

# SÉMAPHOR

N°8 - JULY 1998

THE NEWSLETTER OF LE VIEUX TÉLÉGRAPH\* AND DOMAINE LA ROQUETTE



## MERCURIAL MOMENTS

What a pleasant surprise I had, a few days ago, on the terrace of Le Bain-Marie in Avignon, to be served a Gigondas '96 red at cellar temperature, almost chilled: what a delight, at the exact moment when it starts to gain a few degrees in the glass!

All the freshness of the aromas is preserved, the wine's freshness is fully intact - which, in short, helps to win people over. On that evening it happened to be a Gigondas, but the same goes for all the wines of the southern Rhône Valley, and especially those of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Paradoxically, wines that are native to hot regions cannot stand being tasted at high temperature. So in these summer months, for goodness' sake, Sommeliers and Restaurateurs, give our red wines every chance of pleasing our common customers, who are in your hands.

Respect the efforts we have made to obtain wines that are balanced in spite of their richness, by offering them at tasting, and not room, temperature.

I thank you in advance.

Daniel BRUNIER

## PLEASURE IN A BOTTLE

Two pleasure-oriented vintages have been bottled this year, and are available to you now: the Châteauneuf-du-Pape whites and Pigeoulet rosés and reds from 1997; and from 1996, the Châteauneuf-du-Pape reds.

As usual, the Pigeoulet rosé was bottled first, starting in March, to give it plenty of time to rest before the onset of the hot weather. It is characterised this year by a perfectly brilliant colour: pink with distinctive tile-red tints, a typical trait of the Provençal rosés; the nose is fresh and appealing; and there's a harmonious fullness on the palate, elegant and fairly fresh. The '97 vintage was all about fruit, and the rosés and whites are the great beneficiaries.

For the Pigeoulet '97 red, bottled in the spring, the tasters are already unanimous: it boasts fruit, a balanced palate and a freshness that all serve its purpose as a wine for daily drinking.

This year, the Châteauneuf whites were bottled much later than usual; this was made possible by the way work in the cellar was organised, and can only do them good.

Little by little, the Roquette white is asserting its personality: vintage after vintage, we can feel the sandy soil of the *lieu-dit* La Roquette conferring finesse and elegance. The nose of the '97 is most particular: honey, beer yeast, white flowers; the palate is of honeyed aromas, with good balance and richness on the finish. The slight bitterness one finds in some vintages, when young, is entirely absent this year, leaving an attractive roundness in its stead.

In the Vieux Télégraphe '97 white, recently taken to market, we find the harmony of the beautiful years, with, as a bonus, a quite particular freshness on the finish; the nose is of white peaches, apricots, vanilla, with a faint woodiness; and on the palate there is creaminess and balance, ending with both fresh and sweetish tones that afford all its finesse and personality.

In a nutshell 1997 is, as we announced at the start of the year, a very fine vintage for the whites.

Meanwhile the Châteauneuf-du-Pape red - the '96 - has been undergoing bottling since early May. The process is wholly

traditional, with no fining or filtration, since the 20 months' maturing enables the wines to clear quite naturally, at the tempo set by racking.

The vintage is, in itself, representative of the type of wine that is already open, round and velvety - to be tasted, then, well before the '95 and even the '94.

The Roquette '96, for its part, has superb colour - an intense ruby -, a nose of very ripe grapes and prunes, and is at once rich and *gourmand* on the palate. It gives off an impression of balance in which the aromas, the volume and the tannins concur to offer a moment of true pleasure. It certainly can't offer the complexity or potential of a '95, but is generous in a more simple, direct and yielding manner: a vintage to be drunk within six to eight years, and which, as early as this winter, will assuredly content enthusiasts of young Châteauneuf.

*"The 1996 vintage gives off a sensation of velvet, of immediate pleasure"*

The Vieux Télégraphe '96 also typifies the year. On this subject, one of the cornerstones of our philosophy is to vinify

the different vintages according to what they are, to their potential, to their character - not to force nature's hand, but, on the contrary, to copy it in order to reach the balance of a *vin de terroir*. The nose is distinctively of fresh fruit, with no animal notes for the moment; on the palate, liquorice and spicy aromas predominate; and it is harmonious in volume, with well-blended tannins.

This vintage gives off a sensation of velvet, of immediate pleasure. As a result, we have decided to make it available substantially earlier than usual, so that the stocks of the '95 can be preserved.

Thus, two vintages for ageing have been followed by two more supple ones: Mother Nature has planned things well. As we prepare for the 100-year harvest at Le Vieux Télégraphe, let us hope that She will spare another thought for this crop, and offer all the ingredients needed to vinify a vintage fit for... an anniversary.

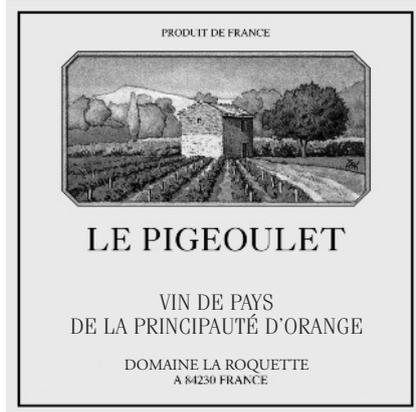
\**Sémaphore*: n. (from *sema-* and *-phore*). In days gone by, an arm-waving transmitter of Claude Chappe's aerial telegraphy.

# LE PIGEOULET FROM LA ROQUETTE HAS GROWN UP

It's a wine many of you have come to know well, both the red and the rosé. Indeed since the first issue of *Sémaphore*, where we introduced it, things have evolved a great deal. Firstly, its quality, the focus of our daily efforts, has improved substantially: the reds are more vinous and fresh, with more balance and fruit; the rosés are fresher and more delicate.

In view of the rise in quality achieved, the interest paid by the whole team in this daily-drinking wine has increased considerably; and each of us in the operation, from vine through to market, has become

more attentive to it. Demand has grown accordingly, and obliged us to set up a quota system, which we have had great trouble getting accepted, given the product's low awareness rating.



Faced with these successive changes, we thought about extending the Pigeoulet vineyard, with the goal mainly of guaranteeing steady quality from vintage to vintage, and of having more wine to satisfy more of our customers.

We are now most fortunate and pleased to have reached an agreement with a *vigneron* friend in Caromb<sup>(1)</sup> to rent - with effect from the '98 vintage - 6 hectares of vines, mainly grenache. The crop will be vinified in the new winery at La Roquette, which, naturally, was slightly oversized to accommodate a possible rise

in production. Given the terroir in Caromb, we can expect a further, substantial advance in quality. Overall output should be about 55,000 bottles.

<sup>(1)</sup> CAROMB: A small village in the Vaucluse, to the south of the Dentelles de Montmirail hill range and at the foot of Mont Ventoux, well sheltered from the Mistral even though close to the Rhône Valley, half an hour from Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

The terroir of Caromb is sited in the most westerly portion of the Côtes du Ventoux AOC area.

## • N E W S •

### LA ROQUETTE WINERY TAKES SHAPE

At the time of writing, the new La Roquette winery had barely been covered, but inside, the vinifying and devatting vats, together with the press and the various working levels, are already in place. The acceptance hopper, the destemmer and other oenological equipment will be delivered in July.

In short, the schedule has been respected practically to the day; and, as luck would have it, the '98 harvest will be markedly later than in recent years.



The person who created this label a century ago couldn't have imagined that it would celebrate its 100th anniversary having undergone just a single change: the addition of the *lieu-dit* "la Crau" in 1996.

## IS MAN PART OF THE TERROIR?

The question can rightly be asked of any person who is aware that "soil" is not a synonym for terroir, but merely its main constituent.

The decidedly French word "terroir" - which is practically impossible to translate into English - does indeed contain the word "terre", but it is also made up of the climate in which it is situated, of its geographical orientation, and even of the grape varieties specific to it. Indeed a *vin de terroir* is, by definition, a traditional wine, made from varieties which have

historically been recognised in the area of production, and which are therefore part and parcel of the winemaking heritage that the terroir represents.

So it would be simplistic to liken terroir to soil, despite the complexity of some types of land - such as, for instance, the plateaux and terraces in the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée area of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Rather, the term embodies the happy marriage of all these so very different, complex and complementary parameters. It is, if you like, a patch of ground that lets the vine develop and ripen its grapes perfectly each

year without the artificial provision of water, and enables the grower to create a wine of inimitable quality.

And that's when the fifth element of the terroir intervenes; the element that allows it to exist, develop and acquire refinement with the passing of time.

You could of course counter this idea, saying that a terroir exists even if it is not capitalised upon. But what would be the point, and what proof is there?

It seems obvious: by virtue of what he does and thinks, man is an integral part of the terroir, because, quite simply, as we were saying before, without him...

Serve 6 : • 800 g long aubergines, 1.5 lb ripe tomatoes, thyme, savory, bay leaves, salt, pepper, olive oil. • Peel the aubergines and cut longways into fine slices. Also cut the tomatoes into fine slices, without peeling them. • Choose a gratin dish that will fit in the oven. • Smear it with olive oil, then stand alternate aubergine and tomato slices in it on their sides, tightly pressed together, until the dish is full. • Sprinkle with thyme and

*"Aubergines Confites de Maquy"* savory, insert two or three bay leaves and douse liberally with olive oil. • Cook in the oven (pre-heated to mark 7) for 45 minutes, and flatten with the back of a fork during cooking. • Then cover with foil and cook for another 30 minutes. • Serve cold as a starter

PS : For this simple dish to work, the vegetables must be very reduced. Don't hesitate to cook them for longer if necessary.



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