

Domaine de Majas

Visits

This visit at Domaine de Majas took place in July, 2012.



Words by Jules Dressner, photos by Maya Pedersen.

The three and half hour drive from Dominique Hauvette's to the incredibly named Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes was beautiful. Long stretches of roads swerving through the Pyrenees, the sun setting in the distance, casting its orange-red glow on the mountain rock... It made me feel like a good old fashioned city slicker.

Well not really, but it was quite breathtaking.

Once in the village, we checked into our chambre d'Hôte. It's run by a Dutch couple, and the guy's name was Jan (pronounced Yan). On top of managing the chambre d'hôte, his main gig involves

organizing [Harley Davidson tours of the region](#). Tom Lubbe would later go on to say that he looked like a character from the movie *Labyrinth*, although I'm pretty sure (because of Jan's long, whitish-blond hair) he meant David Bowie.



We arrived around 10pm, and were worried nothing would be open to eat. Fortunately, the Roussillon functions on pseudo Spanish time, so people were just starting to have dinner. We ate pizzas at the local bar/cafe thing, which was playing 90's rock videos the whole time. Maya "Mayhem" Pedersen and I were very amused hearing the Smashing Pumpkins' *Bullet with Butterfly Wings*:

I always thought that song was called *Rat in a Cage*. *Bullet With Butterfly Wings*? What kind of a stupid, pretentious name is that? P.S: Next time you bump into me, ask me to tell you my friend's story about meeting Billy Corgan and him being a huge asshole.

We then rocked out to the infinitely better *Stupid Girl* by Garbage.

Returning to our rooms, Maya discovered that there was no soap in the bathrooms. Thinking they had forgotten, I asked Jan if he could bring me some the next morning. What follows is a paraphrased re-telling of the conversation.

-Hey, you forgot to give us soap in the bathrooms.

-Soap? What do you mean? You didn't bring any?

-No.

-But everyone brings their own soap to a chambre d'hôte.

-I've never stayed anywhere I had to pay for where I wasn't provided at least a little bar of soap.

-Normally, people bring their own soap.

-Can you get me some or not?

- Um, okay, wait a second...

He then went to his house and brought back some liquid hand soap. Not the best shower I've ever taken... Anyway, fast forward to breakfast, where weird and inappropriately loud electronic-ambient-nordic-chant-Enya ripoff music was playing, and Jan decided to show us a picture DVD of him on various Harley Davidson tours. The whole experience was completely surreal.

After breakfast, [Tom Lubbe](#) came to pick us up and it was time to finally meet Agnès and Alain Carrère! After importing their last three vintages, it was about time! Alain is a very tall, dark skinned man of Spanish origin, born and raised in Caudiès. Agnès is originally from Paris, and unfortunately we barely got to see her since her sister -who she only sees twice a year- was visiting. They both are very kind, grateful people, which is humbling considering all the tough times the estate has been through.

The first parcel we visited consists mostly of Carignan on schist.







Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes (man I love that name) is the limit of grape growing in this part of the Roussillon. After that, you have to travel 50km to Limoux. It's also the only vineyard site in the Roussillon classed as "mountainous." The highest site is the Clos Ségas at 420m, which produces a

field blend that's *"always a surprise"*. The vines are spread over 5 hectares and were planted by Alain's great-grandparents. They are between 120 and 130 years old!!!!



Looking around, I spotted a lot of abandoned vineyard sites on nearby slopes and hills. But here and there, you notice little patches of vines, and Alain says these have all been replanted in the last 15 years:

"Vines used to be on the hills, but people ripped them out to replant in the plains. Now they're back in the hills again!"

Next up, a 5 hectare parcel of 80-90 year old vines. Many grapes are grown in this area, mostly of Carignan, Grenache and Syrah.





Alain has no problems with his neighbors: either the vines are in isolated clos, or -seeing how well Alain's vines were doing- they started working organically themselves.

"It's incredible how much it's changed local viticulture in just a few years." pointed out Tom. Since Alain started working organically, over 70 neighboring hectares have been converted!

After our visit of the vines, it was cellar time. The highlight is this half circle of large concrete tanks in the far corner.





"The last owner basically gave me the cellar. Wine hadn't been made here since 1953."

We then tasted the 2011's out in the sun. The 11 *Grappe Entiere* -a 100% Rolle cuvée that stays on the skins for a month- really stood out, as did the Rouge 11 and the Clos Ségas 10 (11 is being bottled soon). The Ravin des Sieurs Syrah was also quite pleasant. These wines are all extremely affordable and currently available stateside. Conveniently, the tasting ended right around...LUNCH TIME!

Over a bottle of Majas rosé, Alain and Tom continued talking about the region's ongoing struggle. In a very quotable moment, Tom exclaimed:

"It's not agriculture, it's agribusiness. Agriculture is the first word in the latin language, it's something sustainable we can pass from generation to generation. This is not what we have anymore."

"Only three of us made wine independently in the village. Now we are two, and he's also (unsuccessfully) trying to sell his estate. It looks like I'm going to be the only independent here"

"A *monopole!*" chimed Tom positively. They were making light of the situation, but it was obvious that Alain feels a bit like the odd man out, wishing there was more camaraderie in the village. Still, he is grateful to have turned things around and still be here.

"If we hadn't met Tom, we would probably have called it quits as well. Working organically saved the vines. It saved us."