

# SÉMAPHOR

N°20 - JULY 2008

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



## NATURALLY RESPECTFUL

Showing respect for nature, the planet and others now seems to be the top objective of a whole swathe of businesses, administrations and individuals – and that's extremely encouraging and reassuring. Advertisements with no environmental dimension are rare. Polluting consciously is becoming passé; culprits are being named and shamed. In short, it's hip to bother about the branch on which we are building our children's lives. But it's taken a long, long time!

And it also needs to be said that there is a whole population of talented vigneron who are naturally respectful and have been for decades. Not just those who are certified organic or similar, but also all those who – like ourselves – produce naturally to their own specifications, which they develop and improve yearly, from vintage to vintage.

Replacing insecticides by sexual confusion, using only natural fertilisers, minimising copper doses, working the soil to avoid weed-killers, no exogenous bacteria during vinification, tiny amounts of sulphur, an on-site treatment plant that organically processes all our wastewater, systematic sorting of all production and packaging materials, creating a Provençal well to air-condition the cellars...

These are just a few examples from the long list of fine-tuned, natural measures applied by all our team. They have long known that it's their job, and ours, to lead by example and to raise awareness among those who will follow in our footsteps.

The time has now come to talk about these measures, and we will cover them fully in a forthcoming special issue of *Sémaphore*. Not to make them a selling point, but just to inform all the people who trust us without knowing every strand of our philosophy.

Daniel Brunier

## 2007: A GREAT VINTAGE IN THE SOUTHERN RHÔNE VALLEY!

Here's a vintage that has already been much written and talked about, and will definitely show substantial differences from region to region, given how capricious the summer weather was across France last year.

It all began in the southern Rhône, with a lengthy period of water deficit. Autumn 2006 and the ensuing winter were particularly dry and mild; there was no serious rain until May and June (180mm in two months); in fact, it fell so plentifully that mildew, relegated to near-oblivion by the extremely dry vegetation periods of recent years, returned with a vengeance.

This wet episode, a stressful time for vigneron, actually ensured a balanced vintage.

It came when the vine was thirstiest, and largely offset the water deficit.

Summer was very dry once again but fairly cool, as the Mistral blew quite briskly throughout July. This vigorously checked the advancing mildew, but also created a dream scenario for ripening.

The first maturity surveys, done around 20 August, showed fairly big discrepancies between varieties, but also very high overall potential in polyphenols (colour and tannin) as well as a good sugar/acidity balance. This was an important and reassuring moment as we glimpsed for the first time part of the vintage's potential, especially as the grapes were in perfect health.

Harvesting of the white varieties kicked off in late August, but we waited until 10 September to start on the Châteauneuf-du-Pape reds; then, the last bunches were picked in Gigondas on

the first day of October. The only disruption was a single shower of no importance on 18 September.

Ten months later, the results are quite beautiful. The Rosé and Whites have an utterly distinctive freshness, purity of fruit, and rich/mineral balance; no austerity, just the clearly apparent backbone, in each wine, of a vintage meant for ageing.

The Reds are truly superb too. What we have here is a rare vintage in the style of the '90s and 2005s. What's surprising is their consistent quality, a kind of natural concentration. The Pigeolet has fabulously gourmand, creamy fruit. At Les Pallières, the aromas are much darker, with blueberries prominent; these are rich

and profound wines with well-melded tannins, at once mineral and velvety.

Le Télégramme is packed with freshness and red fruit; the mouthfeel is full and elegant.

La Roquette renders the sun-baked character of the vintage, with very ripe Grenache fruit; it's serious, solid and complex, ending on a contrasting note of attractive minerality. The Vieux Télégraphe is also very complex: spicy and slightly smoky, with garrigue herbs; it's deep and rich, with a long, noble finish.

There will of course be an Accent in 2007: it is Grenache-led, rich yet airy, and a little austere. A very serious wine that will further craft the personality of this latest addition to the range.

In short, a greatly generous vintage, and not at all thankless, indeed quite the contrary – it amply rewards the intense efforts it has demanded from us in vineyards and cellars.

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

# M A S S A Y A ...

**T**he name has already been part of our life for 10 years – and yet, amazingly, it has never before been mentioned in “Sémaphore”. An absence due to the vagaries of the calendar, to the time it took for the venture to mature, to our confidence in the future... All these reasons, and doubtless others too.

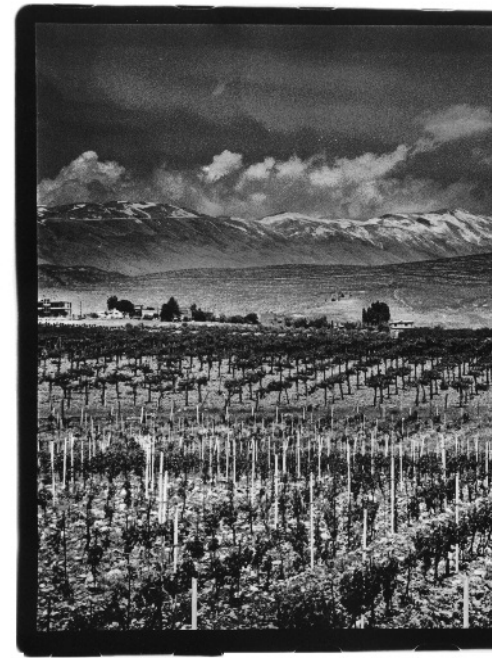
In 1998, we decided to help found Massaya Vins-Liban (El Massaya arak had already existed for several years).

The basic idea was to create a range of Lebanese wines under the Massaya banner from richly characterful terroirs, made by an entirely Lebanese team, guided by our vin de terroir philosophy, and whom we would train and give day-to-day technical support.

Embarking on the project, we knew that besides the technical difficulties, we would encounter political, logistical and administrative stumbling blocks to do with the nature of the country and its environs; and that we would just have to cope.

But these concerns were overridden by something far stronger: we had heard the call of a terroir, and felt that our thinking was deeply attuned with that of our future partners, who soon became our friends: Sami and Ramzi Ghosn, Dominique Hebrard and Hubert De Bouard.

Today, the founding team is near-intact; only Hubert has moved on to other adventures. The technical team, led by Ramzi, is starting to master its subject, acquiring the



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## 2 0 0 6 R E D S D U E O U T S O O N

It's not easy to follow a great vintage. One immediately thinks back to the '98s, and the challenge of escaping their shadow – a situation akin to what we will see this autumn. There are similarities between 2006 and 1999, with the same sensation of freshness, balance and traditional-vintage character, although the 2006s have an additional richness, an extra lining of velvet.

Bottling is over, and the wines will have July and August to rest and become used to the long life that lies ahead.

The 2006s from Les Pallières reflect the harmony of the vintage as a whole: the nose of violets and dark liquorice – a hallmark of the estate – is overlaid by delicate, faintly sweet black fruit.

The palate is fresh, creamy and very velvety. The liquorice edge

persists throughout tasting, which describes a steady curve and ends with a sense of well-integrated tannins, which are necessary to impart contrast. All in all, it's long, very progressive and gourmand.

Le Télégramme, which was bottled early in 2008, is far more open, direct and approachable. Its super-fresh nose is dominated by red fruit laced with menthol, beckoning you hither. It's equally direct on the palate, giving instant pleasure: the Grenache is generously yielding in structure and aromatic style; creamy, straightforward, with well-coated tannins that confirm its family membership.

The 2006 La Roquette is the first vintage to be vinified in the definitive version of the redesigned vat room, i.e. with 33% extra capacity and newly-installed wooden vats. It has the bouquet of a serious,

profound and complex wine: the fruit is slightly smoky, with a fairly pronounced sense of terroir. The grapes taste wonderfully mature on the palate: it's rich, full, and fairly “dark” in aromatic terms. This Roquette vintage will not give in easily. Its tannic structure is evident, conferring a finish of languid elegance.

Spice, pepper, smokiness and wild herbs characterise the Vieux Télégraphe's nose; it is also fresh and complex. On the palate, the various elements will take a while to work in concert: there's a certain austerity here, despite a decent load of fruit; its mineral edge, coupled with the tannic structure, is sure to scare off a few ill-prepared palates, but such is life with traditional vintages, and we are always happy to welcome them back.

# 10 YEARS ALREADY!



*independence needed to give the wines a little of one's soul); the vineyards are still – and will long remain – a work in progress; the cellars bear the marks of maturity; and output is starting to stabilise around 300,000 bottles of wine.*

*Our quality objectives have been partly achieved, but of course there are still many improvements to be made; these will come with time and experience.*

*Since January 2008, the full range of Massaya wines (a presentation sheet is enclosed with this 20th issue of "Sémaphore") has been distributed in France by Vignobles Brunier's sales team. A bonded warehouse, established two years ago, lets us deliver wine to all markets with the same flexibility as for French output; in addition,*

*a logistics and commercial office has been set up at VB's headquarters.*

*We can now say that the house is built and lived in, and has even withstood the first storms. It's starting to become easier to locate, and the years now have their role to play: patining the façades, affirming the building's character, and coaxing out the first signs of ageing – in fact, the beginnings of beauty – and teaching it to live in harmony with its surroundings.*

## PRESS REVIEW / REVUE DE PRESSE



**WINE SPECTATOR –  
INSIDER DEC 2007 +  
WS APRIL 30 2008**

**ROQUETE RED 2005 – 93  
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**  
– 2500cs imported – layers  
of exotic fig, boysenberry  
and loganberry fruit ripple  
across the lush, dense  
structure, while hints of red  
licorice, linzer torte,

mesquite and plum sauce  
glide through the well-  
rounded finish. Drink now  
through 2025.

**WINE ADVOCATE –  
31 OCT 2007 – N°173**

**L'ACCENT 2006 – (92-94)** –  
It is fashioned from 90%  
grenache (80 year old vines)  
and 10% Mourvèdre. Sadly  
there are only 4000 bottles,  
but it is well worth the  
special effort to find and  
buy. A beautiful elegant  
wine made somewhat in the  
style of Château Rayas or  
Domaine Charvin, the wine  
displays sweet Provençal  
herbs mixed with black  
raspberry, kirsch, licorice,  
and a bit of pepper and  
spice. It is full bodied,  
opulent, fleshy, long and  
pure. Drink it over the next  
10-15 years.

**INTERNATIONAL  
WINE CELLAR –136  
FEB/JAN 08**

**PALLIERES RED 2006 –  
92-94 – Medium red.**  
Hugely seductive aromas of  
red berries, garrigue, rose  
and incense display room-  
filling power. Vibrant  
strawberry and raspberry  
flavors are finely etched and  
strikingly sweet, with  
energetic minerality adding  
clarity and lift. Remarkably  
elegant Gigondas with the  
pure sex appeal to enjoy in  
its youth but also the  
balance to repay cellaring. A  
must purchase for southern  
Rhône freaks.

**WINE ADVOCATE –  
31 OCT 07 - 173 –  
ROBERT PARKER**

**VIEUX TELEGRAPHE  
ROUGE 2006 –(90-93) –**  
Aged only in foudre and  
bottled with minimal

clarification, it is a more  
masculine, muscular effort  
than most 2006s. Its dark  
ruby/purple color is followed  
by notions of the sushi  
seaweed wrapper, nori,  
interwoven with incense,  
lavender, pepper, and  
copious quantities of black  
cherry and raspberry fruit.  
Medium to full-bodied, with  
moderate tannin, and good  
structure as well as depth, it  
will benefit from 3-4 years of  
bottle age and should keep  
for 15 or more years.

**SÉMAPHORE**

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