

Clos de la Roilette

Fleurie from Clos de la Roilette.



Alain Coudert. Photo by Alex Finberg.

Profile

The Clos de la Roilette, 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 Roilette, and used the name Clos de la Roilette, 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.



Caption

The late Fernand Coudert.

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 a man named 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 *Griffe 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!

Visits

This visit at Clos de la Roilette took place in June, 2012.



Words and photos by Jules Dressner.

Did you know that there is no clos to be found at Clos de la Roilette and that the horse on the the label is actually a drawing of the past owner's prized race horse? That's some false advertising right there!

At the end of a long, winding road, Alain and Audile Coudert live in the house Alain's late father Fernand bought when he founded the estate. Things are tidily together: the house and cellar are one, and the vines are the first thing you see when you step outside.



We stepped into the tasting room which, as an extension of the cellar, also holds the foudre barrels the wines age in.



2012 will be a small harvest, mostly due to mildew and hail. The 2011's were bottled in May, so this was our first chance to taste them in bottle. The Roilette wines are known for needing a little time, and these were no exception. I really look forward to retasting them in a few months, and can confidently tell you to get ready for some more exceptional 2011 Beaujolais.

During the tasting, we started talking about Beaujolais and its horrible reputation. As an avid Beaujolais lover, I still find this impossible to believe (I touched on this briefly in the [Demoor post](#)), but it seems the French have deemed it an unworthy region. It's gotten so bad that producers only name their wines by cru (Fleurie, Morgon, etc..) because the heavy stigma of the word Beaujolais is so strong that it scares consumers away. The result: a lot of vines are being abandoned, and Alain is sure that with this tough 2012, it looks like this might be the last vintage before many vigneronns call it quits.

In my opinion, this bad reputation serves as a striking example of a broken AOC system that has betrayed itself. By oversimplifying (or confusing) "typicity" with "uniformity", we see mixed results at best: a "good" A.O.C like Chateauneuf permits producers to sell their stock and jack up their prices regardless of how good the wine actually is, because the consumer readily believes quality exists. On the other hand, a "bad" one like Beaujolais is in majority shunned for the very same -often false, or at the very least misguided- pre-conceptions. Any wine lover knows that some Chateauneuf's are much better than others, and the same goes for Beaujolais. And while yes, there is a lot of TERRIBLE, ABSOLUTELY UNDRINKABLE Beaujolais out there, the more I taste, the more I realize this is the case in almost every viticultural region in the world. This is why we must continue supporting the independants, the little guys who actually care enough to make something shine. They never stopped believing in their terroirs, and neither should we.

Anyway, Alain is in the process of building a new cellar, mostly for stocking and bottling purposes. It used to be a chicken and rabbit coop, and they had to dig out a whole bunch of the wall, but now they will have ample space. We also got to taste *Griffe du Marquis* 2011, which is the barrel aged cuvée Alain started making a few years ago. Only 12 barrels -or 3000 bottles- of this are produced; the wine will be bottled in December. Tasted from 4 barrels, and it was fun to taste the subtleties of Fleurie's different micro-parcels.

We didn't have to go far to check out the vines.







Isn't it weird to think Gamay can ever be that green?

Wines



A.O.C Fleurie

Soil: manganese granite and clay

Grape: Gamay

Age of Vines: 30-40 years old

Vinification: Semi-carbonic maceration with submerged hat, temperature control and native yeasts, then aged in large oak foudres.



A.O.C Fleurie "Cuvée Tardive"

Soil: manganese granite and clay

Grape: Gamay

Age of Vines: 80-90 years old **Vinification:** Semi-carbonic maceration with submerged hat, temperature control and native yeasts, then aged in large oak foudres.