

Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes

Visits

This visit at Domaine Louis-Claude Desvignes took place in June, 2012.



Words and photos by Jules Dressner.

The Desvignes family all live on the same block in the center of Morgon. We swung by Louis-Claude's house to say hello, since we couldn't get in touch with Emmanuelle.



Even in his mid 70's, he's kept his raven-black hair (no word yet on if it's "au naturel" or not...). He came to greet us at the front door with some intense news: Louis-Benoit had suffered a light fracture and multiple stitches on his index while planting a new parcel in Javenières that morning. Emmanuelle had driven him to hospital, which accounted for her not picking up her phone earlier. Louis-Claude had better luck reaching her, and she told us to meet them in the Javenières parcel where it all went down.

We hopped into the Louis-Claude mobile and drove over to the beautiful Jarvenières parcel.



Louis-Claude's grandfather purchased these: they are all planted on sand and limestone in the traditional Beaujolais goblet style. Most of them are over 100 years old!





The other vines that complete the parcel were planted in 1989 and 1999. The Desvignes, who work organically, are the only estate to work the soil here, which they feel is a pity since it's such a great terroir.

Emmanuelle and Louis-Benoit -arm slung with a bandaged hand-, greeted us at the bottom of the hill where their team of two was actively planting 2000 vines over .8 hectares of land.



When I asked if they were in selection massalle, Emmanuelle looked at me like I was crazy.

"Of course."

We started chatting about 2012, and Louis-Benoit informed us that they were struggling with mildew: in the *"tropical climate"* they've been experiencing, rainy and hot, humid days have been trading off since March; this is a perfect recipe for mildew to grow and spread.

"Not only that, but you spray a treatment on a hot day, then it rains and washes everything off and you have to start all over again."

Though there is no legal repercussion in organics for retreating with copper as necessary (and the Desvignes are, even at this rate, well below the authorized treatment levels), Louis-Benoit worries that constantly re-applying too many copper treatments might do more harm than good in the long term. This is one of countless struggles one faces in a challenging vintage, organic or not: at the end of the year, you need to harvest grapes, and it is the vigneron's responsibility to protect his vines as he sees fit. In a statement that echoed Thomas Morey's in an earlier visit, Louis-Benoit pointed out that guys working conventionally were struggling just as hard as they were, and in many cases their vines were looking way worst.

After our tour of Jarvenières, Louis-Claude drove us to the Côte du Py site on the way to the cellar.



We couldn't access the vines because we needed a 4x4 vehicle to get there, but to give you an idea their vines are by the house in the middle of the picture.

In the cellar, we started by tasting many of the separate lieu-dits that go into the *Voûte Saint-Vincent* cuvée, including *Les Champs*, *les Plâtres* (aka plaster, because after it rains it gets hard like...), *le Pré Jourdon*, *Peru* (how exotic!) and *Roches Noir*. The decisions on the exact blend vary from year to year and are done entirely on instinct. Bottling also varies by vintage, and this year the *Voûte Saint-Vincent* and *Jarvenières* will be bottled around harvest. The *Côte du Py*, on the other hand, had just been bottled, and was tasting great. 2011 turned out to be one of the few regions in France to experience an excellent vintage (with almost everyone else's varying from good to very good). The Desvignes wines always need time, but you can already taste the expressive, concentrated fruit and balanced tannic structure in the tank samples.

FUN FACTOID: The Desvignes use a deep fryer to melt the wax for the top of their very limited [Les Impénitants](#).



We ended strong by revisiting the 2010's. They were delicious. Our dog, and *Official Canine Companion* (O.C.C) Zaggy took a liking to Louis-Benoit and took a nap on his lap for the entire tasting.



I wasn't kidding about that index! For those of you that don't know, Louis-Benoit is an avid drummer, and he was bummed because he was supposed to perform at a 14th of July concert. I told him it might be time for him to start messing with some drum-machines...