

Domaine de Roally/Bongran

Profile

Tasting Henri Goyard's Mâcon-Viré for the first time, in 1987, was a true revelation. We were stunned: the local coops' wines were correct at best, the handful of estate-made Mâcons we had tasted, a notch superior, and the barrel-fermented Chardonnays from the Côte d'Or had not prepared us for this experience. This wine was rich, lush, intensely fruity and fat, with marvelous weight and length. It was powerful, yet fresh and lively, and its aromas of buttery, roasted nuts lingered on.

After the 2000 vintage, Goyard retired, and his estate went to Gautier Thévenet, son of Jean of Domaine de la Bongran in Clessé. The 14 acres of old vines continue to be plowed, do not see herbicides, fertilizers and anything other than copper and sulfur for treatment. There have been a few changes, the harvest is slightly later than before, the stainless-steel tanks are horizontal rather than vertical, and bottling is done after 15 or 16 months in vat rather than 11. There is the same natural richness of flavor and ripeness in these grapes, and the wines follow the same pattern of slow alcoholic fermentation, ending with some residual sugar.

When the Viré-Clessé AOC was created 10 years ago, the statutes required a totally dry wine (less than 3 grams of residual sugar), so Domaine de Roally, Domaine de la Bongran, and Domaine Guillemot-Michel were excluded from it. For a while, the ex Mâcon-Viré was labelled Mâcon-Village. Then came the summer of 2003, so hot that the grapes ripened too high, and that the entire region produced wines with a lot of residual sugar. Domaine de Roally could now label its wine Viré-Clessé. On the other hand, the wine authorities have stripped some villages of the right to use their names, in order to "simplify" the list of Mâcons available: the other part of the Roally estate, located in the village of Montbellet, has recently lost its right to a named village on its label, becoming a Mâcon-Villages.

Fortunately, all these arcane administrative rules do not affect the quality of the wine. The superb location of the vines on a limestone ridge overlooking the plain of the Saône river, the vines' old mix of different strands of Chardonnay, their age and condition, then a simple but careful vinification make for a powerful, yet complex and delicate wine. Delicious in its youth, it also ages gracefully, acquiring more intense roasted notes, and sometimes, the deeply mineral character often associated with Riesling, rather than Chardonnay.