

GRUET

New Mexico

“Believe it or not,” wrote American foremost wine writer Robert Parker in 1993, “there are vineyards in New Mexico. I have been impressed by the sparkling wines from Gruet Winery.” If the mere existence of New Mexican viticulture today no longer comes as a surprise to most wine lovers, that’s surely because of the exceptional reputation Gruet has established in this corner of the New World.

In 1984, Laurent Gruet, Farid Himeur and Nathalie Himeur (née Gruet), representatives of a Champagne House which is small and young by French standards, set foot to New Mexico and began planting what has since become 92 acres of vines. When asked by a French colleague what was formerly raised there, Farid laughingly replied: “rattlesnakes and coyotes.” But huge stumps in a few nearby areas still testify to more than two centuries of vineyards in what is today New Mexico, a tradition killed-off in the second half of the last century by meteorological and economic calamities.

Still, it wasn’t just tales of 17th Century vineyards which drew Gruet. Extensive research had convinced the team that the sandy soils, warm days and cool nights in the high plateaus of southern New Mexico offered promise of aromatic finesse and acid balance critical to producing fine sparkling wine. The results have certainly vindicated this choice of *terroir*, no matter how surprising or even downright improbable it may once have seemed to wine experts. (Meantime, numerous Franco-American bubbly [ad]ventures in California have increasingly been finding “better uses” for their Chardonnay and Pinot!)

Top-quality sparkling wine, like any wine, must be born of the right soil and microclimate. But that is only the beginning. For vines, Gruet chose the two classic grapes of France’s Champagne region, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The fruit is picked entirely



by hand into shallow boxes to preserve unblemished, unbroken skins, and rushed to press under refrigeration to preserve flavor and freshness.

Gruet’s New Mexican team has transported from Champagne the most rigorous standards of blending, aging and disgorging. The critical marriage of individual lots of wine proceeds according to their self-described “knowledge of perfection.” Wines rest at least 2 years on the lees and are disgorged by hand.

Nor are these the only labor-intensive processes engaged in by the team at Gruet. Says Farid, “We are committed to producing wine of excellent quality. We’re not cutting any corners. We know costs are high, but we try to limit that by other means than cutting corners in quality. We each move boxes, we’re forklift and truck drivers, we’re the office personnel, we work the vineyards, we sell the wines.”

Gruet wines have a fruit character you won’t find anywhere else in the world. But the Gruet team doesn’t fear comparison with the French archetype. On the contrary, if you call their style French it’s taken by them as a compliment!

“... this excellent bargain should please even the most stuffy Champagne snob for a fraction of the price.”

John Long, *Cleveland Plain Dealer* [12/98]

“For my money, the best sparkling wine in the U.S. is *still* produced by *Gruet* in a place about as far away from Champagne as could be ...”

New York Magazine [10/27/98]

“... a great buy ...”

Mike Michael, *Consumer’s Digest* [11/98]

Varieties: *Pinot Noir, Chardonnay*
(*Pinot Meunier* planted ‘98)
Acreage: *Control of 220 acres, 92 of their own, the rest under long-term contract and tight supervision. Vines are 10-12 years old on average, but vigor is retarded by the sandy soil.*

Vinificatory details: *Methode Champ.*

Brut Blanc de Noirs: *Although there is a small percentage of Chardonnay here, pure Pinot fruit of an extraordinarily vivid sort commands the scene. Cherry, plum and floral scents. Rich, round, creamy palate.*

Brut: *Here the Chardonnay dominates over Pinot, with apple blossom and citrus aromas and a bright, yeasty palate with a hint of citrus peel, apricot kernel and apple pit in the finish. As the wine opens in air, apple backs off a bit to reveal lovely toasted wheat flavor.*

Demi-sec: *Pinot and Chardonnay, finished with a hint of sweetness*

Domaine Saint Vincent: *This cuvée doesn’t lack distinctive personality or sheer class. If you find another 100% Pinot and Chardonnay méthode Champenoise even remotely comparable in quality for ten dollars a bottle, let us know!*

Gruet Brut
Gruet Blanc de Noirs
Gruet Demi-Sec
Domaine Saint Vincent

“The Blanc de Noirs ... received one of my highest ratings. Even the non-vintage Brut was excellent ... This is a winery that merits attention.”

Robert Parker’s *Wine Buyer’s Guide*

“[Chef] Vongerichten, who has made the [Gruet] Brut his house’s sparkling wine, impishly asks customers to guess its origin. Nobody does. The wine tastes a bit like quince, said Mr. Vongerichten, and the very fine bubbles, acidity and aftertaste make it resemble a premium French Champagne ...”

Harold Goldberg,

The New York Times [12/91]