

Domaine Luneau-Papin

Interview

This interview with Pierre-Marie Luneau took place at the Salons des Vins de Loire in February, 2012.

Tell us about *Domaine Luneau-Papin*.

We are vigneronns in the Muscadet-Sèvre et Maine. We're to the South-East of Nantes, which is only 15 kilometers away. In Muscadet, there are 8500 hectares of vines spread over 25 communes. We're located in a small commune called Le Landreau; there are 800 hectares of Melon de Bourgogne here shared by 35 estates.

Our cellar is in Le Landreau, where my father Pierre Luneau was born. We also have vines in Chappelle-Heulin, where my mother's family, the Papins, are from. The two estates merged together in the 90's, hence the name.

You're 32 and 2011 was your first year as head vigneron for *Luneau-Papin*. What built up to that?

I've always been cradled by the tanks and the tractors, and I often joke that my crib was a pallet case! I have such wonderful memories from my childhood, and running through the vines brings me joy to this day.

When I turned 18, I was curious about viticulture outside of Nantes, so I took a two year B.T.S in Bordeaux. By the early 2000's I didn't feel the urge to stay in school, so I decided to do a working tour of France. I worked in Sancerre, Bordeaux for a while, then I was in the South (between Perpignan and Rivesaltes) for a good year, then back to Sancerre. I came home for a year before moving to Australia for 6 months, but that trip was mostly to learn how to speak English!

I was back for good in September 2005, and I've worked all six vintages since.

Tell us about the work in the vines.

Luneau-Papin is a family estate. My father was always very knowledgeable about the area, and searched far and wide for the best parcels our land could offer. He was able to procure many of these in the 80's, and we find ourselves today with 50 parcels spread over 10 plots. We have 50 hectares of Melon de Bourgogne, at about 7000 vines per hectare (**ed: as of 2017, the estate has shrunk to 45 hectares**); because of the density of plantation, we average about 50 hl/h yields. Our distinction at *Luneau-Papin* is that we work parcel by parcel, terroir by terroir. You can't claim terroir if you don't highlight the link between the soil, the vegetal state of the vines and its surrounding environment.

40 h is a lot of vines, and today we surround ourselves with a team to thoroughly work on each parcel. This means working the soil so we don't have to use herbicides anymore; to create a more natural place for the soil and the vines. This really started in 2008, when we acquired the "*Terre de Pierre*" plot. Because of its rocky serpentine, I knew we had to work the soil. It was a time when we

had the human and technical resources do so, and my father and I agreed it needed to be done.

This process is parcel by parcel, and we began on five new ones last year. Also, we only use copper and sulfur in the vineyards now. In France, an entire property has to be converted to get an organic certification. You have five years to convert, and today 15 of our hectares are completely organic. I am convinced that in 5 years we will succeed at this **(ed: the estate is certified organic as of the 2016 vintage)**. It means a lot more work from us and our team, and we are in the process of figuring it out. This is my main challenge and goal for the estate. I want to do this so that we can best express the mineral purity of Melon de Bourgogne in our soils. I'm seeing a lot of young vignerons completely in love with their place and their terroir. I'm glad to be part of it!

Can you elaborate on making cuvées parcel by parcel?

Muscadet is France's largest single variety A.O.C: everything is 100% Melon de Bourgogne. We have a rich history of exporting our wine because we are very close to the ocean, and for generations Muscadet would be shipped from the Loire to England and Holland. And you can't forget that for a long time, 80% of the production was purchased locally! None of this created much of an incentive in making cuvées that highlight terroir.

But both my grandfathers were passionate about winemaking. They were already working in the Burgundian style, fermenting and aging everything in small barrels. Parcels were vinified separately, and as a child I remember customers coming by, tasting barrique by barrique. When you came to visit my dad, you came to taste different terroirs...

Muscadet is a big place and while some of our neighbors worked in a similar fashion, we were still relatively few. Today, we are lucky in that we sell the entirety of our production directly from the estate; this permits ourselves to make as many cuvées as we do.

Today, there is a new generation that is interested by their village, by the geology, the pedology of the vines. We have so many soils and sub-soils here. It's a really beautiful region to make wine in. And Melon is a grape that really captures the minerality of a soil.

What about in the cellar?

We make white wine, and there are very few manipulations we have to worry about. With Melon de Bourgogne, you want healthy, clean grapes coming to the cellar. We spend 15 days hand harvesting from each parcel on 24 h of vines. I have nothing to hide: the rest are machine harvested, because the economic realities of Muscadet don't favor hand harvested, terroir driven bottling **(editor's note: this is because prices must compete with their neighbors. Read Joe's article [Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée](#) for a more in depth exploration of this topic)**. **(ed: as of 2017, only the young vines are still machine harvested. 30 hectares are now hand harvested, with more to come)**

The grapes are slow pressed, whole-cluster and vinified parcel by parcel. We do a 36 hour débourage to get rid of the gross lees. Alcoholic fermentation averages between 3 to 6 weeks depending on the parcel. The Muscadet is known for making wine *sur lies*, which means we don't rack the wine after alcoholic fermentation. This creates an exchange between the clear juice and the dead yeasts and minerals. The aging on the lees lasts from winter through Spring, at which time they are typically bottled.

Can you talk about the unique characteristics of the "Terre de Pierre" plot?

Nantes is really at the very edge of France, and we are very close to the Atlantic Ocean. We are located on the very old Armorican massif, which is composed of metamorphic rocks like schist and gneiss as well as rock from magmatic eruption such as granite. We've always been fascinated by the diversity of our terroir, and we were lucky enough to acquire an exceptional plot on a lieu-dit called "*Butte de la Roche*". We called our plot "*Terre de Pierre*"; it is unique due to its serpentine soils. This serpentine forms the hill itself, and actually comes from terrestrial crusts that broke off during a period of tectonic movement; these crusts eventually made their way to the surface. In the 500 million years it took for this to happen, the serpentine became altered. So we have all this silicious, irony serpentine that is okra red.

Some geologists from the University of Nantes came to test it and told us we must do our best to preserve this site. They even declared it a geological landmark!

What do you like to drink?

You have to be curious. Right now we're at the *Salon des Vins de la Loire*, and we all know all the great wines the region has to offer. I'm a big fan of Alsacian wine: it's a place that's also really about minerality, and you find the same qualities on old Melon that I get with Riesling.

Otherwise, every wine has its story. You can't have preconceptions with wine. Every vintage is different and every time you taste it, the circumstances are different as well. Keep that in mind!