

# SÉMAPHORÉ

No.24- SEPTEMBER 2013

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



## EDITORIAL

### “NATURE” or “NATUREL”?

No wordplay intended: this is a serious question, and one that arises regularly for every traditional-wine enthusiast and for every wine professional, whether in production or distribution.

Both these terms can, of course, be criticised for being too vague, to avoid the nitty-gritty of actually stating what they mean. They also, and primarily, have the great drawback of introducing a problem of classification; we no longer know at which bio-altar to kneel. But what does it matter? Isn't the most important thing to have wines made using farming methods that respect the planet? Then again, isn't wine intrinsically natural?

*So: Nature or Naturel?*

*The family of Vins Natures is allowed to use either zero sulphur (SO<sub>2</sub>); Vins Naturels, by contrast, can be vinified and aged with a low level of sulphur.*

*You will readily understand that we take great care to produce grapes and wines with ever more Naturel methods, i.e. grape cultivation that is organic (in the broad sense of the word), and vinification with the fewest possible inputs, although we do add a small dose of SO<sub>2</sub> to help our wines to age. Indeed, we think that creating a quality Vin de Terroir – in which impressions of salinity, minerality, velvet and elegant structure are the priority, rather than primary-fruit and fermentation aromas – requires a little added SO<sub>2</sub>. With it, we can more clearly sense the wines' delicate aromas, lightweight frameworks, the “Mistral” taste, the clean straight stance, the saline edge, and other traits that stem directly from the quality of the grapes and not from vinification techniques.*

*The organoleptic deviations that may be encountered in a wine left to its own devices, without SO<sub>2</sub>, mask the wine's most subtle aromas in favour of unstable aromas that differ according to latitude and temperature. These are, quite simply, deviant aromas: they remind us that wine is a living thing, evolving constantly throughout its life; and will, if we let it drift, proceed to its final state – vinegar.*

*So, Vin Nature? Why not, if the wine's intended lifetime is very short, and if it is not shipped great distances... And Vin Naturel? Definitely, and it matters little to which sub-family the wine belongs, providing its producer can guarantee that every effort has been made to ensure that it really is Naturel, from grape growing through to wine ageing.*

*PS: At Vignobles Brunier, the doses of active (molecular) SO<sub>2</sub> we use in our red and white wines range from 0.35 to 0.60 mg/l.*

**Daniel Brunier**

SÉMAPHORÉ

PUBLISHED BY: Vignobles Brunier  
3, Route de Châteauneuf-du-Pape - 84370 BEDARRIDES - FRANCE  
Tél. (33) 490 33 00 31 - Fax. (33) 490 33 18 47  
vignobles@brunier.fr

EDITOR: Daniel Brunier  
PRINTED BY: Rullière Libeccio - TRANSLATION: Richard Brandon

# 2012 VINTAGE: SIMPLY PHENOMENAL

Very belatedly, our in-house commentaries on the 2012 vintage at Vignobles Brunier are now out. There are various reasons for the delay, and detailing them here serves no purpose.

The exercise is always delicate, and a little laborious. We must step back into the context of the vintage's origins: just after the 2011 harvest, in autumn, when the vines stop sucking up water and reserves begin to replenish in order to feed the next vintage. This was a temperate autumn, which, despite a very rainy November, left a slight water deficit.

The ensuing winter was full of contrasts: there is a tendency to describe it as mild, yet it also included one of the coldest periods in recent decades. December and January were indeed very mild, and a little sap actually rose in some of our vines. Then, in February, came 10 days of intense cold, exacerbated by a fiercely-blowing Mistral – which, following a long mild stretch, had a huge impact on the plants. During this period, across all our vineyards, we lost more than 15,000 vines, mainly very old Grenache, i.e. five hectares' worth, which, thankfully, is extremely unusual. Every year, we naturally lose two hectares' worth, but hardly ever because of the cold.

When March came, we saw that the water deficit had grown to reach -30%, relative to normal. The spring that followed was simply normal in temperature and rainfall; the water gap was not offset, but it rained enough to smoothly support the beginning of the growth cycle.

A hot dry July, which always strongly promotes the formation of serious tannic structure; a very hot August, with a copious spell of rain late on, to favour the completion of ripening; and a September that was hot and windy early on, followed by a period of rain – that, in a nutshell, was the run-up to the 2012 harvest.

The first berry samples highlighted variable maturity from vine to vine, due to the intense cold of February, which had considerably disrupted the budbreak phase and thus created uneven, hard-to-manage growth: waiting was the only solution.

Despite having more than 30 harvests under our belts, it is unfailingly surprising to encounter unknown situations – or, at least, different and unexpected ones. The harvest began in early September, but there were so many waits between varieties, plots and districts that we never felt the stress that typically grips the team when the secateurs start snipping – a direct consequence of the very uneven budbreak back in the spring.

The result is surprising – and an extraordinary consolation, coming after repeated crop shortfalls and capricious weather, and after all the effort and risk-taking required of us: in the freshness of its fruit, its balance, and its integration of serious tannic structure, the 2012 vintage is simply phenomenal.

The red Pigeoulet bursts with very ripe red berries in a nose that is very fresh, vinous and clean; freshness also dominates on the palate, as red berries share the stage with liquorice. It's rich, long, and particularly elegant for a Pigeoulet. This elegance is also evident in *Mégaphone*, emphasised by the highly distinctive floral aromas of the Saint-Hippolyte terroir; the nose is a little bit closed, but on the palate you sense extra depth and very attractive richness, as well as perfectly integrated structure, rounded off by an agreeable saline finish.

Over at Les Pallières in Gigondas, the yields across the rosé and red wines were no more than 17hl/ha – typical of a normal year at Château d'Yquem. So, no concerns about density. Once again, this shortfall was due to the intense cold that preceded spring 2012. *Terrasse du Diable* has a winningly fresh nose of liquorice candy. On the palate it's dense, ample, taut, saline and very long; the tannins are very serious and slightly aggressive, but given the wine's richness, it is really well-balanced. *Les Racines* is a little more austere on the nose, with slightly more spice; on the palate it's deep and fresh, with a very "Racines" feel: dark, spicy, and dominated at the end by slightly hard tannins, but freshness and elegance hold sway to deliver a very harmonious finish.

## **..in the freshness of its fruit ... the 2012 vintage is simply phenomenal...**

The *Châteauneuf-du-Pape* whites will leave their mark. *Clos la Roquette*, in its very open style, offers a highly elegant bouquet laced with vanilla; on the palate, it has the rounded fatness of the great years, combined with noble, upfront freshness; the creamy finish has a pinch of aniseed. For the time being, it has overbearing oakiness in the mid-palate; but experience tells us that, after a few months in bottle, balance will be restored. *Le Vieux Télégraphe* has a heady nose of white blossom, with finesse, elegance and depth; on the palate it is serious, fresh and complex, with aniseed and liquorice dominating through to the finish; it's clean and mineral. Definitely a vintage for laying down.

Be reminded that, since the 2011 vintage, our *Châteauneuf-du-Pape* red output has been reduced to three wines; and in the process, *Télégramme* has acquired strategic status in terms of both quality and volume. The young vines' contribution has now been reinforced by that from plots of vines aged over 45 years in *Domaine la Roquette*, excluding the *Piedlong* and *Pignan* districts. The nose is wide-open, with jammy raspberry and strawberry notes; the palate attractively harmonises finesse and richness, coupled with a saline edge, a femininity, and a volume that are all new to this honest, juicy wine.

*Piedlong*, now in its second vintage, confirms its great elegance deriving from old Grenache, plus appealing minerality, freshness, and a fairly pronounced and well-wrapped tannic structure; on the palate it's a class act, you can taste the pebbles and Mistral; a real yet very ethereal personality that will easily take its place in our range. That's the unanimous impression here at Vignobles Brunier.

The Vieux Télégraphe red epitomises the vintage: a superbly fruity nose with very dark, deep and dense aromas; a palate also dominated by dark fruit, with spice, minerality and a highly distinctive salinity. An impressively big frame, dense velvet, long and clean. The tannins are much in evidence, as in all the 2012s, but here too they are ripe, and give the wine a harmonious framework.

So, yet another vintage that adds a real character and a real personality to our encyclopaedia. It's immensely pleasing to be tracking the birth of our 31st vintage, an experience just as emotional as back in our early years. Overall, it's a vintage that suggests a utopian marriage between the freshness of a 2004 and the seriousness of a 2005.

---

## L'ACCENT BECOMES PIEDLONG

It's now a year since we told you about a big change in our range of Châteauneuf-du-Pape reds: moving from four wines to three, with the Domaine la Roquette label ultimately being discontinued, and an expanded role for Télégramme. We also informed you that our special cuvée L'Accent would be made with grapes from all our Grenache vineyards on the Plateau du Piedlong: its output will thus rise from 4,000 to 30,000 bottles, and it will become the sole standard-bearer of Domaine la Roquette, with serious volume and a more accessible price.

The shift outlined last year is unchanged, though now further clarified. Our philosophy of specific Vins de Terroir is intact: the idea of a range of three Châteauneuf-du-Pape reds seems to have been very favourably welcomed by all our partners; and Télégramme was released in France on 1 April as scheduled, with very good feedback. There's a "but", however. We have decided to rename L'Accent and quite simply call it Piedlong.

In the months after publishing issue 23 of *Sémaphore*, we tried to convince ourselves that an existing wine had a greater chance of success than a new one; that L'Accent was part of us and we should not leave it by the wayside; that it had a history, and could easily mesh with our decision to associate each of our wines with a charac-

terful terroir, etc, etc. But in fact, we never did manage to convince ourselves...

The name Piedlong cropped up in the middle of our discussions, and its personality was always a little more compelling. It dismantled our pro-L'Accent arguments one by one. But most of all, it delivered — on a plate — everything that we had sought since taking our decision: a unique, wild and improbably stony place, with the Appellation's

highest point (altitude: 128m), unspeakably windy, and with a dream subsoil for the hot summers that supposedly lie in store, with its mixture, beyond one metre in depth, of 70% pebbles and 30% clay-rich soil. And it is planted with 70-year-old Grenache. What more could you ask for? It has personality to spare.

So we had a change of heart, and focused all our labelling efforts on showcasing Piedlong. Designing a label is always a tough task, even though we want to create something simple, and attuned to the things we love.

L'Accent, meanwhile, will maybe rise from its ashes one day, as part of another experiment, or to highlight another locale or grape variety. Then again, maybe not... For now, it will stay with us to promote the 2004 to 2010 vintages, providing insights into the ageing potential of the Piedlong-Grenache couple. And will also, quite simply, be part of Vignobles Brunier's history.



---

## PRESS CUTS

**WINE ADVOCATE – #203**  
**– 30 OCT 12 – Robert Parker**

### **Vieux Télégraphe red 2011**

This beautifully made 2011 offers immediate drinkability, which is unusual for Vieux Télégraphe. A deep ruby color is accompanied by notes of pepper, roasted meats, Provençal herbs, black cherries, black currants, tapenade, seaweed and salty sea breezes. This complex, delicious, full-throttle Châteauneuf-du-Pape should drink well for 10-15 years. This estate is somewhat unusual in that it has 135

acres of contiguous parcels in the famous La Crau sector of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. It has one of the most precocious terroirs in the appellation, and is often among the first estates to harvest because of La Crau's microclimate.

### **Piedlong red 2011**

The sweet, broad, personality-filled Piedlong red 2011 (a 2500 cs blend of 90% Grenache and 10% Mourvèdre) offers up hints of blueberries, roasted meats, lavender and sautéed porcini mushrooms. Lively, aromatic and displaying lots of potential, this old vine cuvée should drink nicely for 10-12 years.

### **Télégramme red 2011**

The estate's second wine, Télégramme, possesses one of the most innovative and charming labels in the wine world. The 2011 vintage, a blend of 80% Grenache and the rest Syrah, Cinsault and Mourvèdre, has been beefed up by the addition of a lot of the production of Roquette. 10 000 cs of this seductive, fleshy, high-class Châteauneuf-du-Pape, are produced. Aged in concrete tanks and a few foudres, it reveals lots of kirsch, raspberry and floral notes in a medium to full-bodied, fruit-forward, charming, seductive style. Drink it over the next 5-7 years.