

Julien Frémont

Natural Ciders from Julien Frémont in Normandy.



Julien Frémont's house.

Profile

Julien Frémont works in a breathtakingly beautiful farm in the Pays d'Auge, Calvados. This is Camembert and Livarot country, and of course cider and Calvados, a place where cows and apple trees have defined the landscape for more time than can be remembered. It is green, lush, softly hilly, the soil rich clay with silex, and the climate humid and mild.

Frémont says that he would gladly do without his cows, about 80 when you count the youngsters born each year, and just deal with apple trees and apples, and the cider he makes from them. But he knows that cows and trees take care of each other, that his trees would not grow and age the way they do, or his apples taste the same, without the cows.

The farm has 45HA of grazing fields, 12HA of which are planted with apple trees. The cows mow the grass, prune the trees in summer and eat the fallen apples, until it's time for the harvest from late September until November. The apples are picked by hand in large baskets, then put into 50KG bags.

The trees are a mix of old local varieties of acidic, late ripening apples.

The apples are washed and sorted, then pressed in the press Frémont ancestors built in 1765. Some juice is immediately bottled for apple juice, and the must for cider is put in large vats where fermentation starts. It is essential for fermentation to go slowly, mainly thanks to natural early winter cold, and racking. When the alcohol reaches about 4.5%, the must is bottled so that the secondary fermentation, creating the fizz, can start. This bottling is called Brut par nature.

A selection of apples comes from a particular orchard of old trees. Those are kept in the well-ventilated attic for several months, and passerillage occurs, where the apples dry out and the sugar levels concentrate. When these are pressed and fermented, they make a special bottling called Greniers (attics).

Interview

This interview with Julien Frémont took place on his farm in June, 2012.

Tell us about your farm.

The farm consist of 40 hectares: 15 of orchards, 25 of pasture. We're located in the Pays d'Auge, a natural micro-region in Normandy. This land is full of valleys; it's a land of water, which is why it's so green! The grass feeds my cows well, and this great terroir lets them produce our famous cheeses like Cambembert. We're also well known for our many apples trees. We have a rich history here: my family bought this farm in 1759, and we've always produced cider and raised cattle. I personally got involved at a very young age.

The farm used to be a lot bigger. Can you tell me about the shift to a smaller scale?

In the 18th and 19th century, the way a farm like ours did business was very different. My ancestors were already making cider and calvados, but they would sell entire barrels to restaurants and cafés. These started losing popularity as table drinks, as traditions like coffee and calvados started to fade (blame the cops for that one!). So we had to figure out a new way to sell our product; my father was the one who restarted distilling apples, with which he created a stock that he let age 10 and 15 years. He then bottled them and started selling them directly on the farm, so he's the one who started bottling and selling independently. This was on a tiny scale, but eventually our reputation grew.

I took over 15 years ago, and thanks to some connections I'd made through vigneron friends, most notably Jean Foillard, I was introduced to a network of restaurants and cafés in Paris. Jean told me to load up a truck of samples, and that he'd introduce me to all his bistro buddies that might be interested in the type of cider I was making. And that's what we did; we visited *Tonneaux des Halles*, *Le Baratin*, *Caves Augé*... We visited a whole bunch of places that introduced me to the Parisian market, and this eventually led to expanding our sales internationally.

Before our visit, I was thinking about your presence at the *Dive Bouteille*, and was wondering what your connection to the wine world was.

It was simply meeting a bunch of people who were on the same wavelength. It's actually the vigneron who decided it would be nice to have a good cider at the Dive, since they like to drink it. And it's nice to see restauranters who taste and suddenly realize that it would be a good idea to

have a nice cider on their list. In the end, I work the exact same as anyone at the Dive, and that was the general idea of having me there. And now it feels totally normal that I'm there every year.

How did you meet Jean Foillard?

By complete chance. I was doing a harvest at some guy's who wasn't at all in our world of wine. We finished up and I wanted to keep going somewhere else. He told me that he knew of a clique of guys in the Beaujolais who took forever to finish their harvest because they hand harvested! So I showed up and worked Régis Foillard's harvest, where I met his brother Jean. The way he worked was atypical and very interesting to me; I got a good feeling from him and we instantly hit it off.

How did technology vs. tradition play out on your farm?

There are much more conformist ways to make cider. The way I learned, there was an oenologist who swung by the cellar all the time: he'd taste, then tell me put this many grams of that and that many grams of this. I quickly felt a disconnect working this way, because it was some guy giving me the same recipe over and over. This isn't my approach towards existence, and I got bored very fast. I then started meeting people like the vigneronns we were just talking about, and I realized that I was completely free to make cider the way I wanted to make it. So I didn't rehire my oenologist, and decided to make less protected and drier ciders, because the Auge AOC is restricted to a very sweet style. What I've slowly realized is that you don't have more or less problems working the way I do. The guys who choose to over-protect their ciders have just as many issues as I do, they're just different. There is no fool-proof guarantee against imperfections.

Can you talk about your choice to of pressing and co-fermenting different apples at the same time based on their ripening period?

I combine certain apples to create a single juice, contrary to many producers who create many single variety juices to blend into a final juice that will then ferment. So if one of their juices is marked by acidity, the idea is to blend it one that will soften it, etc. But here we are lucky enough to really know our apples varieties because we've been working with them for so long; we already know what happens when one variety is blended with another, so we can confidently combine them together before they are pressed for their juice. It's a particularity, a producer choice.

Can we talk about your A.O.C and where you find yourself within it?

The A.O.C is a system that has done a lot of good for many regions. We are indeed in a natural region called the *Pays de L'Auge*, and an A.O.C exists for it; but like any other A.O.C, it was formed with predefined ideas, by a group of producers who have dictated production methods. This has less to do with a place and more to do with politics and oenologists. For example, in Auge a cider has to be demi-sec because in their minds, only a demi-sec cider is emblematic of the region.

I used to make A.O.C cider. They were good, and I continue to taste delicious Auge ciders from my colleagues. But there was a point where I felt strange that I was auto-restraining myself by following guidelines. Why can't I make a brut cider if I want to? I found it rather tragic. Simultaneously, I started meeting all these vigneronns and restaurant guys who were pushing quality products, and they started asking me if I had a dryer cider they could buy from me. When I told them no, and that our high end stuff was on sweeter side, they told me they weren't too fond of that style. So I decided to stop following guidelines. The A.O.C is not really a world I'm a part of anymore, and I don't really know what's going on with them at this point. All I know is that it wasn't doing it for me.

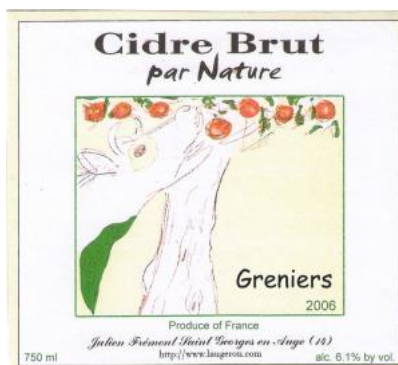
What do you like to drink?

I drink a bit of everything. I don't have any real preferences, but I do have a real fondness for anything that sparkles. It's always done me good; if there's bubbles in it, I don't feel like I'm actually drinking alcohol!

Wines



Cidre Brut



Cidre Brut "Greniers"