

Eric Texier

Interview

This interview with Eric Texier stems from a series of emails from October 2010.

The facts:

3.3 ha in Brézème:

2.2 ha de 15 à 25 year old syrah

0.5 ha of petites serines Syrah Brézème Pergaud (60-70 years)

0.45 ha of roussane planted in 2001

0.15 ha of roussanne Brézème Pergaud

With an additional hectare of roussane as of next year.

In the next five years, I plan to take over an additional 11.5 ha in Saint Julien en Saint Alban which will be 55% syrah, 35% grenache and Cinsault and 10% whites.

I also rent around 4 ha in Vaison: 3.5 ha of grenache aged between 30 and 55 years and 0.5 ha of whites.

How did you end up making wine?□

Passion. My grandmother had given me some money when for my marriage in 1985, and I decided to invest in wine. I began asking around on how to invest this money wisely and began realizing that the wines I enjoyed (Gourgonnier, Chamonard, Trollat, Gentaz, Goyard, Guffens) were a million times more interesting to me than what the specialized press was praising: Bordeaux, Languedoc, nouveau riche... I got in touch with these vigneron and began discovering the concepts and traditions behind their wines.

I was bored to death at my old job as an engineer in the nuclear industry and quickly opted to learn viticulture and winemaking in 1993 by interning at Guffens. I vinified my first wines in 1995 when we moved to Charnay in a house with a wine press and a cellar.

Why do you choose to live in the Beaujolais but work in the Rhône?

I'd been living in the Beaujolais with my family well before I started making wine. My wife and I moved here when our children were still infants. Alice was born here. The kids call it home here, and I felt that I had no right to force my family to move to the south when this whole wine thing was my idea.

At first I wanted to settle in Burgundy, find land in Côte de Nuits or something comparable. Unfortunately I never found anything because of my double handicap of not being a Burgundian or a millionaire!

I ended up working with vines in the northern Rhône thanks to some friendly advice from guys like Raymond Trollat and Marcel Juge who put me in touch with François Pouchoulin in Brézème. I

instantly fell in love with this unknown appellation and the people that had kept it alive; its' parallels to Burgundy, namely single varietal and parcel specific bottlings, sealed the deal for me. But to me, Charnay is the most beautiful place in the world and that's where I feel most comfortable living. I should also point out that I would never be able to afford a house like mine in the Val de Drôme, an area that is extremely touristic and expensive!

Finally, I would never find a cellar as beautiful, as calm and as perfect as my own in Charnay.

What's the work like with the vines? What do you think of your terroirs and your vines?□

Certified organic "Ecocert" in Brézème and Vaison. We began converting Saint Julien in 2011. We use the 500 and 501 everywhere and follow the lunar calendar but I am highly opposed to the necessity of animal compost imposed by biodynamic agriculture; I guess it's my own interpretation of it. We do a lot of experiments involving other types of plants in between rows and vines, as well as "natural" viticulture with zero intervention to the soil or the vines (by applying the principles of Fukuoka, Mollison or Altieri). I do my best to never have to use the three things that I find the most intrusive in organic and biodynamic agriculture:

- Plowing (in between rows or at the root)
- Copper (Mildew, Black Rot)
- Sulfur (oidium)

To avoid these three pitfalls, I work on cultures that complement each other, selecting plants that provide permanent vegetal cover of the soil that can "shut down" when resources become scarce, by using one microbiological elements to fight illness (Ampelomyces Quiscalis against odium...).

The terroirs of Brézème and Saint Julien are particularly unique because wine from either appellation is very rare: 5 producers in Brézème and 2 in Saint Julien. They are the terroirs of farmers, proud of their rusticity and history.

Your situation is fairly unique. What is your criteria for selecting the vineyards and the grapes you work with?

I work exclusively with 3 vigneron: Jean Riché in Chateauneuf, René Dondin in Bussièeres and Bernard Garrayt in Condrieu/Côte Rotie. I've known all these guys for a very long time; Bernard and I even make wine together!

All three of these guys have something in common: they are all better vigneron than I am and know their land way better than I do. In fact I'd go as far as to say that these guys taught me everything I know as a vigneron.

Should I plow along the side of the hill in Condrieu in August when storms are announced in early September? I don't know since I don't have to worry about stuff like this in Brézème, where my soils there "behave" better.

Or do i take a big risk in Chateauneuf and letting grass grow under the rows in a rainy vintage? Again, I have Jean who always does the right thing because of his experience with his terroirs and vines.

What I've learned in Brézème only applies to Brézème; I can't transpose my work there to Saint Julien because the terroirs and the climate are very different. In such, I learn from the proprietors that worked this land before I did.

I work with these three guys because they are great vigneron. They are autonomous and traditionalists (no insecticides, plowing soils or leaving grass) and I have nothing to explain to them.

I laugh when I hear people sourcing fruit tell me they control everything the vigneron does in the vineyard:

- 1) You're clearly full of it unless you live and sleep in the vines every night.
- 2) If you're telling someone how to do his job and he offers zero input and does exactly what you say, I don't see how this can be beneficial to the work being done in the vineyard.

So my basic principle remains the same: I don't give any orders to my vigneron and I control absolutely nothing! They are my friends and I have total confidence in them. Not to mention they all have superb terroirs with the least amount of clones possible (I'm at about 95% old vines or massale) and as many old vines as possible.

What's the wine making process like?□

For red:

- no intervention during vinification: no yeasting, no SO₂, no bacteria, no tannins, no enzymes.
- no pigeages: the hat stays forcefully immersed thanks to a wood clamp.
- Short cuvaisons 5 to 15 days mostly.
- Aged on the lees, no SO₂ unless necessary, no new oak, 20% small barrels, 30% wood tanks and 50% cement tanks.
- very little filtration (less than 10% on normal years, bottled when it's clear).
- 10 to 30 mg of SO₂ at bottling. I do a few cuvees with no SO₂: an improbable Chateauneuf du Pape, 1 bottling of Pergault Saint Julien and Brézème.

For white:

- Pneumatic press or vertical press without maceration except for certain cuvées bottled without SO₂.
- no intervention during vinification: no yeasting, no SO₂, no bacteria, no tannins, no enzymes.
- Aged on the lees, no SO₂ unless necessary, no new oak, 50% wood barrels 50% cement tanks.
- Filtered "sur terre" except for the Pergaud and Chateauneuf blanc.
- 20 to 40 mg of SO₂ at bottling.

My wines are not "nice" or "fun". I believe they express where they come from and truly show a sense of regional identity. They are clear and precise. I don't give a shit what people are drinking at hipster wine bars in Paris or what a 1000 euro bottle of Bordeaux tastes like. I'm very happy people like my grandma and François Pouchoulin, the father of Brézème, like them.

What do you think of the wines of your AOC and how they compare to something "typical" of the region?

I'm in the "Terroiriste" camp, Jules Chauvet style. I don't like modern wines or super natural wines that scream "fuck tradition".

I'll let Jules do the talking: "Every vigneron should accept his wines as they are in reality, and not how he wants them to be."

What kind of wines are you aiming to make?

Wines of terroir.

Have you always worked organically?

Yes.

Why?

For me it comes right back to Chauvet.

The less you interfere with the vines and during the winemaking process the more your wine stays true to its origin, whether it be terroir, varietal or vintage. In such you can be proud of its unique individuality.

Where do you stand on the "natural" wine debate?

If "natural" essentially means a product of nature then long live natural wine! On the other hand, if "natural" means disjointed, revolutionary and trying to justify all possible deviation for the sake of originality, then I'd rather make wines like that then actually drink them...

Modern wines and super natural wines share a common trait: the will of the vigneron/winemaker to make a wine knowing precisely what he wants from it. This idea frustrates me because I feel it leads to a standardization of taste. An overripe Cabernet with a ton of new wood doesn't strike me as better or worse than a carbonic Syrah that tastes like every other carbonic wine ever made. If I had to pick one of the two though, needless to say I'd drink the latter!!!

What wines do you like to drink besides your own?

-Chamonard's Morgon

-Mas du Gourgonier

-Frank Peillot's Altesses.

-Marc Olliver's Muscadets

-Some classic Burgundy: Rousseau, Roumier, Mugneret Gibourg and DRC

The old syrups of Trollat, Gentaz Dervieux, Juge or Verset.

Les Ponchonières d'Helen Durant in Rasteau.