

GRANDE MAISON THIERRY DESPRÉS

Monbazillac / Bergerac

Southwest

Now here's a most interesting case. The Grande Maison Bergerac sec was presented to me by my Parisian friends and partners in wine-crime as part of a grueling stand-up tasting. (That's the kind where, when you're too tired to stand any longer, the tasting's over. Ordinarily, the number of wines is by then well into three figures.) We scour the country for new leads and samples, and ordinarily use tastings like this merely to determine who is worth visiting in person.

Little miss "Sophie" (for that is what our Mr. Després calls his Bergerac sec, for reasons which like much else about this producer I have yet to discover) stole the show on this occasion. Purest ripe Sauvignon and chalk allied to the fig and lime of Semillon in the classic Bergerac manner, but here presented with a richness and polish I've never before encountered.

Després can work the lees like Lafon: that's how creamy rich "Sophie" is. The juice goes into the barrel "dirty" and comes out singing! Yet his playing of the proverbial new barrel organ doesn't drown out the fruit. Sophie's little secrets: Even the fruit of young vines is often picked in multiple passes, then its frozen and immediately thawed (!) to "fragilize" the skins.

Grande Maison bottles a range of Monbazillac with varying cepages, vinificatory media, and degrees of fruit selectivity. The average yield (farmed biodynamic-ally) is 2 barrels an acre! These commence with the ludicrously inexpensive, tank-raised "Cuvée des Anges" and climax with a wine (I'm not kidding here!) that would cost Vintner Select more than the Bordeaux negotiants pay for d'Yquem. Not one but *several* of these cuvées turned heads in a Paris blind tasting in 2000, when assembled local luminaries and foreign importers consistently ranked them above d'Yquem!



Bergerac Monbazillac

Varieties: *Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Vert, Muscadelle de Bordeaux*

Total production: 5-6,000 cases.

Ratio of Bergerac sec: Monbazillac varies according to the vintage.

Vinificatory details: *For Sophie: Fruit from all three grape varieties is given 2-3 days cold soak, then flash frozen, and pressed thawed. 60% new wood, 40% stainless (the latter micro-oxygenated). Regular working of the lees. Bottled sur lie: no racking. For "Cuvée Florale" almost pure Sauvignon, vinified in tank.*

For Monbazillac: Anges (35% Muscadelle; 50% Semillon; 15% Sauvignon Blanc) is done in tank, the other cuvées with varying encepagement and levels of new wood. Cuvée du Chateau (usually 50:50 Semillon:Muscadelle) Typically resides in largely new wood for 18 months.

Cuvées recently represented in our lineup:

Bergerac Sec "Sophie"

Monbazillac "Cuvée des Anges"

Monbazillac

"Cuvée du Chateau"

* * *