

TASTE LANGUEDOC - A BLOG ABOUT THE WINES OF THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

SATURDAY, 20 MARCH 2010

A DILEMMA

What to drink after 1921 Château d'Yquem? That was my problem yesterday lunchtime – a pretty upmarket one, I'll admit, but daunting all the same, as I didn't want to get it wrong. My old boss – he had the misfortune to endure my typing for four years in the mid-1970s - had invited me to Terroirs to share a bottle of d'Yquem of his birth year. The other guests were my ex-Managing Director, who is a MW of 50 years standing; another ex-colleague with keen palate, and Jack's son-in-law, who had given him the bottle in the first place, along with his grandson who is new to wine and keen to learn.

The d'Yquem could only be described as fabulous and venerable. It was deep amber in colour and elegantly honeyed on the nose, with the unmistakable note of botrytis. The palate was that fabulous combination of richness, elegance and maturity, with a long lingering finish. It was certainly a wine that I will remember for the rest of my life. It was ageing gracefully, but like my ex-boss, who still plays a regular round of golf, very far from being on its last legs. 1921 was one of the great Sauternes vintages and I think the wine more than surpassed our expectations.

And then came the thorny question: what do we drink next? The wine list was thrust at me. If you ever find yourself in London, wondering where to have a meal, Terroirs near Charing Cross, is the solution. The food is delicious, with French country flavours, terrines, charcuterie, boudin noir, bavette, seafood, and so on, and the wine list comes from one of the UK's most original importers, Les Caves de Pyrène who specialise in organic wine and make a point of seeking out quirky wines from off the beaten track in France and elsewhere. So I was spoilt for choice.

The question was which wine to choose? Give me a clue, I said. No you choose; we are both very out of date declared the octogenarians. France or Italy? I had spotted a friend's Brunello di Montalcino. France they said. And then my eyes lighted on the evocatively titled **Sous les Cailloux des Grillons** (under the stones of the crickets) from Domaine de Gravillas in the village of St. Jean de Minervois. John and Nicole Bojanowski produce some of the most original wines of the area, and more often *vin de pays* rather than appellation. The name of this particular *cuvée* conjures up warm sunshine in a glass. Let's try something different, I thought. Jack won't want to drink claret – he's got plenty in his cellar at home.

I admit I held my breathe as the assembled company tasted the wine. The octogenarians wouldn't hesitate to voice their opinion. Would they

ABOUT ME



ROSEMARY GEORGE MW

What qualifies me to write and comment on the Languedoc? Quite simply, I have been following its development for thirty years. I was one of the first women to pass the Master of Wine exams, back in 1979, and I became a freelance wine writer in 1981, since when I have written eleven books, covering not only the Languedoc, but also Chablis, Tuscany and New Zealand.

[VIEW MY COMPLETE PROFILE](#)

WHY THE LANGUEDOC?

My very first visit to a wine cellar in the Languedoc was in 1979 and I have returned regularly since then, researching two books, firstly French Country Wines, and subsequently The Wines of the South of France, from Banyuls to Bellet. French Country Wines was published in 1990 and took me off the beaten track to many lost vineyards of France, but inevitably the Midi formed a large part of the book. In those days you sensed the beginnings of a revival in the fortunes of the region; some of the estates with a serious reputation today, were leading the way back in the 1980s, such as Gilbert Alquier in Faugères; Daniel Domergue in the Minervois; Domaine Cazes in Rivesaltes. Aimé Guibert had made his first vintage at Mas de Dumas Gassac in 1978 and set an unprecedented price expectation for a wine from the south of France. Alain Roux was making pace-setting wines

like it? I certainly did. It had a lovely red fruit and brambly nose, and on the palate, the vibrant flavours of fresh fruit, with some acidity as well a hint of tannin, with some intriguing flavours, that I could really only describe as funky, with a touch of appealing rusticity. The combination of sunshine with fresh flavours was delicious. Imagine my relief when they started to purr with pleasure. They liked it just as much as I did. The crickets had come up trumps!

My next appointment of the afternoon was a Côtes de Provence tasting. Well anything would be an anti-climax after such lunchtime drinking. But more in my next post.

POSTED BY ROSEMARY GEORGE MW AT 11:43 

4 COMMENTS:



Iris said...

I like your article about what I would also consider as a real Dilemma. I've experienced something similar some years ago after stepping outside a horizontal tasting of the complete range of Domaine Romanée Conti reds from 2002 - culminating in "the" DRC... what to roder for the diner in the small restaurant after that... My choice was a Chinon from Jouget - which had in some difficulties in convincing after the Pinot.

So even more opleased, to read in your blog post that a wine of Domaine de Gravillas did find grace in your exemple of this kind of dilemma.

I will come back to read more of your tasting notes and stories. I liked very much your explication, why you write a blog about our beautiful region and its wines. I arrived in 1980 - and never went away, even converted to winemaking-).

So I followed the same periods of the evolution as you, and was pleased to meet familiar names, like Daniel Domergue (my teacher at the winemaker school), Alain Roux, whom I met before he sold le Prieuré, Alquier, Guibert and the others who participated in the regretted reunions and conferences of Béziers Oenopole in the 80/90th..

pure nostalgia - but there are many others to discover, so you should really write your second edition:-).

14 APRIL 2010 AT 14:29



Rosemary George MW said...

Many thanks for your encouragement - nice to have a comment from somebody else with similar experiences, and also thank you for sharing your dilemma. I would have thought Charles Joguet would be upto the challenge, but DRC is a very hard act to follow too.

30 APRIL 2010 AT 18:42

at the Prieuré de St. Jean de Bébian. Other reputations have faded and many others were yet to be made. My visit to the Pic St. Loup focused on the cooperative at St. Mathieu de Trévières, and on that cooperative alone. The leading names such as l'Hortus, Mas Bruguière, Mas de Mortiès, Clos Marie, or Domaine de Cazeneuve were as yet quite unknown. The same phenomenon applies to the village of Montpeyrroux, whose wines were also represented by the village cooperative. At the time no one foresaw the enormous development that would take place in the 1990s.

Nonetheless back then, the Languedoc intrigued me. On the last day of my last research trip for French Country Wines, back in October 1987, I had lunch in Narbonne with Claude Vialade, who was the export director for one of the big players of the region, les Vignerons Val d'Orbieu, an enormous marketing and export association of cooperatives and smaller wine producers. One of us said: there is a book to be written on the Languedoc. I mentally filed the idea and ten years on, and two or three books later, I embarked on The Wines of the South of France, which covered all the vineyards between the Spanish and Italian borders, including Provence as well as Languedoc Roussillon, and also the island of Corsica. The Wines of the South of France was published in 2001 and examines the vineyards of the Midi as they were on the eve of the millennium. I could write a second, comparable book, featuring only wine growers who have started making wine in this century. But these days it is impossible to keep abreast of the pace of change with the printed word; the region demands the immediacy of the web. Numerous research trips only served to fuel my enthusiasm for the wonderful region of the Languedoc. Holidays in gîtes between Perpignan and Draguignan, as well as snatched weekends in the middle of research trips, enabled my husband and I to decide on our favourite corner of the Languedoc. And in 2004 we bought a house within easy reach of the towns of Pézenas and Clermont l'Hérault, which gives me a wonderful