

SÉMAPHOR

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



NO RED VIEUX TELEGRAPHE IN 2002

There will be no 2002 vintage of the red Vieux Télégraphe – something which hadn't happened since 1974, although the circumstances then were quite different.

The decision was taken early on – too early, some said – and by 15th November, faced with a truly unusual situation, we knew which path to take. We could have selected the best vat in the cellar – pampering it, ageing it separately, and bottling a small amount to keep our honour intact in what was the most difficult of years. But where would that have left the second wine, emptied of its essence, and how would it have turned out? Bereft of the Vieux Télégraphe's minerality, natural structure and its quirks in terms of smoky, meaty, pebbly flavours – derived purely from the terroir – neither our hearts nor minds were inclined to make a first wine, even in very small quantities. At harvest-time, we made every effort when sorting the grapes, vinifying, and tailoring our working habits to the special prevailing conditions, to make a fresh wine packed with fruit, ample body and pleasure. It will be named Vieux Mas des Papes or Télégramme, and be a second wine in the true sense of the word: in no way deficient or overdone, and suave and elegant as well. Yet it will soon remind us that without the generous gifts of Mother Nature, complexity, depth and sensuality will always remain out of reach.

Daniel Brunier

WHAT'S NEW IN BOTTLE ?

I often remind people that each wine corresponds to just one bottling, and I must say that we make it a matter of principle; in doing so, we guarantee the consistency of bottles of the same vintage and which bear the same label.

The bottling season runs from March to July, and it's traditionally the white Le Pigeolet that leads off; since spring of this year, you've been offered the 2002 vintage, which is distinctively fresh, with a nose of white peaches and lime-tree leaves; on the palate, it's very acidulous, thirst-quenching, moreish and light. Next came the 2002 white Clos La Roquette, which has also gone to market: the vintage is conspicuously fresh, and the nose blends hazelnuts, white flowers and citrus fruits. On the palate, a balance is achieved between richness and nervy acidity; the overall effect is vinous, with a pleasantly clean finish.

As for the 2002 white Vieux Télégraphe, which will be available from September, we have woody notes, which are fairly present at the moment and just waiting to be married with subtle aromas of white flowers and grapefruit. The mouthfeel is fresh, elegant, lively and acidulous, with citrus fruits and white peaches dominant. The wine will, of course, need a few months in bottle to resolve into harmony, but it's already a pleasure, though a little short on complexity compared to the 2001.

Moving on to the Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Gigondas reds, the 2001 wines were recently bottled and are currently resting up, the better to express themselves in September when they leave home.

Over at Les Pallières, black holds sway in the 2001, though we wouldn't go so far as to say this black is a colour... It has a beautifully dark robe; on the nose, kirsch and black fruits at once concentrated and fresh. The palate is very fresh too; with mineral notes and a rich elegance: there is dark chocolate, Zan liquorice sweets, and spices. The impressive structure has plenty of velvet and vinosity. The overall effect is a touch severe for now, but the vintage copes well. It does have a weak spot – production is 25% lower than in 2000 – but is reassuringly similar to the personality that the wines of Les Pallières are starting to acquire.

At Domaine La Roquette, the 2001 is also a

fine success: a nose of old Grenache, very ripe, elegant and fresh, with mineral notes. The palate is powerful and balanced, and the pleasure afforded by this very rich vintage isn't alloyed by any heaviness or heat; on the contrary, it gives off a sensation of freshness and finesse, underlaid with aromas of cherry-stones, spices and a little wood. Appealing mineral traits show through, reflecting soils of undeniable pedigree, all wrapped up in the velvet of nicely matured tannins. Certainly one of Domaine La Roquette's finest accomplishments since 1986.

Over at Vieux Télégraphe, the story's not so different: the 2001 is "the business". Extremely ripe red fruits are complemented by hints of smoke and pebbles; you sense it could turn animal without warning, as with the majority of the most concentrated vintages. The palate is very rich, velvety and laced with liquorice, full-bodied and

balanced, and feels like it goes on forever. The richness seems to come in a quick series of waves, bringing the complex fruit of great

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vintages.

The tannic structure is fairly marked, but doesn't impinge on the overall impression; we are in the presence of a vintage that was aged for a particularly long time to obtain such a precious balance. How satisfying it is to bottle a vintage of this standing!

The bottling period ended on a slightly less concentrated note, with the 2002 red Le Pigeolet bringing down the curtain. It's an engaging Pigeolet, though without the build or presence of the 2001: the colour is slightly lacking in intensity (a sign of the vintage), the nose and palate are of fresh fruits, and the balance is intact; but it is a fairly unassuming wine.

By the time all these wines reach the market, we will be harvesting the 2003 crops. So far the signs are perfectly good, with roughly a week's advance on 2002, which in theory means picking will start in the very first days of September.

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

LES PALLIERES VAT ROOM UNDER WAY

The vat room at Les Pallières – and we've been talking about it for quite some time – is obsolete and the situation had to be rectified. We first embarked on a very large-scale plan which was dropped because we felt it was oversized. Then, during the 2002 harvest, a new idea emerged: simply to enlarge the existing room, which would be easy enough to do and meet practically all our requirements, namely: to remain faithful to our grape-intake philosophy, reduce the size of the vinifying vats while increasing overall capacity, provide comfortable working conditions, improve the fermentation controls, and enhance the aesthetics of the building. The idea fell short in only one respect: the enlarged vat room

would not be able to accommodate any substantial increase in the size of the estate; but that is not at all an objective at present.

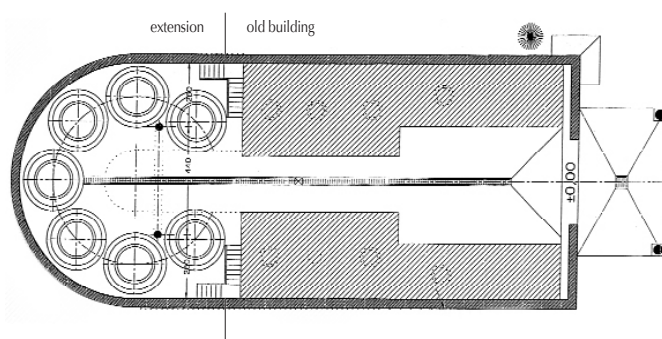
What's actually being increased is the length of the current vat room, to create a circular area that will house seven additional vats, ranging from 60hl to 90hl in capacity. They too will be made of wood and concrete.

At the same time, of course, we are upgrading the temperature controls by fitting a dual system, with heating and cooling functions for both the room and the vats themselves. Intake of the grapes will remain exactly the same, i.e. down a gravity-flow mat onto a sorting table, and with selective destemming over the tanks. The building's appearance has been

completely revamped: the structure and roof have been replaced by a traditional assembly, which is circular in the new section; the floor has been changed, by a new drainage network and stone paving. Openings in the upper part of the walls, and a porch to protect the main door, have been added.

The first major building project at Les Pallières is thus on its way to completion – not forgetting that all the cellars need to be "freshened

up" and that the next stage is sure to be the creation of a tasting and reception area, which is cruelly lacking. But putting production and quality issues first is how we work; and so, now that the vineyards and latterly the vat room have been brought up to scratch, we can take our plans to another level.



T E L E G R A M M E

Exceptional vintages always entail consequences: 2002 has generated fallout, some of which, no doubt, we have yet to discover.

Following the decision not to produce any red Vieux Télégraphe in this vintage, our sales team in charge of the French trade market put in a request: "We need specific packaging for the 2002 red Châteauneuf-du-Pape."

So the question was posed, and the answer would naturally be defined by a set of criteria and constraints:

- Feel the Vieux Télégraphe presence
 - Second-wine effect
- Arouse consumers' curiosity
 - Idea of something temporary
- Not too up-to-the-minute, but still new
 - New but reassuring
- Retain the original Châteauneuf bottle

The brief was handed to Terre Neuve, which looks after our communications. As usual, the agency took things in hand and came back to us with the design shown below. Bull's eye.

We thought it was a stroke of genius to simply invert the Vieux Télégraphe label and stamp it with a slightly tilted "Télégramme", as if it were temporary – and thus have big brother's shadow hovering in the background.



Starting in April 2004, our French restaurateurs and resellers will be offered this Châteauneuf-du-Pape called Télégramme; each bottle will carry an explanatory back label to answer the questions the consumer will be asking. The astonishing

thing, and which partly guided our choice, was that the brand name, when presented to us, had never before been used in our business sector.



To understand and approach a vintage properly, it's essential to know the weather conditions in which it developed over practically the entire year prior to harvesting. Which is why, generally speaking, when we present you with the latest vintage in March each year, we travel back in time to the autumn two years before. But there are also special circumstances, events so heavy in their impact that everything prior to them is ultimately of very little importance.

This was the case in 2002. Just bear in mind that the vinetrunks were carrying a handsome, very healthy crop when the storm of 8th and 9th September crashed down on the area. It was a storm of rare violence, lasting nearly 24 hours, during which 450mm of water fell on Châteauneuf-du-Pape – some 75% of a typical year's rainfall.

In the Gigondas appellation, further east, we recorded significantly lower rainfall of 270mm. The epicentre of the storm was, in fact, a few dozen kilometres to the west of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, in the *Gard département*.

Harvesting began two days after the storm; we felt privileged to have suffered no material damage to our buildings or vines. And picking ended at Les Pallières on 9th October, which amounted to the traditional month's work, although only 65% of the total crop was taken in as the grapes were very stringently sorted.

So, overall, the vintage quickly proved to

The 2002 vintage

be troublesome and fairly average. The whites will make the grade: they have in their favour the freshness and nervy quality much sought after in the region in a normal year. As per usual; a white Vieux Télégraphe will be available from September 2003, in near-normal quantities (only 15% down); the white 2002 Domaine La Roquette – produced in such small quantities that it will struggle to satisfy even the French market – and the white Vieux Mas des Papes have both been on the market since May; the white Le Pigeoulet will also be very much reduced in quantity.

As for the Châteauneuf-du-Pape reds, the cuvées were subject to a rigorous selection, and as a result we are able to offer 50% of the normal output from Domaine La Roquette: it's a fresh, elegant wine, with ripe fruit, discreet tannins and a rounded finish. Its ageing potential is clearly limited to seven or eight years, but it is already a pleasure to drink. Collectors will finally have a Châteauneuf-du-Pape to drink in early 2004.

The wines selected for bottling at Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe under the 2002 vintage total 55% of the red Châteauneuf-du-Pape crop, and will feature the labels Vieux Mas des Papes or Télégramme, as described in the panel over the page.

The wines are in the image of the 2002 offering: pretty, appetising, rounded, fresh and elegant – all qualities suited to perfect second wines, but not the style of a classic Vieux Télégraphe. They will

go on sale around the time the Vieux Mas des Papes is usually marketed, i.e. early 2004, as the maturing process is shorter than for a wine made for laying-down.

At Domaine Les Pallières, 2002 began with a serious shower of hail on the blossoms in early June, which made big inroads into the potential crop yield. The September storm was more moderate in these parts, and the vines withstood it fairly well, thanks in part to their very light grape load. The resulting crop was 17 hl/ha, half the usual yield, with the emphasis entirely on fruit, spices, balance and pleasure. This 2002 Les Pallières could have a pleasing development in store because, despite a lack of richness, the estate's trademark elegance is present.

The red Le Pigeoulet wasn't spared by nature either: the crop was 15% down on 2001, itself a year of very low output.



SÉMAPHORE

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