

CHÂTEAU LA SAUVAGEONNE

Coteaux du Languedoc -
St.-Jean-de-la-Blanquiere

La Sauvageonne benefits from its high altitude, west(Atlantic)-facing slopes and a prevailing soil of hard red schist ("Ruffes") to make Syrah of great richness, but also finesse.

This estate came to my attention with the 1992 "prestige" bottling (their fourth), which garnered high praise here and in France. That wine displayed a rather claret-like personality (even if Parker wrote "Cote Rotie"!) and a richness and sweetness of fruit that belied its having been made from 10-15 year old vines and in tank. Owner Geäntet Ponce insisted he had only Grenache, Syrah, plus a few old Cinsault and Carignan vines.

I had considerable success selling these wines, but quality was spotty and Ponce was not keen on doing special bottlings for crazy Yankees. I gradually drifted away, visiting the estate now and again to taste but ceasing to commercialize.

Then, in January 2002, I learned that Ponce had sold to a wealthy London developer, Fred Brown, who wanted a trophy estate in France. "Well," I thought, "if he recognized Sauvageonne as a potential trophy, he must have some serious inkling of wine." There was time to put this address back on my Spring travel plans, and so I went, I rediscovered, and I was totally blown away.

It turns out another young Englishman named Gavin Crisfield had been commissioned by Brown and spend over a year trying to find the right property for him to purchase. When he spied the white cupola of La Sauvageonne atop its huge schistic hillside, he knew it was a beacon.

Ponce who not only agreed to sell, but also to "consult". That consists mostly in straightening out fifteen years of papers and explaining to the authorities the acres and acres of - you guessed it:



Cabernet and Merlot - stuck back behind the Syrah and Grenache!

The plans of the new team will make your head spin ... and so will their first - vintage 2001 - results. And when you consider that they only acquired the property just before harvest and had no hand in pruning or planning prior to that ... it won't take long before the world knows the name "Sauvageonne".

The basic cuvée here, "Les Rufes" is far from base. A blend of Syrah (40%), Grenache (30%), Carignan and Cinsault (each 15%) vinified in tank, it sets, in its inaugural vintage, a new standard of textural richness and overall quality in an \$11 wine. Dayton consumer Todd Penrod, called it "obnoxiously good for the price" a description I'd struggle to top that description!

The estate's flagship wine, "Pica Broca", is 60:40 Syrah:Grenache and comes from higher-altitude, lower-yielding vines. It's vinified half in tank and half in new barrique. There is a lot more depth here, even discounting the more sophisticated élevage.

At the apex will be "Puech de Glen", from the Syrah in the sweetest spot on these slopes (but with the same vinificatory regime as the „Prestige). Finally, the Cabernet and Merlot have found their own home, in a Vin de Pays called simply "La Sauvageonne" (and puckishly contained in a heavy *Burgundy* bottle). This cuvée, a German merchant colleague wrote, "will strike fear into the hearts of overpriced Pomerols and Napa Merlots."

Languedoc

Coteaux du Languedoc

Varieties: Syrah, Grenache, Cinsault, Cinsault; Cab. Sauvignon, Merlot, Cab. Franc.

Total acreage: 29 acres

Cot. du Languedoc "Les Rufes"

Cot. du Languedoc "Pica Broca"

Cot. du Lang. "Puech de Glen"

Vin de Pays d'Oc "La Sauvageonne"

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"[Sauvageonne s] reds from the Languedoc region of Southern France are outstanding values because they taste as if they should cost about twice as much."

Mark Fisher, Dayton Daily News 2/99