

Domaine des Terres Dorées

Interview

This interview with Jean Paul Brun took place in New York City in April 2011.

Tell us about *Terres Dorées*.

I started *Terres Dorées* in 1979 with 4 hectares of vines. We are currently at about 30 hectares. I am based in Charnay, a village in the Southern Beaujolais with limestone soils. I also own 15 hectares spread between other crus of the Beaujolais, namely Côte de Brouilly, Morgon, Moulin a Vent and Fleurie, all of which are on granite soils.

The first wine we ever made was our *Beaujolais Blanc* from Chardonnay. Today 8 hectares are dedicated to it. The second was our old vine Gamay called *L'Ancien*. Things progressed and led to another white cuvée aged in oak and another bottling of younger vine Gamay called *Cuvée Première*, as well as a Pinot Noir that was planted in the early 90's. Recently I've begun making a late harvest Chardonnay, a Chardonnay crémant and a "méthode ancestrale" rose from Gamay (*FRV100*).

As far as the other crus, I have 5 hectares in Moulin a Vent and Fleurie. I make a basic Fleurie and a 1er cru called *Gris Midi*. I currently only make a basic Moulin a Vent but am in the process of searching for a parcel to make 1er cru in the future. The Côte de Brouilly and Morgon wines are made on a much smaller scale.

How did you personally get involved with wine?

You can say I've been in it since I was a little boy. Before I converted *Terres Dorées* into an estate, it used to be a farm with cows, sheep, pigs, prairies, cereal and 4 hectares of vines. When he noticed I was interested in winemaking my father stopped selling our grapes the the cave and we started making it and bottling it ourselves. My first vinification was in 1977.

When my father retired I initially rented the vines from him and started *Terres Dorées*. I did everything myself at the time, including going to Paris to sell my wines to shops and restaurants. It worked out rather well and I haven't stopped since.

What's the work like in the vines?

We were working conventionally for a very long time and over the last decade we've worked organically for all the non cru vines. It was very difficult at first, especially the process of working the soil and grass, but we've gotten better at it and it's working out well.

You shy away from making traditional, whole cluster, semi-carbonic Beaujolais and opt for a more Burgundian style of winemaking. Can you explain this choice?

This is definitely something that sets us apart. It took us a long time to be recognized for doing this but people are finally are coming around to it. We do indeed work in a Burgundian fashion. We start with a tray table were we hand pick the clusters before de-stemming. We then place the juice in vats, do pigeages and macerate for 4 to 6 weeks depending on the cru. We then age the wine in cement

vats or oak depending on the vintage and appellation.

The reason I work this way is because I wanted to make wines that you can drink and appreciate easily, but also that can pair well with a full meal or that you can keep and age in the cellar. From early on I felt that the traditional Beaujolais style of whole cluster semi-carbonic maceration didn't work with my wines and when I made them this way I wanted to age them longer to soften up the tannins. Of course Beaujolais is usually released rather early and if I had made my wines in this style, I wouldn't have felt comfortable releasing them before at least a year and a half of aging before release. This way, I can release my wines in the spring and be happy with them.

We're trying to push things even further by aging everything until June or July and releasing the latest vintage at the time of the current harvest. This was the plan for 2010 and was impossible due to the the incredibly high demand for 2009, and we plan to do this for the 2011 vintage.

Do these work methods pose any problems with your AOC's?

I'm not in jail yet so I guess it corresponds to whatever their criteria may be. What ultimately matters is quality. I think that I may one day get in trouble for not using whole clusters but in my opinion the wines have better structure, age better and are just more interesting.

How do you feel about your AOC as whole, and more specifically, how your wines fit in this idea of a regional "typicity"?

I think the concept of the AOC is sound: wine is from a specific region and I think it's more interesting to defend a region than a varietal that can be grown anywhere in the world. But it's up to the vigneron to be honest and express the varietal, the terroir, the vintage and the region, not the AOC.

What's your take on the whole "natural wine" debate?

There are so many different styles of "natural" wine that it becomes difficult to classify them all into one definition. In fact why classify them at all?

For me there are two types of wines: industrial wines you see everywhere, with residual sugar, added or reduced acidity, artificial coloring etc..

Then there's what I would call artisanal wines, wines where you taste and feel the vigneron's sensibilities. The merit of terroir and appellation are part of those sensibilities, but what truly matters is that the wine is made well. I find it unfortunate when people discredit themselves, claiming to make "honest" wine by working naturally, yet the wines have serious flaws. This is inadmissible: before talking about how a wine is made, you must first make sure that there is nothing to critique in the quality of its taste.

I think a lot of people are getting too caught up about making wine without sulfur. These wines have gotten a lot of press recently and I don't want people to think that I'm against making wine without sulfur, because I'm not, but we all know that sulfur is produced naturally by the fermenting yeasts to auto-protect the wine and that wine without sulfur becomes vinegar.

I can think of a few incredibly talented vignerons that have mastered making sulfur free wine, wines where I've never had an off bottle, and I commend them. And I can think of even more vignerons that only sulfur minimally at bottling and also do a great job. But the majority just don't have a firm

grasp of what they are doing.

These people discredit sulfur free wine. The fact these wines are commercially available is a travesty to me: I'd rather these guys make conventional industrial wine than fucked up sulfur free wine. They should stay home and let the big boys do the job correctly.

For these guys it becomes less about making great wine and more about being part of a "cool" movement. They spend the harvest eating the whole time and goofing off with the harvest crew and when everyone's gone, they check what's in the vats. And all of a sudden they notice acetate and brett because they didn't put any SO₂. And then you tell yourself: "This is a mess, I better put some sulfur in there before everything turns to shit". So you're a sulfur free vigneron that uses sulfur when things don't go your way? It shows an incredible lack of professionalism.

And as far as my personal involvement in "natural" wine I think a big part of why we have been getting a lot of press recently has to do with the fact that we use natural indigenous yeasts and that only represents about 5% of French winemaking. Honestly, it's a lot more work. During vinification I spend every morning inspecting every vat to make sure no acetate is developing and that everything is happening smoothly. I work this way because of a personal choice, out of respect to the plant and the people that drink our wines. The quality in my grapes was already there but now we work in a way that respects nature and we know it's important for the future so it just feels like the right thing to do.

What wines do you like to drink?

I like easy drinking reds that are light in tannins and fresh, crisp whites.