

Thomas Morey

Interview

This interview with Thomas Morey took place in his Chassagne-Montrachet tasting room in July, 2012.

Tell us about *Domaine Thomas Morey*.

We are located in Chassagne-Montrachet, and work on 13 hectares of vines spread across 6 villages: Les Maranges, Santenay, Chassagne-Montrachet, Puligny-Montrachet, Saint-Aubin and Beaune. I work with my wife Sylvie, along with four full time employees. We produce about 45, 000 bottles of white and 15, 000 bottles of red.

I used to work with my father, Bernard. A big part of my estate is historically in the family, as we've inherited many parcels. Others I've purchased rather recently, and on top of that we also rent some land. Proportionally, 8 hectares are ours, and we rent the other 5, some in metayage, others in traditional farming.

What kind of new parcels are you working with?

Starting with 2011, we were offered to work with 3 supplemental hectares of vines in Chassagne-Montrachet which featured some new appellations we hadn't yet worked with. Knowing how difficult it is to purchase vines nowadays, it was hard to refuse a rental opportunity. These vines are owned by my closest neighbor, who'd inherited the land from his in-laws but was never a vigneron. He was renting them to someone else, but they retired so he offered them to me. And I accepted!

How old are the vines?

It varies a lot, but most of the vines I work with were planted between the mid 50's and mid 60's. 90% of the estate is in selection massalle.

You are in the midst of converting to organic viticulture. Can we talk about this decision?

I was always attracted to this type of agriculture, which I don't consider to be "*organic*" at all. Even though that's the modern name for it, my idea was to revive a work tradition my grandparents had followed their entire lives. They worked with basic products -copper and sulfur- that remain the least harmful available. I'm very aware of the environmental impact of our work, especially as a producer on the front-line of chemical use that is unhealthy for human beings. It just seems like the reasonable thing to do.

And again, it was a bit of an homage to our grand-parents. If they could do it, why not us? Mine passed away not too long ago, and a lot of imagery came back to me. I started reconstructing the story of their lives: they provided us with such beautiful wines, and by taking this old-school approach, I hope to do the same. And honestly, in the first two years working on my own, I felt like the products I was using were filthy. I wasn't comfortable using them. Who knows what impact this will have on our health in 25 years...

So I started in 2011, and this was a good year to start since it was easy weather-wise. And when you start strong with a good year, it gives you a lot of confidence. In the case of 2012, it's a lot tougher and requires a lot more personal investment, but once you've started in this direction, you really don't want to go back.

You mentioned during our visit in the vines that Burgundy is becoming more beautiful

I believe this is also linked to people becoming more conscious of their rich past. In the 80's, if there was a tree amongst the vines, you'd cut it right down because it was in the way. Nowadays, if some nature grows around the vines, people let it be. I think that we are becoming more and more conscious of our environmental impact; little by little we are getting over this functionality-first mentality with this new generation. People are planting fruit trees again, and creating diversity around the vineyards.

Oeno-tourism might also be part of this. It's progressed a lot, and now you see tons of tourists on bikes and in their cars. It's up to us to offer them something worth while to see when they visit. It's not only vines over here, it's the whole environment: the vines, the murals, the trees. Once the horses disappeared in the 50's, people started focusing more mechanization. We needed more room, everything had to be faster and more productive.

What's the work in the cellar?

Nothing revolutionary in the cellar. I only work with indigenous yeasts, and I'm very strict about not using sulfur during the vinification of the wines. Other than that, it's very traditional Burgundian wine-making. We do soft filtrations for the whites, because I don't age them that long. Maybe if I aged the wines an extra 6 months, I could pass on filtration, but this isn't the case today.

You have an interesting way of dosing sulfur that I've never heard anyone else use. Can you talk about that?

The goal is that when the wine is bottled, I'm at about 35 mg of free SO₂ per liter. If I want it to be that low, it requires regular doses over the course of the year. I only age the wines 11 months before bottling them, which encourages me to work with fast alcoholic and malolactic fermentations. These are usually done by late December (late January at the very latest). I then take advantage of the winter cold to naturally lower the temperature in my cellar, and from March through August, I will regularly add tiny amounts of SO₂ instead of adding one or several huge doses over a more spaced out period of time. This way, the SO₂ incorporates itself more smoothly with the wine, and that way I don't have to add any more at bottling.

What do you like to drink?

It's a long list! Locally I like Château-Chalon. It might worry some that a guy who makes Chardonnay in Burgundy admits to liking this style, and as my grandpa said: "*it's messed up wine!*" But I disagree and I love the oxidized style of the Jura. I love Syrah and stuff from the Rhône. I'm a huge fan of German Riesling, but also enjoy Alsacian ones. And I really like Champagne! I even like California Sauvignon Blanc and Zinfandel. There's good wine everywhere!