Noella Morantin

Interview

This interview took place at La Boudinerie, Noella Morantin's home, in June 2011.

Tell us about your estate.

I currently work 8 1/2 hectares in Pouillé in the Loire-et-Chere. At the moment I rent 6 1/2 hectares from the Clos Roche Blanche and 2 hectares at the bottom of Pouillé. I work and vinify 5 varietals: Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Gamay, Côt and Cabernet Sauvignon. I purchased all of my fruit for the 2008 vintage and I've been renting from *Clos Roche Blanche* since 2009.

Did you have a previous career before wine?

I'm originally from Pornic, a small town bordering the Atlantic ocean. My father always had a little vineyard, and I'd do the harvest every year. We'd make wine for personal consumption: a barrel of red and a barrel of white. I always drank and liked wine as far back as I can remember.

Anyhow, I used to be a marketing director for a communications company. I was terribly bored at my job and one night I randomly met a professor of viticulture in a bistro. He suggested I give it a shot, so I did. At that point I had no intention of becoming a vigneronne. I just wanted to learn more about wine. But things just progressed, happened naturally, and here I am!

How did you end up in the Loire?

I got my B.T.S in agriculture/oenology in 2004, at which point I was also working for Agnès and René Mosse (from 2001 to 2003). I then spent a winter with Marc Pesnot in the Muscadet. That same winter I decided to go to the *Salon de Vins de Loire* where I met Junko Arai from *Bois Lucas*. Junko lives in Tokyo and was looking for someone to replace Pascal Potaire as main overseer of the estate. She hired me in 2004, and in the first few months I was trained by Pascal. I worked there until 2008, and when I started looking for vines to work under my name, Didier and Catherine from *Clos Roche Blanche* thought of me.

How would you distinguish your wines from *Clos Roche Blanche*?

The approach is different. I follow my instincts and sensibilities and I think that makes my wines stand out.

What's the work like in the vines?

We work them how we see fit. My partner Laurent does a lot of the vine work and we make decisions together based on what we think needs to be done at any given point. I think it's of utmost importance to be in the vines every day in order to really grasp what they need. We work the soils, try to get rid of grass and make sure not to "rogne" too early so the wines can have a nice acidity.

And in the cellar?

As naturally as possible, and with no intervention. I follow my wines closely and stay attentive to the vinification process from start to finish. I also age my wines in barrel for a long time, which in 2009 was a big risk since it meant that I wouldn't have any wine to sell in 2010. Still, I knew it had to be done.

For example the *Chez Charles* and *Terres Blanches* were harvested in 2009 and bottled in March 2011 and the 2010 gamay was bottled in April 2011. And now that I can see and taste the result, I know I made the right decision and have no regrets.

For me it's about adapting to each vintage. I don't want my cellar work to follow a strict agenda. I don't want to say: "everything will be bottled in March!" If you don't adapt, you won't always reach the full potential of the vintage.

Have you always worked organically?

I would not be making wine if I wasn't working organic vineyards. And I wouldn't be making wine if it wasn't natural wine.

Speaking of "natural wine", tell us how you feel about this whole movement of winemaking?

It's become very trendy in the last few years in France and a lot of vignerons claiming to make natural wines are lying to their customers to help increase their sales. As far as I'm concerned, I fully support the movement and consider myself part of it. I make natural wine.

From the work in the vineyard to the bottle sitting on your table, there has been no chemical intervention whatsoever, just a tiny bit of sulfur at bottling to help preserve the wine.

Now maybe because I add a gram of sulfur at bottling some winemakers might accuse me of not making "real" natural wine, but those same people also tend to make a lot of vinegar. When I was at *Bois Lucas*, I made some sulfur free wine, and I made wine with a gram of sulfur at bottling like I do now. The sulfured wines were much better! They were more balanced and when I analyzed them a year later, that gram of sulfur had disappeared.

Once the wine is finished and ready to be bottled you can't really harm or manipulate it, and I don't think a small amount of sulfur will affect the wine negatively. You can keep a bottle of *Chez Charles* open for a week and it won't budge. It's very resistant to oxidation and won't fall apart. This isn't because of sulfur, it's because of the work in the vines.

All this to say that I am not against sulfur free wine; the pétillant naturel I make is sulfur free, but that's because it has a lot of gas and the risks of it falling apart without sulfur are much lower.

You only bottle as Vin de France as opposed to the Touraine AOC. Can you tell us how you came to this choice?

From the get-go I wanted to make Vin de France, but a lot of people advised me against it. They told me that it was important to defend and take pride in your appellation, and I reluctantly started making AOC wines. Unfortunately, I quickly realized that the majority of the AOC wine being produced in my region came from conventional chemical farming and oenological manipulation in the cellar.

These people have appellation sauvignon because they've used an industrial yeast that makes the

wine smell like cat piss. If it doesn't smell like cat piss, you don't get the appellation. That was my first big problem with the AOC system.

The final straw was last year when there was an issue with my *Boudinerie* 2009. It had 0.24 volatile acidity, and even though 0.9 is the level necessary for the wine to be deemed flawed, the board denied me the AOC for this cuvée because of V.A. I reanalyzed the wine myself and provided them with the results proving I was well within the limits allowed, and they told me that it didn't matter, that when they had tasted it they had deemed the V.A too high and I'd have to present it again in order to reevaluate it. So out of principle, because at this point I'd sold all my wine and there wasn't any left, I re-presented the wine and, low and behold, this time the wine was ok and they accorded me the AOC.

At that point I told myself I didn't need these people to tell me what to do. I'm perfectly capable of making the wines I want to make without having the AOC boss me around.

What do you like to drink?

Other people's wines! I'm always drinking mine so whenever I can drink someone else's I jump on the opportunity! I love Eric Pfifferling's wines. I love Marc Pesnot. I love René Mosse's Anjou Blancs.