

SÉMAPHOR

N°21 - JUNE 2010

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



A TRIBUTE TO HENRI

Henri Brunier, the third generation of Vieux Télégraphe vignerons, died in October 2008 at the age of 85. He dedicated his whole life to the vine: he could easily have been nicknamed "l'homme de la Crau", so hard did he strive to extend plantings on the plateau, a fabled expanse in the Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC.

Just as it takes many years to truly know one's parents, it takes a very long time to realise and accept that they are gone. This largely explains Sémaphore's silence: to discuss material things without paying tribute to Henri seemed inconceivable; but Sémaphore could not pass away with him, for it was created to communicate on an enterprise that is partly of his making. And so, just as the crop needs four full seasons, only the passage of time has yielded these few lines.

To be born in Provence in 1923 and to depart today's world is a journey from the plough, drawn by one or more horses across the pebbles of La Crau, to web-based plot management aided by multiple satellites; a journey through a world racked by upheaval. The aftermath of the Great War, the Second World War, the rising power of America, the disintegration of the USSR, the advent of new communications, the creation of Europe, the slow awakening of China as it became the world's workshop, the gradual radicalisation of Islam culminating in "9-11"

and its consequences... For a global-politics buff like Henri, there was plenty to chew on.

He witnessed the inter-war age of egocentric progress, the wartime black market for food, and the realisation that our planet could not survive unless it wised up. Long ago, he understood that simply by preventing waste, the course of the world could be altered. He was one of those people who systematically switch off the light on leaving a room; who readily trim back their personal comfort for the good and the future of all. He also showed great generosity to his family, and not once in his life did he act for gain.

His outward appearance reflected wellbeing, peace of mind, and an ambition for his loved ones that far exceeded his own. If his family and friends were happy, then so was he. He worked away behind the scenes, rugged yet delicate, preferring a job well done to fine words.

His character traits, and the details of his personality, needed to be guessed and sensed. Only very rarely did he open up. Talking about Henri is like describing a church to which access is barred: a strong, handsome and reassuring presence that could harbour nothing but noble thoughts. After all, when the essence is so obvious, what's the use in knowing more? Something of a closed book, he did not attract confidences. Just as adversity had shaped him, he believed it should continue shaping later generations.

But what defined him best was his respect for others: in the daily conduct of his life, by turns childishly simple and hugely complex, he profoundly respected young and old, family, friends and new acquaintances, because they too respected others. Quite simply, he had a very generous heart and an appealingly open and youthful mind. These reached their acme with the handover to his children, which he carried off nobly and naturally.

Like the man he was.

Daniel Brunier.

2009 VINTAGE LIVES UP TO ITS REPUTATION

Yet another vintage that will mark the memory and has already generated a tremendous buzz, to use the "in phrase". Climatic conditions throughout its cycle were, it has to be said, very special and bound to yield equally special wines.

Let's go back to the beginning. The first important point was the autumn and winter of 2008-09, with rainfall well above the 20-year average (460mm from Oct. 1st to end-Feb, compared to 275mm). The direct effect of this was to restock the underground reserves, sapped by several winters of water deficit. Spring rain, the saying goes, cannot offset a dry winter – and this is even truer in southern France. The vintage therefore had solid foundations.

Though not cold, spring was cooler than usual, and this feeling of coolness was heightened by plentiful days of rain and a Mistral that blew fairly regularly and would continue to do so until the end of the cycle – giving us precious help, but also destroying much in its path. Until June 15th, we had a mixture of showers, fine days, and windy periods of rare violence. These massive Mistral episodes were largely to blame for the grapes we lost from a crop already in physiological deficit. Then came a period of three particularly hot and dry months, which, coupled with the new water reserves, promoted a sudden acceleration in the growth cycle, which seriously disrupted our harvest schedule.

In these perfectly healthy conditions, we began picking the white grapes in late August, and finished with a plot of slow-ripening Mourvèdre on October 5th.

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

Harvesting broke off for two rainy interludes followed by the Mistral, but with no adverse effect on the healthiness of the grapes, which remained practically perfect until the very last day.

After the vinification period – which was hitch-free but very long, given the extended harvest and very cold winter – we could at last discover the 2009s in detail, in this springtime of 2010. The white Pigeolet is true to form: a nose of white flowers, simple and well-balanced. We regret that the rosé, Au Petit Bonheur les Pallières, will be absent this vintage.

The Clos La Roquette and Vieux Télégraphe whites are both attractively clean-cut, each well established in its own style, fairly open in their bouquets, well balanced, attractive on the palate, and pleasingly fresh; notes of white fruits, white flowers and anise, and very nicely structured.

The Pigeolet red, from the foothills of Mont Ventoux, made the most of the hot period with adequate water: it is brilliant, straightforward, creamy, and full of pleasure and harmony. It will certainly rank among the very best Pigeolets.

At Les Pallières, the third vintage of Les Racines still has a very closed nose, but is well balanced between richness, velvet and elegance; blackness – even bitterness – dominates; it's slow to uncoil, grapy, profound; you really feel it's just waking up.

**“It pushes hard;
it’s
straightforward,
ethereal
and rich.”**

The other Pallières cuvée, Terrasse du Diable, is a little more rustic, aggressive and temperamental, with fruit that is perhaps fresher and also very ripe. It's rich, solid, fleshy; the tannins are strongly present, and will require lengthy ageing in bottle.

Télégramme spells ripe Grenache; it's solid, liquorice-laced, nonchalant and practically in the groove already. La Roquette has tremendous texture. The nose is sharp, feels like ink, ripe and black; on the palate, very slow to uncoil, naturally concentrated, with a potent flavour of dark chocolate – rare in Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

L'Accent de la Roquette has all the virtues of old Grenache, in a vintage where grape maturity reached an ideal balance and richness gave way to grip, finesse and complex depth.

The Vieux Télégraphe shows fine harmony, poised between freshness and the vintage's slow-uncoiling quality; it's black too, markedly bitter, with great backbone. It pushes hard; it's straightforward, ethereal and rich.

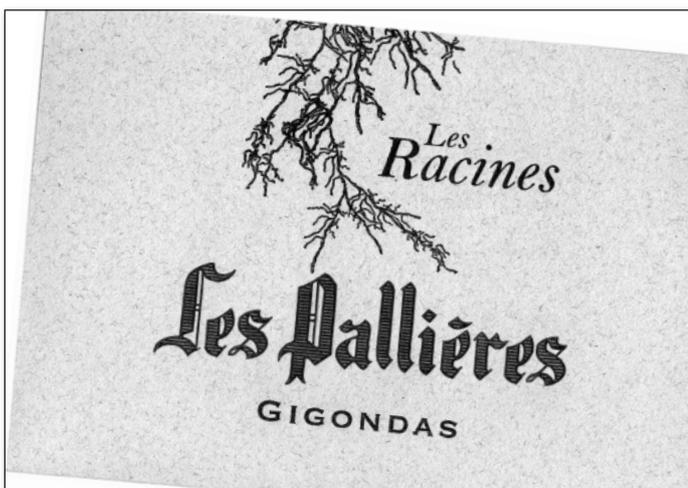
As you will readily have gathered, we must be patient with the 2009 reds. Their natural concentration, due to very low yields, suggests that their full two years' maturation will be needed to smooth their edges into mellow harmony.

LES PALLIÈRES SPLITS IN TWO

Two personalities? It made perfect sense.

Many of you have already observed – and even tasted – that with the 2007 vintage, Domaine Les Pallières switched from one red wine to two cuvées from specific plots: Les Racines and Terrasse du Diable, both under the “Pallières” banner, of course.

As you can gather, Les Racines is made from the estate's old vines, planted mainly around the winery at about 200m altitude. Grenache dominates the blend (more than 80%) alongside Syrah, Cinsault and Clairette. This cuvée epitomises the heart and origins of the estate; average vine age exceeds 60 summers.



Terrasse du Diable takes its name from the estate's highest plot, which bears this name in the land registry, doubtless because it is hard to reach. The cuvée is made from the grapes of all the high-lying plots, scattered among 110ha of woodland that is integral to its characteristics. The plots are at 250m to 400m altitude. Grenache is naturally the lead variety (90% of the blend), accompanied by 5%

Mourvèdre and 5% Clairette from plots planted just over 40 years ago by the Roux brothers, previous owners.



So why separate these two characters? In the southern Rhône Valley, it is said that varietal blends give wines complexity. Is the same really true of lieux-dits and exposures?

Certainly, but in recent years we have noted that the grapes grown in the two Pallières micro-climates yielded wines so different that they struggled to achieve harmony when blended. It was, in a sense, an arranged marriage.

This was especially clear from their tannins' features: rather than complexity, we felt we were just creating two tiers of tannin that could take years to integrate.

It was also frustrating to see some vats' identities being lost in a single wine, and curious to see a likeable personality flourishing, though not dominant.

It was frustrating, too, to produce one wine, one experience, one discussion, one companion, one proposition. The idea behind the separation is not to compare, but to have a choice – choosing the moment, the food, the mood.

This is a luxury that costs nothing, and whose importance is acutely tangible when absent.

As you have gathered, there is nothing very scientific in our move to create two Pallières personalities; rather, we wanted to deepen a little further our understanding of our terroir; to enjoy ourselves; and, we hope, to please the greatest possible number of our client-friends.

Clearly, 2007 was a dream vintage for Les Pallières' new departure, giving us the old vines' delicate richness with the intense freshness of the high-lying Grenache.

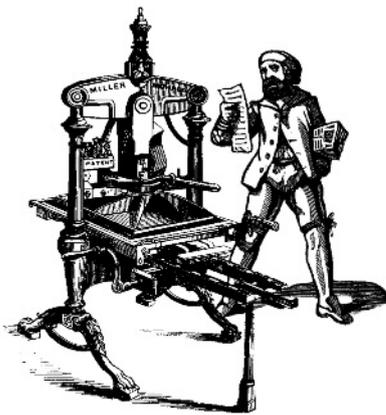
But we are convinced the future will throw up other fascinating surprises of the same kind.

Last of all, we were itching to dust off Les Pallières' image. We had spent 10 years rebuilding the vineyard, cellars and vinification facility. With our foundations made solid, we could then focus calmly on rejuvenating the image of the estate.

PRESS REVIEW (EXTRACTS) REVUE DE PRESSE (EXTRAITS)

Out of respect for the original texts of the writers who devote their time and passion for our enjoyment, we have decided not to translate the review that follows. It will therefore consist entirely of the authors' words. This has the advantage of retaining the original vigour of the comments, and the drawback of perhaps not being understood by some of you – in which case, please accept our apologies. **By doing this we are, in a sense, respecting the terroir of language.**

The complete Press Review is available at: www.vignoblesbrunier.fr



WINE ADVOCATE ROBERT PARKER OCT 2009

ROQUETE ROUGE 2008
The 2008 Châteauneuf-du-Pape is one of the vintage's strongest wines. It exhibits medium to full body, supple tannins, and sweet framboise and black cherry fruit notes intermixed with flowers and spice box. This front end-loaded Châteauneuf du Pape is ideal for drinking over the next 5-8 years. Shrewd connoisseurs of Châteauneuf-du-Pape should be paying attention to what is taking place at La Roquette. This property was acquired by the Brunier family (who also own Vieux Télégraphe) in the mid-eighties, and over the last 4-5 years they have made successful efforts to upgrade the quality dramatically.

WINE SPECTATOR INSIDER 14 OCTOBRE 2009

ROQUETE ROUGE 2007
This has gorgeously silky mouthfeel, with layers of blackberry, black cherry and dark plum fruit seamlessly woven with black tea and perfumy pepper and spice notes. The long finish lets the fruit and minerality drip. Grenache and Mourvèdre. Drink now through 2020.—J.M.

INTERNATIONAL WINE CELLAR - #148 JAN/FEB 2010

**LES PALLIÈRES TERRASSE
DU DIABLE ROUGE - 2008**
Dark red. Brighter and stonier than the Racines, with scents of strawberry, redcurrant and Asian spices underscored by dusty minerals. Racy, finely etched red fruit flavors stain the palate without showing any excess weight or rough edges. With a late note of succulent herbs, this is already showing good complexity, but this taut, well-balanced wine will be even better with a few years of bottle aging.

INTERNATIONAL WINE CELLAR - #148 - JAN/FEB 2010

**PALLIERES LES RACINES
2008**
Bright red. Smoky red berries, flowers and minerals on the nose. A sweet, energetic midweight that offers redcurrant and cherry flavors and a tangy note of blood orange. A bit unginging on the finish, which repeats the cherry note and lingers with very good persistence.

ONEBOTTLE.COM 13 AVRIL 2010

**PALLIERES - LES RACINES
ROUGE 2007**
[...] The 2007 Pallières Les Racines qualifies as a great wine. In fact, I think it is safe to say that the 2007 Les Racines qualifies as a living wine, a wine you can approach the way you might approach another human being. Clarity and ambiguity rarely appear side by side in the same wine. They coexist in the 2007 Les Racines. If you do not taste this wine - this year, in five years, and in ten years - you will be cheating yourself. "Les Racines" means "the roots". When you drink the 2007 Les Racines, you nourish your soul in the same way that a root nourishes its vine. [...] The wine overwhelms you with its depth, then it teases you with the twin promises of love and beauty. When the wine delivers on those promises, you surrender to its generosity. The finish tells you a story. In the story, you are connected to other people by a line that has no name. [...] The story has no ending. It fades into the sunset, only to reappear as a star in the sky. [...]

Joshua Baer



www.vignoblesbrunier.fr

DECANTER WINE MAGAZINE NOVEMBER 2009

**LES PALLIERES :
A LITTLE PIECE OF
PARADISE**
A petit paradis is how I would describe VT's Pallières vineyard in Gigondas. A tinkling stream runs nearby, lavender bursts out, bees buzz, and crickets chirp among the herb-covered Provençal scrubland. Aesthetically, this is a vineyard in a million. It was no surprise, then, that it caught the eye of Kermit Lynch, Vieux Télégraphe's shrewd but poetic US importer, prompting him to join forces with the Bruniers to buy it in 1998. Pallières had been capable of giving grandiose wines - the late 1960s and 1978 spring to mind - but misses also occurred due to wayward levels of attention. The vineyard climbs from this Eden, so that its higher areas are more limestone, more breezy and later ripening than the compacted red clay, partly sandy areas below. Grenache is its heartbeat. A vertical tasting of Pallières from 1998 to 2007 at the domaine in November 2008 showed progress has been made over the past 10 years, with a gradual gain in body and depth.

SÉMAPHORE

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