

Domaine du Closel

Interview

This interview with Evelyne De Jessey took place on a bus from Los Angeles to San Francisco in March 2011.

Tell us about *Domaine du Closel*.

Domaine du Closel consists of 16 hectares: 13 hectares of Chenin Blanc to make Savennières, along with 2 hectares of Cabernet Franc and 1 hectare of Cabernet Sauvignon reserved for Anjou and Anjou village.

I took over the estate in 2001. At the time, though I had drunk a lot of great wine, I had another profession and had never made any! Since then I have less time to drink but more time to make it!

I took over for my mother; the vigneronne before her was an aunt, and before her another woman, so as you can see there are a lot of women in Closel's history!

Do you work organically?

We do. We've always worked very traditionally, but I was the one who pushed that we get a certification and work in this fashion. We started converting the vineyards in 2006 and have been certified as of 2009. Recently we've experimented with biodynamic agriculture, but are far from mastering it and aren't certified.

From the beginning of my tenure I began working more or less organically, but at the time it didn't seem that important to be certified. Over time I came to realize that it gives the consumer a solid reference point, so I decided we should get certified. Certification or not, working organically reflects my attitude towards nature. I've raised my children this way. My children are certified organic!

Were the vines in good shape before converting?

The vines were always in good shape, except that a lot of them are dying from esca! We're constantly replanting, and recently we've purchased graft holders from Southern France; we will attempt the whip and tong graft method in hopes of ridding ourselves of esca in the future. The grafts will of course be selections massales.

What's the work like in the vines?

It's hard! We work the soil a lot, and we've evolved in that we let everything grow around the vines: we used to let grass grow high, then we started growing various cereals that would later incorporate themselves into the soil, but now we let all of the indigenous flora grow because it really helps us out with insects.

What about in the cellar?

We don't do anything in the cellar! I just tasted wines that we haven't touched in four months: they taste much better now! We bring in the grapes and everything's already on them so the fermentation process happens naturally (in *barrisques*) and doesn't need me around! We still taste them every once in a while just to make sure everything's ok. The fermentations are rather long: the *Papillon* for example ferments in its' *barrisques* for almost a year. This freaked out my mother when I first started doing this. But now that she realizes it works just fine, she doesn't care anymore!

How do you feel about Savennières as an AOC?

The AOC is getting better and better since I'm now its' president! (laughs)

When I was first elected, I wasn't too sure what I was supposed to do. So I decided to gather all the *vignerons*, get them drunk, and asked what they expected of me. it worked out great. We debated on what we expected of our appellation, and I suppose this is the role of the president: to create an identity and to communicate it to the rest of the world. Another role is to have everyone work together, and I feel that there is a great ambiance between everyone in Savennières.

10 years ago there was a vote that permitted *vignerons* in the commune next to ours to make Savennières. This upped the amount of growers from 12 to 36, and since then we've had no choice but to work together to help our appellation grow healthily. I'm very happy, because a big group of our *vignerons* are orienting themselves towards organic and biodynamic agriculture in order to make wines that reflect their *terroir* and taste like the area. They aren't bombarding their wines with tons of sulfur anymore and I can proudly say that there are more and more delicious Savennières on the market.

What's your stance on "natural wine"?

I think that everyone's priority should be that the wine be good. I'm not quite sure what "natural wine" means; so many people claim to be making it, but they're all doing it differently.

Wine should taste good, but it's important for the *vigneron* to be happy with what he's doing. It's one thing to express a *terroir* or an appellation, it's another to express *joie de vivre* in what you do.

At the same time, I'll admit that I make and drink wines made in a certain fashion. But there are already so many rules that concretely defining these wines seems arbitrary to me. If the wine is good people are going to buy it.

If anything, it should be conventional wines that mention that they use chemicals on the labels. I find it strange that we're the ones that should alert the consumer that our wines are "pure" and "natural" and others don't have to warn that they are "chemical" or "poisonous".

What do you like to drink?

I'm a fan of Burgundy: they have an elegance and a finesse that fascinates me.

I also love to travel and discover new wines that reflect a *terroir* and a place. Switzerland, Austria and Italy are countries where I've discovered some truly original wines.