

Julie Balagny

Interview

This interview with Julie Balagny took place at L'Herbe Rouge in February, 2012.

Tell us about the the estate.

I settled in Fleurie in 2009. Before that I worked in the South (between Perpignan and Nîmes) for about 11 years. In Perpignan I got a BTS working at a larger, more "chemical" estate, where I more or less became the head of the cellar. After that I worked at Terre des Chardons, who work biodynamically and with simpler vinification practices. When I decided it was time to start my own estate, I had my mind set on either Fleurie or in the Jura. I was able to find my parcel through Yvan Métras, who put me in touch with Michel Vigner. I instantly fell in love with this 3.2 hectare parcel, all bunched together in the middle of the woods, next to the river... The property also included 2 h of prairies and 3 h of woods, and in the spirit of working biodynamically, I knew this was a perfect place to start a polyculture. The vines support the woods, the woods supply the livestock, the livestock supplies the soil: everything works together, everything is coherent.

Why Fleurie or Jura?

Because it's what I like to drink, because it goes down easy, because the terroirs are rich and complex... When you drink Beaujolais or Jura, you know you're drinking something unique that can't be recreated anywhere else. They're something very French about them...

How did you get involved in wine?

I was born and raised in Paris. As a little girl, I was fascinated with wine; I'd see my mom spending all day in the kitchen cooking, then having my dad come home with a bottle, putting it on the table: how it was just as important as the food. This marked me. I was always amazed how people took such pleasure in drinking wine, and wondered how something so magic and special could come out of a bottle.

In college I studied psychomotricity, the process of teaching basic motor skills to the mentally handicapped, and at the time it seemed like it was going to be my career. But I changed my mind!

What's the work in the vines like?

My vines are all on a steep slope, and it's impossible to work mechanically. You can't even work with a horse because he'd have no room to turn at the top and bottom of each row. So everything is done by hand, by pick and winch.

And in the cellar?

Cold carbonic maceration, no remontage, no pigeage. Whole cluster. I have a very old manual wood press that I use, and then I have a few barrels.

What's it like to not have any neighbors? Also, how did the choice of making several cuvées

from the same parcel come about?

The choice to make different cuvées was an obvious one: there are three different soil types that are visually evident (if you're here you can actually see the difference), and vinifying them separately lets me get to know my vines better. The soils are: pure granite mixed with pebbles and sand, granite and quartz and granite with basalt.

How old are the vines?

The youngest are 30 and the oldest are 90.

Who owned them before you?

It was owned by some guy involved in sharecropping, and the entirety of the harvest went to the cave cooperative. They were worked chemically, so they are still in conversion.

Where do you stand on "*Natural Wine*"?

I don't feel integrated in it, or feel in any way like an extremist. I think the point is to be a vigneron, to work with each vintage and to use as little intervention as possible. A wine has to be good, and everyone has to like it. Well maybe not everybody... But at least most! I can't stand flawed, dirty wine. If I can work sulfur free, I go for it. It's not so I can say I don't work with sulfur, it's a choice based on ever changing circumstances. So far it's worked, so I do it.

Do you have any future plans for the estate?

I think it will remain as is in size. As I mentioned earlier, the real evolution I hope to achieve will come from working with livestock and the woods. If there were to be an expansion, I'd rather do it to help a young vigneron get started. There would be room to assist each other, to share tools, know-how and manual labor. Other than that...

What do you like to drink besides Jura and Beaujolais?

Burgundy! I'm not against Champagne either! I also love Alsacian Pinot Noir.