

Domaine du Possible

Interview

This interview with Loïc Roure took place at L'Herbe Rouge in February, 2013.

Tell us about *Domaine du Possible*.

I created the *Domaine du Possible* in 2003. I'm located in the oriental Pyrenees, in an area called the Fenouillèdes. I live and produce wine in Lansac's old cave cooperative, which I share with another vigneron, Edouard Lafitte. I started with only 2.5 h, then 4.5 h in 2004, then 7 h for many years and as of last year, I've expanded to 10.5 h.

We have three main types of terroirs: pure schist, gneiss and granite and a little further, clay and limestone as well as marly schist in the Caudiès-de-Fenouillèdes. I grow about 4.5 h of Carignan, 2.6 h of Grenache, 1.3 h of Syrah, a little bit of Mourvedre and for whites I have a majority of Macabeu, a little Carignan Gris, and a tiny bit of Grenache Blanc and Grenache Gris (this represents about 1h).

What were doing before starting the estate?

All my prior jobs had me sitting in front of a computer. For many years, I worked for Amnesty International in Lyon. When my contract was up, I decided that I wanted to open a wine bar/bistro; since I'd never worked in a restaurant, I got myself hired at one, where I worked for a year and a half. I then took a sommelier course; this involved an internship in Cornas working for a gentleman named Thierry Allemand.

His passion was incredible. All it took was a few days with him for me to realize that this was what I wanted to do! This was in 1999, and over the next three years I started working for vignerons all over France, mostly in the Rhône but also in Alsace and the Loire. I learned a lot, and in 2003 I felt ready to start my own estate.

How did you end up in the Roussillon?

I originally wanted to settle in the Ardèche, but couldn't find the vines that I wanted. As far as the Roussillon, I used to come here as a kid and wanted to revisit the area. I quickly realized that there are great terroirs here, that being close to the mountains and the sea is pretty good living and of course, there were vines to sell!

Another important step was meeting Cyril Fhal (*Domaine Clos du Rouge Gorge*) and Jean Louis Tribouley. They are both great guys and had started their estates a few months prior to my arrival. They had the same philosophy as I did, so it was very encouraging.

Did you have an idea of how you wanted to work from the beginning?

Yes. I wanted to work normally, which in my mind means not using chemicals. Organics are the bare minimum if you want to do this sort of thing. In the cellar, I've always wanted to use the least amount of entrants possible. I was much more militant about this when I started, and was completely opposed to using sulfur.

But you evolve. I want to make wine, and I want it to be good! So now I use a bit of sulfur if I have to, but it's pretty rare. Paradoxically, I've become less of a fundamentalist. But I've also gotten better at using less sulfur!

Repurchasing and renovating an old cave cooperative sounds like a pretty unique endeavor. What was that like?

Taking over the cave cooperative meant taking over 70 years of winemaking that was not at all in the style that I wanted to produce. The first major challenge was cleaning it up; it had been abandoned since 1990 and was black with soot. It was filthy! Wiping the walls down took forever...

When Edouard came into the picture, we started shaping the cellar to our personal tastes and needs. This was a place designed to produce industrial wine, and it was only in 2009 that we finally started to feel a natural equilibrium in there. The wines were fermenting on their own, without any issues of *piqûre lactique* or *piqûre acétique*. I guess what I'm trying to say is that it's a challenge re-appropriating a surface like this. It's rather big: 600 square meters with 5 meter ceilings.

Otherwise, it isn't really a cave cooperative anymore, but Edouard and I do share all of our cellar equipment. It's extremely practical, but what's also great is that we can bounce off of each other's work and ideas. We taste together, express our concerns and give each other pointers. Edouard is a really experienced guy.

What's the work in the vines like?

We live in a region where you can't really leave grass in the vines. It's very dry here, and the competition becomes too much. So we leave a little, but not too much. I work the soils on a superficial level. We have a lot of Tramontana wind here, and I joke that this is our number one "treatment" to fight against illness. But we do have occasional oidium issues, particularly with the Carignan and Macabeu. For this we use contact sulfur. Mildew is very rare here, but copper really takes care of it. Still, I must have used Bouillie Bordelaise maybe 4 times in 10 years.

I also use some natural plant based preparations. I'm very open minded in experimenting in the vines, and will try anything if I think it will benefit them. I like the idea of biodynamics, but in no way claim to partake in it. I don't work in polyculture, I don't have a farm or any animals, and I don't see the point in ordering cow horns from 400 kilometers away.

And in the cellar?

We harvest by hand, and I quasi-systematically cool down the grapes when they arrive to the cellar. They spend a night in a cold chamber, and sometimes I lower temperatures down to 4 degrees. It depends on the grapes and the vintage.

80% of the grapes are vinified whole cluster. I normally perform a semi-carbonic maceration by putting the grapes in the tanks then foot trotting. I do very little-to-no pigeages, no remontages but the occasional soutirage.

Many people in your region choose to intentionally declassify their wines to IGT, but you systematically label yours under the Côtes du Roussillon AOC. Can you elaborate as to why?

The way the AOC works, a panel tastes every wine before bottling. I have been part of these panels since the very beginning, even as a worker in Ardèche. It's easy to criticize them, but you have to be

part of it to understand how it works.

We are lucky enough here, because there has been a large wave of newly formed estates in our region over the last 10 years. This has brought a fresh perspective and open-mindedness to the tasting committees. Furthermore, the fact that a private enterprise now heads these committees (as opposed to the INAO) has created a broader discourse for wines that have been traditionally judged "atypical". This means wines that are not yeasted or heavily sulfured.

The big difference between IGT Côtes Catalanes and AOC Côtes du Roussillon is that to produce the AOC wine, you need to have a certain amount of Syrah planted (20 or 25%, I forgot). It just so happens that I have that much Syrah, but realistically, claiming my wines are from the Côtes Catalanes is just not true. I'm 40 kilometers from the sea, in a more mountainous and slopey area. Altitudes go from 250m to 450m in the matter of a few kilometers, and to top it all off, the Catalans call us gabachas, which means strangers!

I've participated in many reunions about this, and the region that is designated as Côtes du Roussillon can really be defined by the region of the Fenouillèdes and the river of Agly. I personally find it perfectly logical to support this.

When I visited last summer, I could feel a real energy in the Roussillon. It seems like this new wave of producers have a great sense of camaraderie, and are dedicated to working in a less interventionist fashion.

This new wave of outsiders, people who came from somewhere else to set up here, really started from 2000 to 2002. You had Bruno Duchêne, Jean-François Nicq, Alain Castex, Cyril Fhal, Jean Louis Tribouley, Olivier Pithon... You of course had Gérard Gauby who has had this philosophy from the beginning. But after this first wave, there was just an explosion of new estates in 2005 and 2006. To this day, people are still starting new estates here on a regular basis. Just in my sector around Latour de France, we've gone from 0 h in organic viticulture in 2000 to 185 hectares today!

This is a really nice combination of newer independent vigneron, but also of locals who didn't work organically but got inspired by the results of their new neighbors. It's great! And now, the the cave cooperative in Estagel has just shifted 100 of its hectares into organics. People also get along here: they buy and share vineyard and cellar equipments and have even devised systems where they share employees so they can work full time amongst many small estates.

We recently organized a tasting in Latour de France with 11 locals and a few of our good friends from other parts of the Roussillon. 500 people showed up just from word of mouth. There really is a great, fantastic energy that only continues to grow.

What do you like to drink?

I am a big fan of acidity in wine. I have a hard time with very tannic wines.