

Domaine Filliatreau

Interview

This interview with Frédrik Filliatreau took place in January, 2012 at the *Salons des Vins de Loire*.

Tell us about Domaine Filliatreau.

I started up in 1990, and I am the fourth generation in my family to work here. We're pretty big compared to a lot of my friends in the area, but have divided things up over the years. *Domaine Filliatreau* covers all of our vines around the village of my grandparents; it's where our original cellar is and where we make Saumur-Champigny. Then you have the *Grande Vignolle*, a lieu-dit, which is where we make those cuvées and have our store. Finally, we have *Château Fouquet*, which has been completely organic since 1998. *Fouquet* is 6,5 h, with an additional 4.5 h still in conversion.

When my father took over in 1967, a lot of things changed. Though my grandfather was a vigneron, he didn't necessarily do it by passion. He'd make some wine for his family and friends, whites and rosés, then sell most of the grapes to the a couple of négociants. There were no reds at the time; that was my father's doing. He's also behind us bottling and selling independently, and was really one of the first guys to do it in the region. He was also one of the first people to work in this "modern fashion" of fruity, light and easier to drink reds. They were a hit in Paris, and things really took off from there.

Did he also change the cellar practices?

My grandfather worked with concrete tanks and barrels. My father quickly realized that this affected the wine's freshness, so he integrated concrete tanks that you could open from the top, giving him much more control. The inspiration to do this came from Charles Joguet in Chinon.

Then in '78 he met a guy who sold stainless steel tanks. When he realized it was the solution to his temperature control issues, he was sold. So yes, there has been a serious evolution in the cellar. My father was always looking for the way to make a lighter, fruitier Saumur-Champigny, but it was always with the utmost respect to the vines and the grapes. It might seem obvious now, but if you want your grapes to taste that fruity you have to respect them.

The interesting thing is that there was almost a reverse evolution for us in the 90's. We had some years that produced a very concentrated wine, and while it threw some people off at first, it became popular in its own right for being more powerful and structured. And now we find ourselves producing both styles, which is fun for us!

Is your dad retired?

No. He's obviously less active then he was 20 years ago, but he still loves being in the vines; in fact he's been teaching my wife how to prune! He's really a vigneron, and stuff like this (*Salons des Vins de Loire*) is not really his thing.

And *Château Fouquet* is your project right?

It was something we did together. When my father purchased this great piece of land, I was still in school so I had no say in that decision. He is also the one who decided to replant certain parts that had been abandoned. Again, under the influence of Charles Joguet, we began replanting in selection massale that actually came from Charles' *Clos du Chêne Vert* vineyards.

It was my idea to convert to organic viticulture, and he was all for it! This made me really happy, because in '98 it was still something new and exciting that not many people were doing. It was a situation where in many cases, the new generation wanted to work organically, but their parents refused to change. It was fabulous having his support.

Why not convert the entire estate then?

I really hate to say it, but it's strictly economical. It's a reality we have to accept. To this day Filliatreau has a huge reputation in French restaurants, and we knew that if we converted everything to organic, it would make the wine about 25% more expensive, which would confuse and frustrate the customer. It's not fun to talk about the profitability of your wine, but upping our prices by this much was impossible. *Château Fouquet* was new, and let us start from the ground up.

And now we work exactly the same way in our old vines in Saumur-Champigny. We care about the vines and good work. Part of our estate is in lutte raisonnée, the other is organic. It's the way it is.

You recently bought a horse to work the soil, Can you tell us about that?

I bought the horse last year. It's yet another evolution! It's a dream I've had for a very long time, and I'm ecstatic at learning how to work the soil with a horse. It's great doing it with my father too, because it brings him back to his youth; he never did it much himself, but remembers it being a common thing. We were talking about it one day, and he told me he'd love to have a horse for the vines. So without telling him, my wife and I found Scarlett. At first he was shocked we'd actually done it! But once he met her and saw what she's capable of, he fell in love! He's been obsessively sourcing plows from all his friends and we now have a huge collection of them that are completely useless!

For now we're only working 1,5 hectares of *Château Fouquet* with Scarlett. The idea is to eventually do all of it: we'd have to pass to 2 or 3 horses and hire a new employee, but it's totally doable. I'm very excited about it!

What do you like drink?

I like everything that's different from Saumur-Champigny! I really love Savagnin and Poulsard from the Jura. The wines are so different yet so terroir! I recently loved some Chianti Classicos. I don't know, as long as they bring me pleasure!