

CLUB CHEVALIER

♦ GRANDS TERROIRS ♦



JANUARY 2018



he notion of *TERROIR*—in short, the idea that a given vineyard's unparalleled combination of environmental factors such as geography, geology, and climate results in a wine expressing unique character specific to that site—is one of the wine world's most polarizing topics. Scientific studies have purportedly both proven and disproven the influence of *terroir*; books have even been written on the topic. Meanwhile, the debate rages on as enthusiasts, glass in hand, passionately animate cellars, bistros, and dining rooms across the globe.

Traveling France's wine roads, one quickly sees that the French hold this idea dearly, and have done so for hundreds of years. Why else would Burgundy's Cistercian monks have built a stone wall around the great Clos de Vougeot, immortalizing what could be called the Côte d'Or's first officially recognized *grand cru* in 1336? A vigneron would argue that the difference in aroma and flavor between a noble Clos de Vougeot and a humble Bourgogne rouge grown a mere hundred yards away, in the flatlands on the opposite site of the *route nationale*, is palpable evidence in the effect of *terroir*. And while Burgundy, with its maniacally precise delineations of vineyard parcels and sub-parcels, is the most obvious place to look for such evidence, many other sites in France and elsewhere have proven their capacity to yield wines of superlative complexity and refinement.



This month we will explore six such sites in France and Italy. Beyond simply enjoying favorable soil types or fortuitous annual sunshine statistics, these vineyards have much more going for them, whether it's the specific angle at which the sun strikes the vine leaves throughout the growing season, the depth of the topsoil that allows for perfect drainage after a storm, or the wild herbs that grow nearby and appear to contribute aromatic nuances to the final product. Even in difficult vintages, these special plots of land imbue a sense of harmony that shines through from vine to glass—this is the timeless power of a great *terroir*.

— ANTHONY LYNCH

LE TERROIR

CLIMATE

Climate determines ripeness, based on a grape's balance of sugars and acids at harvest.

A site's latitude and its geography, such as nearby mountains or bodies of water, impact mesoclimate and microclimate.

Other important factors include rainfall and wind.

VINEYARD SITUATION

A vineyard's exposure (N, S, E, W) determines how much sun it receives. Its slope dictates the angle of the sun's rays as well as drainage, while elevation impacts a site's ventilation and temperature difference between day and night.

SOIL

Soil depth, mineral content, fertility, and pH have a crucial effect on how vines grow. Other factors like water and heat retention also influence ripening, vigor, and vine health.

FAUNA AND FLORA

Microorganisms like yeast and bacteria, present in the air and on the grapes, play a huge role in natural vinifications. Vegetation near a vineyard (for example, Provence's garrigue) has been noted to affect a wine's aroma.



2016 FRIULI COLLI ORIENTALI PINOT GRIGIO

“RONCO PITOTTI” ♦ VIGNAI DA DULINE \$45

THIS IS WHAT PINOT GRIGIO tasted like decades ago before the mass market existed. Note the wine’s ever so slightly gray-pink tinge. Note the full body, the voluptuousness—it does a full malolactic fermentation. Yes, this Pinot Grigio is *terroir*-driven, intensely stony, and it should age quite well. A bottle from the 1980s shared a few years ago with the old proprietor was very special.

➤ *Ronco Pitotti is a terraced amphitheater ideally situated to capture the sun’s rays throughout the day. The soil is flysch, a sedimentary rock composed of alternating strata of marl and sandstone. These layers are derived from an ancient seabed and can be seen in some parts of the vineyard crumbling away to create a dusty topsoil. Surrounded by woodland, Ronco Pitotti enjoys an idyllic isolation amid nature, with flourishing biodiversity of local fauna and flora.*

2016 LANGUEDOC BLANC “LES COCALIÈRES”

♦ DOMAINE D’AUPILHAC \$35

THIS BLEND OF Roussanne, Rolle (Vermentino), Grenache Blanc, and Marsanne is a definite contender for “best white of the South.” The juice ferments wild and ages for more than a year in neutral casks, completing its malolactic fermentation before an unfiltered bottling. Why one of southern France’s finest whites? Poise, length, sense of place, and aging potential. A 2002 opened recently showed astonishing complexity, reminiscent of honey, almonds, wildflowers, and liquid rocks.


➤ *The Languedoc is certainly not known for its white wines, but planting the right grapes in the right site can yield great results. Retaining freshness is the crucial determinant here, as the hot meridional climate favors low acidity, and grapes like Marsanne and Grenache Blanc are lacking in natural acidity to begin with. At 350 meters above sea level, Cocalières experiences diurnal temperature shifts crucial to preserving this acid, while the northwest sun exposure prevents excessive ripeness and correspondingly flabby wines. The vineyard also boasts a curious and unusual geology: it was once a lake that formed after the eruption of an ancient volcano, resulting in a mixture of limestone and basalt—a rare geological phenomenon. The white wine from Cocalières perfectly reflects its *terroir*: taut, mineral—almost salty—and suggestive of the wild thyme and fennel that grow abundantly around the vines.*




2016 FLEURIE “LES MORIERS”

◆ DOMAINE CHIGNARD \$26


IN THE HEART OF THE BEAUJOLAIS, Cédric Chignard is carrying on a tradition of crafting delicious, authentic Fleurie from his family’s holdings. The very traditional vinification consists of a carbonic maceration followed by aging in enormous old *foudres*—nothing fancy, but a time-tested way of working that is best adapted to the local *terroir* and grape variety. The combination of bright, juicy fruit and deeper earthy tones makes this Fleurie utterly drinkable today and versatile at table with many styles of cuisine.



➔ *Les Moriers is a sloping granite clos (walled-in parcel) that borders the neighboring cru of Moulin-à-Vent. Correspondingly, the wine marries the delicacy, floral tones, and textural seductiveness of Fleurie with Moulin-à-Vent’s power and structure. Proof that the Clos des Moriers is a blessed site: in recent vintages, it has repeatedly been miraculously spared by hailstorms that devastated surrounding vineyards.*




2014 CHINON “LE CLOS GUILLOT” ◆ BERNARD BAUDRY \$38



CABERNET FRANC reacts differently to the various soils within the Chinon appellation, giving wines that range from light and fruity to seriously full-bodied, tannic, and capable of long aging. The Baudrys farm their vineyards organically and ferment this wine in cement and wood tanks, then age it for one year in used oak barrels. The wine is then racked back into cement tanks, where it rests an additional nine months before an unfiltered bottling. It is a powerful expression of Chinon, with beautifully refined aromas of forest fruit and spice. While its elegance makes it approachable today, it will easily age and improve for ten or fifteen years in a good cellar.

➔ *Le Clos Guillot sits on a slope with south/southeast exposure, favorable to good ripening each year in this cool-climate northern region. The soil of clay over yellow tuffeau—a local type of limestone that is porous and almost chalky in texture—retains just the right amount of water to sustain the vines during times of drought but drains well enough to avoid oversaturation in wetter periods. Loire tuffeau is valued, for it produces wines with very fine, chalky tannins, giving reds like this an important structural element without seeming overpowering or aggressive. Chinons grown in tuffeau are also renowned for their exceptional aging potential—don’t hesitate to tuck this one away.*



2015 CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE “PIEDLONG”

◆ FRÉDÉRIC & DANIEL BRUNIER \$58

IN A REGION where raw power usually trumps finesse, we are fortunate that vigneron like the Bruniers are tirelessly striving to bring out the nuance inherent in some of the southern Rhône’s great *terroirs*. Their Piedlong bottling is an effort to deliver classic, stony Châteauneuf that is accessible both in price and in its early stages of life. It consists of old-vine fruit grown mainly in *galets roulés*, resulting in a mineral tension even in a hot, dry vintage such as 2015. Sleek and suave on the palate, the Piedlong culminates in a noble tannin that will remind you of the southern Rhône’s potential for wines of real finesse. Paired with a tender roasted leg of lamb, it will be superb young or old.

➤ *A well-exposed vineyard littered with galets roulés, Châteauneuf’s famous rounded riverbed stones, Piedlong is the ideal site for Grenache to express the purity, finesse, and minerality typical of the best wines from this appellation. A portion of the fruit—the Mourvèdre—is sourced from the nearby Pignan parcel, which has much sandier soils. This softens the grape’s rugged tannins and allows for an elegant balance in the final blend.*



2012 BAROLO “VIGNA LAZZAIRASCO” ◆ GUIDO PORRO \$47

GUIDO PORRO may be the best Barolo producer you’ve never heard of. A quiet fellow most content to work away in his steep Serralunga d’Alba parcels, this Barolista prefers to avoid the spotlight. Guido is simply a hardworking traditionalist who makes Barolo the old-fashioned way: that means fermenting with natural yeasts, macerating the juice on its skins for at least three weeks, and aging the wine for three years in Slavonian oak casks. Lazzairasco is a sun-soaked amphitheater that gives correspondingly rich, lush, powerful Baroli, loaded with sumptuous ripe fruit and streaked with notes of tar and tea. It drinks well young, but there is certainly no hurry to uncork this big, bad beauty.

➤ *While the Barolo appellation features marl soils throughout, the town of Serralunga is home to particularly poor, limestone-rich marls that give especially potent, structured expressions of Nebbiolo. The steep Lazzairasco vineyard lies in the lower portion of the famed Lazzarito cru and enjoys full southern and southeastern sun exposure and shelter from prevailing winds. As a result, this site bakes in the summer heat, producing ripe, full-throttle wines with all the heft, concentration, and aging potential Nebbiolo can provide.*





2016 Friuli Colli Orientali Pinot Grigio "Ronco Pitotti" <i>Vignai da Duline</i> FRIULI	Pinot Grigio	Vines planted in 1940 and 1958 Flysch	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–52° F Decant optional	Orchard fruit, citrus rind, wet stone Silky, delicate, lively yet well rounded	Drink now through 2025
2016 Languedoc Blanc "Les Cocalières" <i>Domaine d'Aupilhac</i> LANGUEDOC	30% Roussanne, 30% Rolle, 20% Grenache Blanc, 20% Marsanne	Vines planted between 1999 and 2002 Limestone, basalt	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–52° F Decant optional	Linden tree, almond, pistachio, white peach, honey Creamy, fleshy, taut; saline finish	Drink now through 2025
2016 Fleurie "Les Moriers" <i>Domaine Chignard</i> BEAUJOLAIS	Gamay	60-year-old vines Granite	Serve <i>cool</i> 55–60° F Decant optional	Floral notes, red berries, spice Pure velvet; bright, juicy, mineral	Drink now through 2025
2014 Chinon "Le Clos Guillot" <i>Bernard Baudry</i> LOIRE	Cabernet Franc	Vines planted between 1993 and 2000 Clay, yellow limestone	Serve <i>cool</i> 55–60° F Decant 1–2 hours	Peppery spice, fallen leaves, blackberry Dense, earthy, grippy yet refined	Drink now through 2030
2015 Châteauneuf-du-Pape "Piedlong" <i>Frédéric & Daniel Brunier</i> SOUTHERN RHÔNE	90% Grenache, 10% Mourvèdre	Grenache = 70-year-old vines; Mourvèdre = 50-year-old vines Grenache = <i>galets roulés</i> on <i>molasse</i> and clay; Mourvèdre = sand and clay	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant 1–2 hours	Ripe strawberry, black cherry, <i>garrigue</i> , <i>réglisse</i> Suave, muscular, pure; stony tannins	Drink now through 2030
2012 Barolo "Vigna Lazzairasco" <i>Guido Porro</i> PIEDMONT	Nebbiolo	45-year-old vines Marl	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant 1–2 hours min.	Eucalyptus, tar, tea, ripe raspberry Luscious, masculine, profound, intense	Drink now through 2030

cover: *Galets roulés* in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Photo © Vignobles Brunier
inner left panel: Les Cocalières. Photo © Domaine d'Aupilhac
inner right panel: The Lazzairasco *cru*. Photo © Dixon Brooke

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