

Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

Interview

This interview with Claude-Emmanuelle Desvignes took place at L'Herbe Rouge in February 2012.

Tell us about *Domaine Desvignes*?

My brother and I are the 8th generation to work our vines. I've been here full time since 2001, and Louis-Benoit joined me in 2004. We have 13 hectares of Morgon, most of which are old vines, since their average age is 70.

In the Beaujolais you can vinify by climate, which we do. *La Voûte Saint-Vincent* is a blend of parcels from the Py climate, and the soils are sandy granite. We have three hectares on Côte du Py, where the soils are composed of eruptive rocks and schist. Finally, Jarvenières is at the bottom of Côte du Py, and is heavy in clay and magnesium.

When did you know you wanted be a vigneronne?

I was very interested with winemaking as a child. In 10th grade I decided to specialize in viticulture. After I got my baccalaureate, I spent four months at a winery in Long Island for a work internship. Then I came back and started working with my father. It's what I've always wanted to do.

What's the work in the vines like?

We eliminated herbicides in 2004 and work the soil ourselves. We work organically but aren't certified because it's too much of an administrative hassle. And I'll be the first to say that if there's a serious concern with mildew or odium (like in 2008), I won't hesitate to use some synthetic products in moderation.

Was this your decision?

My brother had a lot to do with the decision to work organically. I had experimented with 1 hectare before his arrival, but when Louis-Benoit signed on he was adamant about completely changing our work methods. He had a valid point: you can't claim to make wines that highlight terroir by using a ton of chemicals in the vineyard.

One big mistake we made was to convert everything at once. We ended up ripping out all the superficial roots by plowing everywhere, which resulted in the vines yielding half of what they usually produce. It took a while for them to recover, but we don't regret it. It's better now: the soils are alive and you can tell!

What about the cellar?

We aim to make tannic, age worthy wines, so we let them ferment and age for a long time. We're not against semi-carbonic Beaujolais; it's just not our style. My father started making wines like this, and we've continued in his footsteps. As far as vinification, you can call it "conventional", since we use a

Morgon starter yeast to for the fermentation.

You recently expanded your cellar right?

Yes. Since I've taken over, we now produce and bottle all of our wine (my father sold about 50% of the grapes to a négociant), so storage became a big issue. We've always worked out of a facility built in the 60's, which had the big advantage of having cement tanks made on premises in the 70's. We needed more room, but we wanted to keep these tanks because they had such a rich history. So we simply expanded around the original facility.

Why do you think most people have a preconception that Beaujolais can't age?

My father has a bunch really old books on wine, and many say that a good Morgon can rival anything from Burgundy. A vintage like 2009 will age 20 years no problem. That's what great about Gamay. You can make a very fruity wine, but you can also make something structured without it being being too opulent or high in alcohol. It's always accessible, without ever being excessive.

What do you like to drink?

A lot of things! We always have a Morgon at the end of every meal to remind us of how good it is, but otherwise we're always drinking other wines. I'm a big fan of the Roussillon, Collioure and Banyuls. I love Loire whites, as well as the Mâconnais since we're not far. Also, Cahors!