

Agnès et René Mosse

Interview

This interview with René Mosse took place in his dining room in June 2011.

Tell us about the history of the estate.

We arrived in Anjou in 1999 to take over a family estate that had no successor. The owner was about to retire, and we purchased the land from him. At the time the estate was 9 1/2 hectares of vines, and today we work 17. Over the years, we've replanted a lot of parcels as well as acquiring parcels of Cabernet Franc. We're still in the process of ameliorating the vineyard, a work which we feel is never finished. Prior to our arrival the vines had gone through three generations of intensive chemical viticulture, and from day one we started slowly converting the vines parcel by parcel to organic viticulture-and since 2001- to biodynamic viticulture.

How did you end up a vigneron?

I worked all types of jobs before I ended up where I am now. Prior to purchasing the estate, I had a wine bar/bistro in Tours with Agnès where you could drink a bottle in house or take it to go. This led to meeting a bunch of vignerons from the Loire, most notably Christian Chaussard and Francois Chidaine. We became friends, hung out and this was my first real exposure to the vineyard and the cellar.

I eventually stopped working in Tours and for a period of time I was a cook for various vignerons, which was a lot of fun. They would organize tastings or celebrations and I would cater the food. This is when I really started meeting a lot of vignerons and one of them told me about a viticultural formation in Amboise for old people. Oops, I mean adults!

Agnès and I went through the program together. I then got hired at an estate in Touraine, where she joined me in the work. After that I worked in Burgundy for a year and half and once that was done we decided to start our own estate in 1999.

How did you end up in Anjou?

Ending up in Anjou was a bit of a coincidence. I'm from the Touraine, where there are appellations for white (Vouvray, Montlouis) and for red (Chinon, Bourgeuil). What's interesting about Anjou is that you can make red and white wines on the same terroirs, and in Touraine this is a rarity. It was also much cheaper to start the estate here than in one of the appellations I just mentioned.

What we soon realized about Anjou was that selling the wine wouldn't be easy. The average French customer grimaces when you mention Anjou. While a Bourgeuil or Vouvray means quality, when they think of Anjou they think of headaches and stomach pains. Vignerons here make wines that are heavily sulfured and chaptalised, and save for a few big houses that put out a quality product, the region has had a hard time fixing it's bad reputation.

I'm glad, however, to say that in the 10+ years we've been working here, there's been a positive evolution. A lot of younger vignerons have come here to start their own estates, working well and on

a smaller scale. Today I am happy being a vigneron in Anjou, but when we first started we were really worried we'd made a terrible choice.

What's the work in the vines like?

We work the vines organically and biodynamically: no chemicals, no herbicides and we work the soils. We are certified organic but not biodynamic.

And in the cellar?

I do everything! No that's not true.

Once we've harvested the grapes the white are pressed directly and put in barrels the next day. The reds ferment in stainless steel and are then aged in barrel for about a year.

As a member of the A.V.N (Association des vins naturels) tell us how you feel about "natural wine".

When we started out, "natural wine", at least the way we speak of it today, did not exist. For us it was all about working organically in the vines. We never intervened in the cellar either, but it was never our intent to be labeled or to be part of a movement. When we started a vast majority of vignerons who had organic vineyards didn't even know they had them, but had simply always worked that way.

And when I sold wine in Tours, it was never about if the wine had been inoculated or chaptalised or this or that. What we did look for was quality, something that spoke to us when we drank it. When we drank a Bernard Baudry or a Francois Chidaine for example, we could taste the quality, and that was what drew us towards the wine. This was the late 80's/early 90's, and neither of those guys were working organically at the time.

I never speak of natural wine when asked about our wines. For me working as well as you can in the vineyard and not intervening in the cellar is the ONLY way to make exceptional wine. If you ask me I'll tell you it's wine made as naturally as possible. I have no ties or intent in defending "natural wine" or being part of this so called movement. A lot of the stuff coming from these natural winemakers is completely undrinkable and I refuse to be in cahoots with these guys. Quality is what matters. I don't care how your wine was made if it's undrinkable.