

CHÂTEAU DE ROQUEFORT

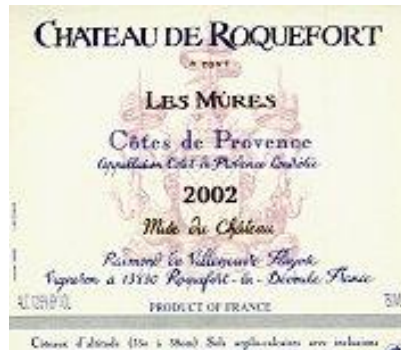
Roquefort-la-Bedoule

Vintners from other growing regions frequently express surprise when I tell them how much time I am devoting to hunting vinous treasures in Provence ... and astonishment when I claim to have had repeated success! Chateau de Roquefort, appropriately named for the rocky, once fortified hillsides it inhabits not far east of Marseille and just north of Cassis, is yet another vindication of my efforts. But I cannot pretend that this gem lay undiscovered. Wine has been made in these cellars since the waning Middle Ages, and thirty-something owner-winemaker Raymond de Villeneuve has established a loyal clientele in numerous European countries.

De Villeneuve is in fact the first of his kind I can recall to request of me – after reluctantly agreeing to part with some wine – that he *not* have to read any reviews in the U.S. wine journals on my account! I am happy to follow orders and keep these wines something of a secret – happy in fact to do whatever it takes to keep a trickle of Roquefort’s diverse and fascinating wines flowing our way.

Chateau de Roquefort’s largely old and bio-dynamically farmed vines benefit from sheltered sites hedged with cliffs and from cooling ocean breezes. Local geological variations on the almost ubiquitous clay and limestone include intrusions of flint and rich beds of fossilized shells. A common denominator for all of de Villeneuve’s diverse cuvees is vivacity: the richest reds here still retain a bright core of acidity.

Roquefort’s white, “Les Genets”, from high-elevation, north-westerly exposed parcels, is full of citricity, minerality and sheer personality. That it’s made up entirely of the ostensibly humble indigenous varieties Clairette and Rolle (a.k.a. Vermentino) might



shock you considering the wine’s complexity – but it also helps explain the low price! There are up to three different rosés here, but just compare the distinct virtues of “Corail” and “Sémiramis” and you’ll understand why. Both are composed of the usual Rhone suspects plus a dollop of Clairette, but they’re from different sites, and the latter from fifty year-old vines.

The mainstay Roquefort red is “Les Mûres”, a blend of Grenache, Syrah, Carignan and Cinsault, enjoying a mixed upbringing in tank and barrel and unfiltered bottling. “Rubrum Obscurum ex Veteribus Vitibus”, raised in small barrels, marries fruit from Grenache planted in 1948 and 1959, Carignan planted in ’55, and Mourvedre from 1963. Around 500 cases of this distinctive and fascinatingly complex wine are produced most years. (Those interested in the origin of the art work that graces this label, I shall be happy to supply you more information than you can imagine: this was necessary to authenticate its status as “art” with the late, unlamented B.A.T.F.!)

Provence

Côtes de Provence

Varieties: Syrah, Grenache, Cinsault; Cabernet, Carignan, Mourvedre, Clairette, Rolle ... and Tiny quantities of the red Bordeaux varieties.

Total acreage: 51 acres

Average production: 9,500 cases

Vinificatory details: Consult text at left.

“Les Genets” blanc

“Corail” Rosé

“Sémiramis” Rosé

“Les Mûres” rouge

“Rubrum Obscurum ex Veteribus Vitibus”

“La Pourpre”

“Raymond de Villeneuve continues his ascension The wines have gained finesse and texture. The maturation is optimal, at times with jammy aromas. But at the same time they preserve their equilibrium and the finesse of the grape. 2001 is a great success [here].”

La revue du vin de France [6/02]

Twice so far, Roquefort has essayed a serendipitous “Coincidentia Opositorum” cuvée – otherwise known as “La Pourpre” – when some of the usually early-ripening Syrah and the late ripening Carignan came in simultaneously and could be fermented together. The results are remarkable indeed almost alchemical.

