

Certain organizations, such as Demeter and Biodyvin, provide official certification to biodynamic farmers who adhere to a strict set of rules. Other growers choose to borrow various elements from biodynamics, applying only the principles they deem most suitable to their vineyards on a case-by-case basis.

What is the purpose of biodynamic farming? Sustainability, certainly, but its merits go far beyond this. Proponents of biodynamics insist that it benefits the planet and creates a healthier work environment, but they are

also convinced by the results—what's in the glass. What do biodynamic wines taste like? It's hard to say. Successful examples seem to exhibit a liveliness and energy not evident in wines resulting from conventional farming. One theory suggests that living soils naturally retain more freshness than those devoid of life; should the vine reach a natural balance in an ecosystem rich with animal, plant, and microbial life, then it should also produce grapes with a perfect balance at ripeness.

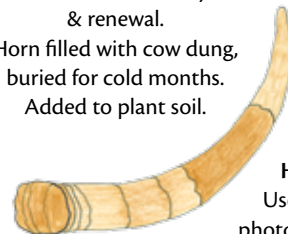
Skeptics, however, dismiss biodynamics as a hippie marketing fad, with no palpable outcome on the wine. Luckily, we can taste for ourselves: the six wines featured this month are all handcrafted by enthusiastic proponents of biodynamic agriculture, and the results speak for themselves. Can you taste it?



Treatments in Farming Biodynamics

HORN MANURE

Used for soil fertility & renewal.
Horn filled with cow dung, buried for cold months. Added to plant soil.



HORN SILICA

Used to enhance photosynthesis.
Horn filled with finely ground quartz, buried for warm months. Sprayed on plant foliage.



YARROW

Used to strengthen plant immunity. Fermented & added to compost.

CHAMOMILE

Used to improve plant regeneration. Dried & buried, then added to compost.



STINGING NETTLES

Used to increase nutrients & minerals in the soil. Dried & buried, then added to compost.



OAK BARK

Used to improve soil pH & strengthen immunity. Made into paste & buried, then added to compost.



DANDELION FLOWERS

Used to improve flowering & fruiting, plus overall plant health. Dried & buried, then added to compost.



VALERIAN

Used to promote overall balance in the plant. Ground & extracted, then added on top of & near the compost pile.

HORSETAIL

Used to prevent fungal disease. Made into tea, then added to plant soil.



Elaine Chukan Brown, 2014

CLUB CHEVALIER

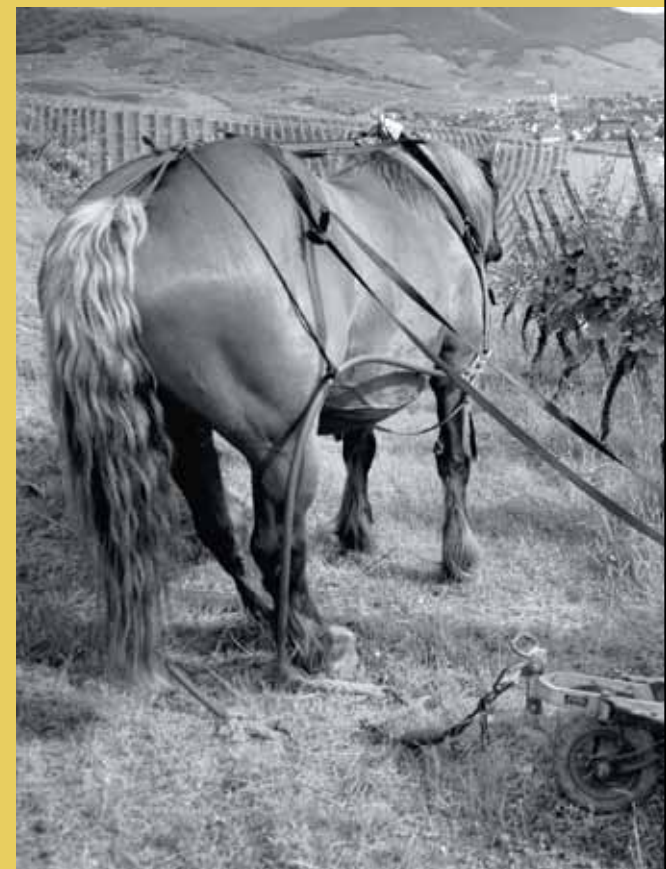
BIODYNAMICS • JULY 2018



Biodynamic describes a method of farming that treats the vineyard as a living organism. It is based on a philosophy created in 1924 by Austrian scientist Rudolf Steiner, who was also the founder of the Waldorf school system. Steiner developed the “spiritual science” of anthroposophy, which was meant to understand science through the spiritual world.

Because the soil is treated like a living organism, it is necessary to build its “immune system” and maintain its health. Since pesticides and herbicides tend to deplete the soil of nutrients, biodynamic methods ban the use of both. Instead, homeopathic remedies usually produced from plants and minerals are utilized to nurture and protect the vines from pest and disease. In short, the goal of biodynamic farming is to be in tune with the totality of life forces affecting the growth of the plant, so that the vineyard can find a natural harmony.

Two main factors make biodynamic farming distinctly different from organic farming. The first is the use of a complex system of herbal sprays and composting techniques, known as “preparations.” The second is the timing of the operations in the vineyard and cellar, strictly regulated by the movements of the spheres. Biodynamic producers follow lunar and cosmic patterns to determine when to prune, rack, bottle, and perform other operations that impact the final product.



2016 VOUVRAY “LA DILETTANTE”

◆ C. & P. BRETON \$26



IS IT POSSIBLE to squeeze honey from a stone? That is hard to imagine, yet the image is precisely what this young Vouvray from Catherine Breton brings to mind. The honeyed aspect is typical of Chenin Blanc, and when coupled with the stony element derived from the chalky soils found in this part of the Loire Valley, it yields this live wire of a wine with

succulent fruit and a completely bone-dry, mouthwatering finale. A truly versatile white, La Dilettante has the bright acidity to pair with sushi or delicate fish dishes, but it contains the textured weight on the palate to accompany richer foods like poultry or mushrooms. For a real treat, age it for five years and enjoy it with a slice of seared foie gras.

2015 PINOT GRIS *GRAND CRU* “EICHBERG” ◆ KUENTZ-BAS \$51

I PREDICT this Eichberg will give you one of the most beautiful Pinot Gris aromas you’ve ever experienced. Gorgeous! Definitive! Then, a luxurious, satin pillow on the palate.

“Samuel, what would you serve with it?”

“Ris de veau with morels. Pigeon or quail with a balsamic reduction sauce.”

➤ On this type of soil [limestone and heavy clay, with high water retention], biodynamic farming is essential to avoid suffocation of the root system and a blocking of maturation, and equally important to aerate the soil and draw a maximum of the mineral elements available in this deep, thick layer of clay. In the cellar, I use minimal sulfur during vinification and instead age the wine on its lees, crucial for a sunny vintage like 2015 where aromatic complexity is often discreet; we must intensify it during élevage. The work in the vines will allow for balance in such a vintage thanks to the minerality and the salinity drawn from the mycorrhizae [the symbiotic relationship between fungi and plant roots, resulting in nutrients available for uptake], and finally low yields are essential for attaining balance in a warm vintage like this. —SAMUEL TOTTOLI, KUENTZ-BAS

2016 SAUMUR CHAMPIGNY “LA MARGINALE”

◆ THIERRY GERMAIN \$55

THIERRY’S CABERNET FRANCS from Saumur Champigny are models of purity, finesse, and drinkability. This blend of parcels from the communes of Chacé and Varrains is only made in the best vintages, and sees the longest aging of Germain’s reds—up to 24 months in a mix of older barrels and *foudres*.

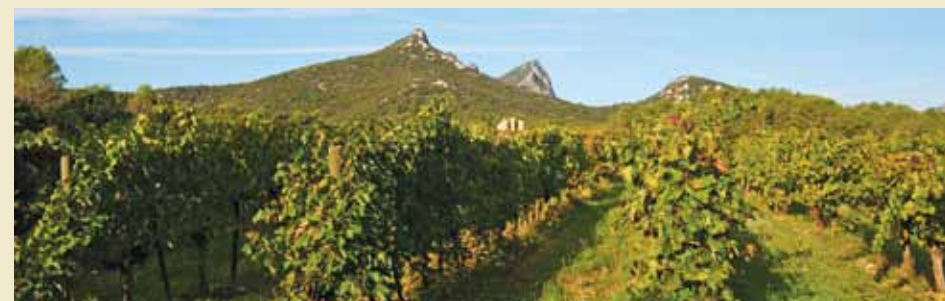
Thierry is a pioneer of biodynamics in the Loire Valley, with great experience and wisdom acquired under the tutelage of Clos Rougeard’s Charly Foucault. With incredibly pristine, vivid fruit along with a deep, rich structure and silky-fine tannins, Germain’s reds are grand examples of the heights biodynamic wines can achieve.



2016 PIC SAINT LOUP *ROUGE* “CUVÉE SAINTE AGNÈS”

◆ ERMITAGE DU PIC SAINT LOUP \$26

BIODYNAMIC AGRICULTURE may seem like voodoo medicine to some, but few are more convinced of its worth than the three Ravaille brothers, who farm the limestone slopes around Pic Saint Loup in the Languedoc. Since beginning the conversion to biodynamics in 1999, the Ravailles have been quick to sing the praises of this philosophy—homeopathic remedies for vines, if you will. According to cellar master Pierre Ravaille, biodynamics brought noticeable improvements to vineyard health and overall quality within years. Here is a red to support that claim, a blend of mainly Syrah and Grenache from high altitude on poor, thin, rocky soil. Its mystical perfume evokes wild blackberries, smoke, spice, and olive brine in a chewy, mineral-driven expression of this underrated southern French *terroir*. Drinkable now, it is also a great bargain cellar candidate, and an excellent ambassador for biodynamic viticulture.



2016 CORSE FIGARI *ROUGE*

◆ CLOS CANARELLI \$48

IN RECENT DECADES, Corsica’s wine scene has experienced a total revolution. In spite of its ancient history of viticulture, the island’s production had long been plagued by an overemphasis on quantity, with the vast majority of the volume represented by bulk wine sent to mainland France for blending. Fortunately, a resurgence in enthusiasm for traditional methods, along with technological advances in winemaking, have allowed for a return to the quality-oriented wines that Corsica had been praised for years ago. At the forefront of this upheaval are producers such as Yves Canarelli. Ever since joining the family domaine in 1993, Yves has focused on replanting native varieties and working the vineyards biodynamically to bring out the best of his *terroir* in the Figari appellation, located on the southern tip of the island. Clos Canarelli’s Corse Figari *rouge*, composed primarily of Niellucciu filled out by Syrah and Sciaccarellu, has the depth and intensity that you would expect from this wind-swept, sun-baked land, as well as a certain finesse that complements its rugged edge. It represents one of a growing number of captivating wines from this exciting region.

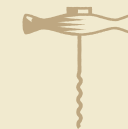
2014 IROULÉGUY *ROUGE* “CUVÉE HAITZA”

◆ DOMAINE ARRETXEA \$46

MICHEL AND THÉRÈSE RIOUSPEYROUS craft some of the most exciting, singular wines in France—wines that tell a story about a land and a people. Basque country, in the heart of the Pyrenees just miles from the Spanish border,



feels drastically removed from the rest of France, thanks to its unique culture and landscape. Haitza, Arretxea’s top bottling of red from the steep mountain slopes of Irouléguy, features Tannat and some Cabernet Sauvignon, aged in barrel and built to last. Pitch-black in color with dense, earthy tannins and suggestions of wild forest berries and spice, this bottling is the Pyrenees’ answer to Clape’s Cornas and Tempier’s Cabassaou. And old vintages—you can’t help but think, “Why didn’t I put down more of this one?”



| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|------------------------|
| 2016 Vouvray “La Dilettante” <i>Catherine and Pierre Breton</i> LOIRE VALLEY | Chenin Blanc | 40-year-old vines Clay, limestone | Serve <i>cold</i> 46–52° F Decant optional | Wildflowers, apple, key lime Textured, flinty, tender | Drink now through 2022 |
| 2015 Pinot Gris <i>Grand Cru</i> “Eichberg” <i>Kuentz-Bas</i> ALSACE | Pinot Gris | 25- to 45-year-old vines Clay, limestone | Serve <i>cold</i> 48–54° F Decant optional | Mirabelle plum, peach, wet stone Round, voluptuous, unctuous yet dry | Drink now through 2025 |
| 2016 Saumur-Champigny “La Marginale” <i>Thierry Germain</i> LOIRE VALLEY | Cabernet Franc | 45-year-old vines Clay, limestone | Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional | Violet, pine, ground spice, blackcurrant Silky, pure, precise | Drink now through 2025 |
| 2016 Pic Saint Loup <i>Rouge</i> “Cuvée Sainte Agnès” <i>Ermitage du Pic Saint Loup</i> LANGUEDOC | 50% Syrah, 40% Grenache, 10% Mourvèdre | 40- to 50-year-old vines Limestone | Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant 1–2 hours | Black olive, smoked meat, blackberry, Provençal herbs Fleshy, mouth-filling, savory | Drink now through 2030 |
| 2016 Corse Figari <i>Rouge</i> <i>Clos Canarelli</i> CORSICA | 80% Niellucciu, 15% Syrah, 5% Sciaccarellu | Vines planted in 1997 Granite | Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant 1–2 hours | Smoke, black fruit, maquis herbs, spiced minerals Generous, chewy, powerful | Drink now through 2030 |
| 2014 Irouléguy <i>Rouge</i> “Cuvée Haitza” <i>Domaine Arretxea</i> SOUTHWEST | 70% Tannat, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon | 20-year-old vines Sandstone | Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant 1–2 hours | Elderberry, pink peppercorn, wild forest berries, spice Dense, earthy, focused | Drink now through 2030 |

cover: Biodynamic vineyards at Clos Canarelli
inner panels: Tilling vineyards with a horse in Alsace
far left: © Catherine & Pierre Breton

middle top: © Thierry Germain
middle bottom: © Ermitage du Pic Saint Loup
near left: © Domaine Arretxea