

CHÂTEAU LES VALENTINES

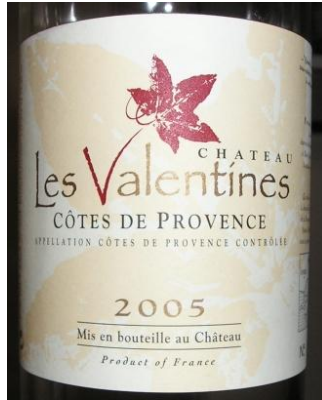
La Londe-les-Maures

The founding of Château Les Valentines represents a tale that will seem more familiar to Americans than it does to Europeans. Gilles Pons developed a thriving computer graphics firm in Paris. Pascale Massenot was a marketing guru who did some work for the wine trade. They decided “for the sake of the children” to move to the countryside somewhere in the south and begin a new life in wine, making a small fortune out of any large fortune the graphics business would leave them. The domaine name comes from their children as well: Valentin + Clementines.

When Gilles and Pascale discovered La Londe-les-Maures in 1997 they knew they had struck gold. There was a modest but adequate facility which they were able to utilize temporarily and then replace with state of the art. There were some old vines, some well-chosen new clones, plus more room to plant. Domaine Ott and other well-known properties are in the neighborhood, but none benefits more from the unique microclimate and dazzling geological complexity that has in 2006 brought La Londe to the verge of A.O.C. recognition.

The Iles d'Hyères off shore protect the town of La Londe-les-Maures from storms and moderate the breeze which nevertheless blows relentlessly, keeping the grapes free from rot and disease. Immediately inland from town is a narrowing wedge of arable acreage not more than a mile square, backed by high rocky hills, perfectly protected and sun-trapping. The soil is a crazy-quilt of mica schiste, flint, iron-rich limestone pebbles, clay, and other components offering a great balance of drainage and retention.

Almost immediately, Pons and Massenot set about planting new



sections. Their Mourvedre vines were selected from old vines at Domaine Tempier (with whom they share an oenologist). Their new Syrah has similar star origins. As these vines mature, the estate's impressive red will become more so.

For now, the majority of production is rosé. (Incidentally, pink wine makes up 80% of Provençal wine.) But Pons and Massenot adopt a “designer” approach quite distinct from that of most other Southern French estates. Not for them the rosé-as-byproduct that results from bleeding juice off of one's red wine fermentations, nor the common Provençal approach - which could fairly be called “pretending to make white wine from red grapes”. Theirs is a wine *designed* to be the most expressive and versatile possible rosé, based on carefully controlled skin contact. Like most Provençal rosés, Valentines under-goes malolactic fermentation. Yet, due to ripe (tartaric) acids, the fruit remains vivacious, and the wine displays uncanny versatility.

Valentines rouge explores the amazing synergies of cofermentation and results in the extraction of exceptionally refined tannins, in the preservation of bright fruit and subtle aromas, and in hiding any trace of alcohol. This is truly a wine unlike any other in the South of France - and only in its first decade!

Provence

Côtes de Provence

Varieties: *For the red: ca. 1/3 each Grenache and Syrah; 15-20% ea. Cabernet Sauvignon and Mourvedre; Carignan - according to vintage. The rosé is close to 50% each Cinsault and Grenache, with small a admixture of Syrah, Mourvedre and Tibouren. The white is Ugni Blanc, cofermented with Vermentino (a.k.a. Rolle).*

Total acreage: 25 acres

Average production: *Around 14,000 cases, including a 2nd label “Caprice de Clementine”.*

Vinificatory details: *For the red, cofermentation of Grenache with Syrah and Mourvedre with Cabernet. (The bit of old vines Carignan receives separate treatment.) Fermentation is in wooden uprights and aging in uprights as well as small barrels of various ages. The rosé and white are vinified entirely in stainless steel.*