - just what we would expect.

The Pigeoulet red will resemble the '96 in style, with perhaps a little more volume on the palate but the same degree of tannic structure.

To sum up, returning to the above comparison between the '97 and '85 vintages, we might venture a little further and say they are halfway between the big, *gourmand* '85 and the spicy, well-balanced '93.

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

A NEW WINERY FOR DOMAINE LA ROQUETTE IN 1998.

Or rather, at long last, a proper winery worthy of the name, for fermentation was previously conducted in various places, partly outdoors, organised from one year to the next and adapted as best we could (and often not too well) to our changing needs.

And that's the real reason for getting such a project under way: the demands of the wine world, and our desire to offer wines that express as faithfully as possible our expectations and philosophy.

Which doesn't mean we're installing banks of state-of-the-art fermentation equipment; that erases the features of the terroir, and with the passing years pigeonholes the wines by family of taste, their personalities suffering as a result.

No, our plan is quite the contrary.

Going back to a system which conveys the grapes to the vats by gravity, as they did in the old days, is far from easy. But it's worth it, allowing occasional destemming according to the variety, the age of the vines, the maturity of the stalks, and so on. It also reduces oxidation of the fruit by eliminating the pipes and pumps - thus ensuring excellent cellar hygiene.

It's a simple concept, consonant with our *vin de terroir* philosophy, our sensitive varieties of grape and our hot climate, but it could only be put

into practice by radically overhauling the winery. Now devatting will be done entirely by gravity too - the aim here being to simplify the work but also to avoid any pumping, which is liable to give the grassy tones of wines from vats whose contents haven't been destemmed.

As you'll have realised, two themes running through the project are gravity and the simplifying of tasks. We should add a third: accessibility to the grapes during fermentation, provided by the introduction of «lift-lid vats». Put simply, we are making cap-punching possible in addition to traditional fermentation; in fact we have already been doing this for several years, with very satisfactory results.

To these central ideas will, of course, be added details equally as important to the project's execution, to its equilibrium and to the realisation of our goal, namely to give future vintages something «extra».

But extra what? It's difficult to define and especially hard to quantify.

What we are sure of, though, is that we winemakers, and users of the forthcoming cellar, will take great pleasure in being there; and if this pleasure finds its way into our wines, we will have achieved our goal.

HOW'S «L'HIPPOLYTE»?

In the course of 1996, and in issue 4 of *Le Sémaphore*, we voiced our opinion on whether Le Vieux Télégraphe should yield a *cuvée spéciale*: «no *cuvée spéciale* on the market, but a *cuvée expérimentale* which, in deserving years, will test a feature or prominent trait of the vintage in question.»

This *cuvée* bears the name «L'Hippolyte», in memory of the Domaine's creator, representing the first generation of Bruniers to enter the vigneron's trade at Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

There have of course been similar experiments in the past, but since 1994 they have

been structured and accorded official status by the label «L'Hippolyte», although none of the *cuvée* is sold. Since then, what have they taught us, or confirmed?

For the reds, thanks to the '94 and '95 - two dense, structured vintages - we have been able to re-analyse the influence of wood on our wines and confirm our position on the subject.

The *barrique* makes a difficult bedfellow for Grenache, which accounts for 65% of our final blend. *Foudres* (at least 50 hl, old or new), when tended in the best of conditions, entirely respect the wine's character and confer creaminess and irreplaceable volume on the palate.

As for the whites, the '96 and '97 confirmed that we might benefit from fermenting more juice in wood than the

now-standard Vieux Télégraphe practice of 20% in wood, 80% in vats.

Without overdoing the woody aromas, wine that is about 30-40% fermented in wood seems markedly more complex, richer, more unctuous, though slightly less fresh; but given that our white

wines serve mainly to accompany food, and not as an aperitif, we wish to favour a complex rather than a fruity register.

But all this is stringently limited to shades of character, and there is clearly no question of disturbing the existing balance; we are merely feeling our way, little by little, towards a greater nobility.



• P R E S S •

A big «thank you» to Pierre Casamayor, who, in the December '97 *Revue du Vin de France*, in his «Un domaine au microscope» feature (pages 108-110), focused on Le Vieux Télégraphe.

The article is entitled: «VIEUX TELEGRAPHE, Noblesse castel-papale». What a lovely present for our 100th anniversary!

Again in the *Revue du Vin de France*, this time the February '98 issue (no. 418), in an article by Dominique Couvreur, what an honour and pleasure to see four Châteauneuf-du-Pape wines brought together with Alain Senderens' superb winter menu.

Each course is married with its own Châteauneuf-du-Pape - heady stuff indeed!

The 1981 Vieux Télégraphe red swayed the matchmakers, who felt it was an appealing companion for the second course, «*La poutrelle*» (a substantial sort of *daube*).

In his yearly report on Châteauneuf-du-Pape - autumn '97, letter 113 - which centred mainly on the 1996 vintage, Robert Parker awarded only three marks of 90/100 and above, to what he calls the «*cuvées classiques*», as opposed to the «*cuvées spéciales*» that have flourished in recent years. Le Vieux Télégraphe was one of the three.

The 1995 La Roquette red obtained a «Vin d'exception» gold medal in the wine competition at Cavaillon Fair (in November '97) in addition to earning the «Excellence» accolade at a Châteauneuf-du-Pape tasting organised by *Vins Magazine*, January/February '98, issue 25.

SÉMAPHORE

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PRINTED BY:
Imprimerie Rullière-Libeccio

TRANSLATION: Birdwell Institute

Serves 6

Ingredients: 1.5 kg diced beef (knuckle, chuck, shoulder) - 4 onions - 6 carrots - 1/2 cup olive oil - 1 bouquet garni (thyme, bay leaf, parsley) - 1 small piece orange peel - 1 litre red Châteauneuf-du-Pape - 1 handful black olives.

- In a cast-iron pot, warm the olive oil, onions, bouquet garni, salt and peppercorns.

Maguy's daube

- Add the beef and sauté without browning.
 - Add the (chopped) carrots and the olives, and cover with the wine.
 - Put a lid on and heat to boiling.
 - Turn down the heat and allow to simmer gently for 4 to 5 hours.
 - Serve on hot plates with fresh pasta.
- P.S.: It's even better when heated up.