

CHÂTEAU DE PIBARNON

Bandol

Catherine and Henri de Saint Victor have owned this property since 1978 and, in less than two decades, established one of if not the top reputation in their region. Bettane and Desseauve, in their *Classement*, give Pibarnon, along with Pradeaux, their only two-star ratings in all of Provence. These ratings will come as a shock to most Americans, who cut their teeth on the wonderful Bandols of Domaine Tempier, long imported to the States by Kermit Lynch, but slightly less well-known in France.

Pibarnon, unlike Tempier, creates a single red assemblage: there are no single-vineyard bottlings or special cuvées. This domaine boasts the chalkiest soil, highest altitude, the most spectacularly amphitheatric vineyards and the highest percentage of Mourvedre acreage in Bandol. And they are not resting on their laurels.

The estate has pioneered the use in this region of a so-called "percolator" method of extraction first developed by some clever classified Chateau in Bordeaux. This involves evacuating the fermentation tanks of all juice so that the remaining solids "crush themselves" further. While this is taking place, the juice is allowed to stand chilled overnight so that a temperature differential is achieved which enhances aromas. The overall aim, explains Catherine and Henri's son Eric, is to achieve power without sacrificing elegance. The proverbial proof has been in the tasting.

The past decade has seen the extension of acreage here, planting with venerable vine material via *selection massale*. Some of Pibarnon's steep new sites are arguably even nearer perfection in their exposure to light and sea breeze.

It seems absurd, when one considers the already high and rapidly rising prices of Bordeaux or of California's top reds, that a wine with the quality and pedigree of Chateau Pibarnon should still be purchasable for around twenty-five dollars. Relish this absurdity while you can. Mourvedre, with its unique meld of red meat and blue fruit flavors, is



becoming one of the new darlings of the wine world. How long before France's - indeed the world's - greatest Mourvedre is fully appreciated?

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"This magnificent domaine directly facing the sea, which has been at the summit of its appellation for more than ten years, produces a red of remarkable race and distinction, an archetype of great Bandol ..."

Michel Bettane, Thierry Desseauve,
Le Classement de 1999; 1996

"The site [of Pibarnon] is exceptional, with a broad semi-circular amphitheatre of terraced vines stretching downwards from this 300-metre summit. A patchwork of woods and pine-clad *garrigues* combine to provide a special micro-climate above the mists of the valley below. ... The high limestone content contributes tight structure and fine tannins to the grapes grown on it, while *gobelet* training and trellising on a single wire helps to aerate and expose the bunches, thereby gaining two weeks' maturity. A green pruning in July reduces the charge per vine to five bunches ..."

Remington Norman,
Rhone Renaissance (1996)

Chateau de Pibarnon Bandol

Varieties: *Mourvedre, Grenache(5%)*
(*Clairette & Bourbelanc for the blanc*)

Total acreage: 120 acres

Average production: 20,000 cs.

Vinificatory details: *Extended maceration by "percolation"*.

Time in oak is often restricted to less than the two-years-before-bottling requisite of the appellation, with the wine being transferred to tank once it has seen "enough" barrel. Interesting experiments have been conducted fermenting and/or aging the wine in new or newish barrique, but the Saint Victor's conclusion has always been remained that this suits neither the terroir nor their aesthetic aims.

Bandol rouge

[Very occasionally we shall select a particular outstanding vintage of rosé or blanc to represent.]

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"I tasted a few wines that were mostly Mourvedre, but none impressed me like the Pibarnon. A smoky, complex wine with licorice and coffee flavors, lots of fruit in the mid palate, and a long, beguiling finish. **92.**"

Roger Voss WINE ENTHUSIAST, Dec., '98

"[Pibarnon rouge] is meaty, opulent and classy, and has consistently been among the top three examples of the appellation for the last 20 years."

Clive Coates,

The Quarterly Review of Wines [Spring 1999]