

# SÉMAPHORE\*

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



## ON ACCENTS

There's something that has always troubled and frustrated me: literature has no accent – or scarcely one that you can hear. It has a style, a richness, a depth and a balance – or not – but it does not have the accent that roots the author in their home area, or in their village or town.

When I read a fine translation of a foreign book, only after finishing it (and concentrating for a few minutes) am I able to regain a sense of the author's natural surroundings.

Granted, there are local words that betray an area, typical expressions planted here and there like banners; but in general, it is hard to associate an unknown author with an area, or even a country.

I have no idea what caused this reflection; it has little to do with our subject. Perhaps it was prompted by the enjoyable thought that when you read *Sémaphore* you are not assailed by the terrible twang of the accent that Provence inflicts on us. Maybe, in fact almost certainly, I also had in mind our “new” spelling of La Roquette – with a grave accent which we found at the back of a drawer and isn't at all regional. It might, at a pinch, be peculiar to France. But this spelling is special: it once existed, before vanishing in some administrative bungle (even then!), and was just waiting to be reborn. Now it is.

Daniel Brunier

## THE 2005? A SIMPLY GREAT VINTAGE

*Just before the final blendings, and the red wines' placing in oak for their second year of ageing, all the pointers seemed to confirm that 2005 would be one of the Southern Rhône Valley's great vintages.*

*Let's look back briefly at its weather history: generally speaking, 2005 was a “mistral vintage”, and experienced some drought. Except for the rainfall in October 2004, which came at the right time to round off the 2004 vegetative cycle; the rainfall in April 2005, when the vintage really developed; and the rainy episode during the harvest in September 2005, the year showed a rainfall deficit of 30%, slightly smaller than in 2003. But, extending the comparison with 2003, summer temperatures were far lower in 2005; and, more importantly, the day/night ranges were much wider – and we know the crucial role these play in driving maturity, which in 2005 stretched from 5 September, for the early varieties on the Plateau de la Crau, to the 30th for the Grenaches at Les Pallières and the Mourvèdres at Pignan.*

*The harvesting period was relatively short and hitch-free, with only one interruption for rain in the first week; this did not influence the vintage's potential, which had steadily grown throughout the summer.*

*The Vieux Télégraphe and Roquette whites are quite beautiful. They enjoyed tempered summer temperatures, and their freshness, minerality, floral/fruit balance and overall harmony were perfectly intact (the 2005 is certainly the best white ever made at La Roquette).*

*The Châteauneuf-du-Pape reds also strike this balance between freshness and richness. All the varieties reached full maturity: overall, their balance is very superior, with no suggestion of “overheating”; they are powerful and naturally concentrated due to the low yields; and fresh, creamy and velvety, with very ripe, well-blended tannins and no aggressive edge. This is the third very fine vintage on the trot, and is quite the equal of its predecessors.*

*At Les Pallières, a classic set of features. A nose of appealing spice, cocoa and black aromas – fresh liquorice, black fruits... – and super freshness. The palate? Rich and elegant, mineral, silky, balanced, with well-integrated tannins. One senses strong potential.*

*For the second year running, we have produced a rosé at the estate: it's a very attractive colour, but in early summer was a shade mineral-heavy, with the fruit struggling to get out, but there is good freshness. In order to give as much pleasure as the 2004, it needs to smooth its edges, but its current phase should be very short-lived, and it will end the season in style.*

*In the pure-pleasure department, the 2005 red Pigeoulet will be purveying lots of it from September onwards: it's fresh, open, elegant, silky and packed with fruit; perhaps less rich and concentrated than in the 2004, but undeniably balanced.*

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

# CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE WHITE WINES AND THE EVOLVING CLIMATE

*Given how our climate is evolving, you would think that a hot, dry area like ours would be producing white wines that are increasingly rich and fat, with sensitive balance and over-ripe aromas.*

*Well, that trend has yet to start. Indeed, over the past few years, in the "traditional school" of Châteauneuf-du-Pape white wines, what we have seen is a strengthening of their mineral underlay (which equates to freshness), balance, complexity and finesse.*

*So, how to explain the positive development of the wines in this family, to which we like to think we belong? There are many factors. Our intention here is not to list them exhaustively, but simply to mention our thoughts and actions over the past 15 years.*

*In terms of grape-growing, the first positive observation is simply that our white-grape vineyards have aged, and we have stewarded this process well. We know that deep, strong roots are a source of minerality and complexity.*



*Additionally, in the past 10 years, debudding and unripe-fruit management has become standard practice: the reflex is increasingly to adapt fruit load to vine vigour and to the climate, in order to optimise maturity.*

*Lastly, we pay great attention to the harvesting date for each variety. This is of capital importance: in the sweltering sun, the line between not enough and too much is quickly crossed.*

*Our cellarwork is now more refined, too. We are closer to nature, with regard to our fermentation temperatures and yeasting: we gave up very low temperatures long ago, and have great confidence in our indigenous yeasts.*

*Our use of wooden containers for fermentation, as well as for ageing, is now more straightforward. Experience has taught us to spread fermentation between demi-muids, barriques, foudres and vats: half the volume in oak, and one-third of this in each type of container.*

*The combination of these factors, coupled with the energy*

*of a big and excellent team, has meant that, during a tough period, we have been able to enhance the quality of the 10% of our total output that still deserved greater recognition.*

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## FRESH DEVELOPMENTS AT LA ROQUÈTE

As you'll have noticed, much has changed at the La Roquette estate in recent years, and the developments have continued in 2006: this programme is focused on the winery and a new reception / tasting area.

The winery was cramped. Vintage after vintage, we were acutely aware of it, and sometimes had to make concessions on the fermentation times of the first vatfuls, so that we could continue to harvest parcels as they reached maturity. It was very frustrating, and sometimes led us to take ill-considered risks.

We have therefore decided to boost vinification capacity by a third – a substantial increase which, as from this year, will provide welcome breathing-

space and great flexibility in our work, which is a prerequisite of quality.

A set of truncated-cone wooden vats has been installed, following our conclusive experiences at Vieux Télégraphe and Les Pallières.

The building interiors and exteriors around the reception area have been refurbished. The basic idea was to create, at 2 Avenue Louis Pasteur in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, a convivial, pleasant and professional place to taste and purchase all our products.

We decided to completely redesign the exteriors, a job due for completion this winter. The reception and tasting area will be located at the courtyard level, and the adjacent rooms will be fully

refurbished and utilised.

So, for its 20th year in the hands of Vignobles Brunier, La Roquette is having a makeover – a move underpinned by vineyards now reaching full maturity. The average age of the estate's red-grape vines has topped 50 years; and that of the white-grape varieties, 20 years.

**SÉMAPHORE**

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