

Clos de la Roillette

Fleurie from Clos de la Roillette.



Fernand Coudert.

Profile

The Clos de la Roillette, in the village of Fleurie, covers nine hectares of one of the best slopes in the Beaujolais Crus. The clos has an eastern exposure, borders the Moulin-à-Vent appellation, and produces wines that are beautiful when young and have the capacity to age 5-10 years, depending on the vintage.

In the 20's, when the Fleurie appellation was first created, the former landowner was infuriated with losing the Moulin-à-Vent appellation under which the clos had previously been classified. He created a label, using a photograph of his racehorse Roillette, and used the name Clos de la Roillette, without mentioning Fleurie. The owner vowed not to sell a drop of his wine on the French market and the production went to Switzerland, Germany and England.

By the mid-1960s, the owner's heirs had lost interest in the clos and a large portion of the land had gone wild and untended. In 1967, Fernand Coudert bought this poorly maintained estate, and replanted the vineyards. His son Alain joined him in 1984, and has been the winemaker since.

The Couderts say their particular *terroir* (mainly clay and manganese), and the age of their vines (25 to 33 years-old) account for the richness of their wine. It has a deep blackcurrant color with a hint of purple, a restrained nose of crème de cassis, a rich, full mouth with aromas of cassis, black cherries, and a nutty character, and finishes with zesty acidity. This is a wine that ages gracefully and takes on the aromatic character of a Pinot Noir.

With the 1998 vintage, the Couderts introduced a new wine, Cuvée Christal, which is lighter and meant to drink younger. Also, a few vintages ago, they started a selection of old vines cuvée that is partially aged in older oak barrels. They call this Cuvée Tardive, meaning that it needs more aging time and has even greater longevity than the Clos cuvée.

Interview

This interview with Alain Coudert took place at *L'Herbe Rouge* in February 2012.

Tell us about *Clos de la Roillette*.

My father bought the estate in 1967; before that it was owned by Crozet, who at the time owned 100 hectares in Morgon and Fleurie. The label dates back to 1910: Roillette was Crozet's prized race horse.

What was your personal path to becoming a vigneron?

I have a brother, and we are just one year apart. His heart was set in working with my parents, but he had a serious accident in '79. This made me reevaluate my own situation, and I decided to start working on the estate that same year. I took over in 1991; my sister has also come back to help out, so it's still in the family!

What's the work in the vines like?

We work in *lutte raisonnée*, with the least amount of phytosanitary products possible. A large part of Roillette is heavy in clay, which makes any mechanical work next to impossible. So we work the soils manually about twice a year, but only superficially because I honestly think we'd rip the vines right out of the ground otherwise (especially the really old parcels). The idea of passing a tractor through the 80 year old vines that make the *Cuvée Tardive*, it's just impossible!

And in the cellar?

Vinification is the traditional, semi-carbonic Beaujolais style. We do a submerged hat, we do temperature control and we use native yeasts. The idea is obviously to best express our terroir, because in Roillette, our soils are 25% clay (as opposed to the rest of the A.O.C which is all granite). This clay is only found in a 50 hectare radius, and result is a more structured wine, somewhere between a "typical" Fleurie and a Moulin a Vent. I vinify in a more Fleurie style, because I'm looking for that freshness and fruit.

To make things clear once and for all, what's the deal with the *Cuvée Tardive*?

When I called it the "late" *cuvée*, all I meant was that you should drink it later. You simply can't do a late harvest in Beaujolais, and you'll have a very unbalanced wine if you try. *Cuvée Tardive* is made from 80 year old vines, and can seriously age. In a way it's to prove that Gamay is a grape that can achieve more than youthful drinkability.

What about Cristal?

***Cristal* is the exact opposite of *tardive*! It comes from two granite parcels and the vines are much younger (25-30 years). The grapes produce something fruitier, so it's very easy to knock back on a hot summer day or for an aperitif. It's definitely not a *nouveau*! Maybe you could call it Roillette's *nouveau* because it's the first thing released, but don't push your luck!**

Since we're on the topic, what about *Greffe du Marquis*?

This wine is aged in barrel, and I think it's a very interesting expression of Gamay. The wood is obviously not present to mask the wine, but rather to accompany it, to complement its tannins and create complexity. It's really tight the first two years, but opens up beautifully when you give it some time.

The name comes from my parents' surname in the village, which was *Marquis*. It's definitely not from past lineage, so don't think we're royalists! I think it started with a good family friend who used to come over to drink a glass with my dad every day. He'd see my mom on the balcony and salute her, then tell people he'd seen the *Marquise* when he'd get back to the village. It stuck!

What's your take on "*natural wine*"?

I have nothing against natural wine, but if you're going to attempt to make them, you need to have a very serious approach. This means being able to really invest your energy in proper hygiene. Naturally made wine shouldn't be lazily made wine. You have to be omnipresent and control everything from A to Z. Abandoning your vines and letting them grow wild is not real work in my eyes.

In the end, "*Nature*" means a whole lot and at the same time not so much. There are some vintages where nature needs us to help it out, or else it doesn't fare so well.

What do you like to drink?

Burgundy! I'm also a fan of classic Châteauneuf and Côte-Rôtie. I drink Beaujolais everyday too!

Wines



A.O.C Fleurie



A.O.C Fleurie "Cuvée Tardive"