

Dard & Ribo

Visits

This visit at Dard & Ribo took place in June, 2012.



Words by Jules Dressner, photos by Maya Pedersen.

Driving over to the commune of Mercurol, we ended up getting there really early and decided to visit the neighboring towns of Tournon and Tain-L'Hermitage.





The two towns are separated by the Rhône river, but you can walk across the bridge pictured above in five minutes. The river also separates two departments: Tournon is in Ardèche (where Jean-René Dard was born) and Tain-L'Hermitage is in the Drôme (where François Ribo is from). As you can see, Tain-L'Hermitage has a great view on some of the steepest, best placed Hermitage vines. The main drags are very touristy, but getting lost in the little side streets was a lot of fun. We also saw this very strange Kebab place:



"Hygiene, Quality, Service". MMMMMMMM, appetizing!

The Ardèche is also a huge player in French apricot production, and this time of the year is the peak of the season:



After killing some time, we set off to the small village of Blanche-Laine, where Dard & Ribo have their cellar.



In the 8 or so years we've worked with these guys, no one has ever met François Ribo; René-Jean takes care of everything on our side of things, and apparently François does the same for certain customers. So, you guessed it, René-Jean was our host. I would describe him as a lovable grump: he grumbled about us visiting on a Sunday ("*and the day after the 14!*"), but then spent 5 hours carefully showing us the vines and tasting through the 2011's. He likes to complain a lot, but it's always with a hint of amusement; he also has a great sense of humor and would be a shoe-in as a New Yorker. He's actually never been to the U.S, and says the only reason he would come is to have a "*real American burger*".

The first vineyard we visited was a parcel of Hermitage.





Roussanne, Marsanne and Syrah are co-planted together here. And while the Marsanne and Roussane are a bit hard to distinguish from one another, René-Jean grabbed some leaves to show how to easily spot the vines of red (left) and white (right).



Besides size, the white vines' leaves are more undulated, and their "butts cross"...

Their Crozes-Hermitage vines are at the very edge of the appellation. They are 20 years old, and were planted by René-Jean and François; when they took over in 1984, the preexisting vines were nearly 100 and unproductive. They ripped them out but were still able to get some selection massalles out of them, which is what was replanted. This particular parcel is one of many (but not all) that François works with a cable pulley and horse. The soils are deep, granitic sand.



The way they acquired this parcel is a cool story. Both the guys were participating in a traditional night of singing and dancing, with the party constantly moving from farm to farm. At around 2 AM, they found themselves drinking at an old farmer's house. In passing, he mentioned his imminent retirement and how he was hoping to sell his vines. Hungover, they woke up early the next morning to sign a contract with him. No one could understand why the guy was so adamant about selling his vines to two young nobodies who were just getting started, but he must of seen something special.

We also spotted some vines René-Jean is picking out his massalles for replanting:



Even in the Northern Rhône, there has been a lot of rain this year and therefore a lot of illness. This has forced them to do more treatments than usual. At the time of our visit, they'd done 5, but most in the region were well above 15. They were also hit with hail three times, which did some damage.

Our next stop was at *les Karrières*.



This parcel has the particularity of being on [kaolinite soils](#). This is the same clay that is used to make porcelain, and just a few minutes from the vines, kaolinite is mined for just that.



We also checked out a parcel in Crozes-Hermitage called *les Bâties*.



Over the course of the visit, René-Jean kept bringing up his constant struggles with Inter-Rhône, an

organisation designed to promote every aspect of wine in the region from A to Z. They claim to exist in order to maintain a certain quality in the vineyards and in the cellar, but according to what René-Jean told us, it seems like little more than a legal, administrative imposition of laws and regulations attempting to uniform an entire (rather large) region. The latest incident: Dard & Ribo recently got a 17 euro fine for letting too much grass grow...

"You need to let it grow when it rains this much. If you work the soils, you spread more illness."

But this is only a minor offense. Recently, the Dard & Ribo wines were tasted by an Inter-Rhône panel who told them their wines were deviant and atypical, and now they're busting their chops about the winemaking, trying to send a guy over there to see what they're up to. This from the same institution that allows chaptalisation, acidification, and just passed the use of wood chips!

Unrelated but just as ridiculous, the cave cooperative of Tain just converted to organics, so they called Francois to tell him *"watch what you're putting in the vines"* so it wouldn't overlap into theirs. I guess they didn't know Dard & Ribo have been working organically since the 80's...

"But they never called us to tell us: hey we're using chemicals. Watch out!"

The same cave later got mad because the A.O.C forbade them from spraying the organic treatments via helicopter.

Crozes-Hermitage factoid: did you know that 70% of Crozes-Hermitage's vineyards are on flat land? In fact, up until fairly recently it was used as a bistro wine served at the counter. Traditional Crozes red was always light and pleasant, but in an effort to build up the region's reputation, many vigneronns began making fuller bodied, more extracted and heavily oaked bottlings.

"Crozes was never meant to be a serious wine. It's supposed to be easy to drink."

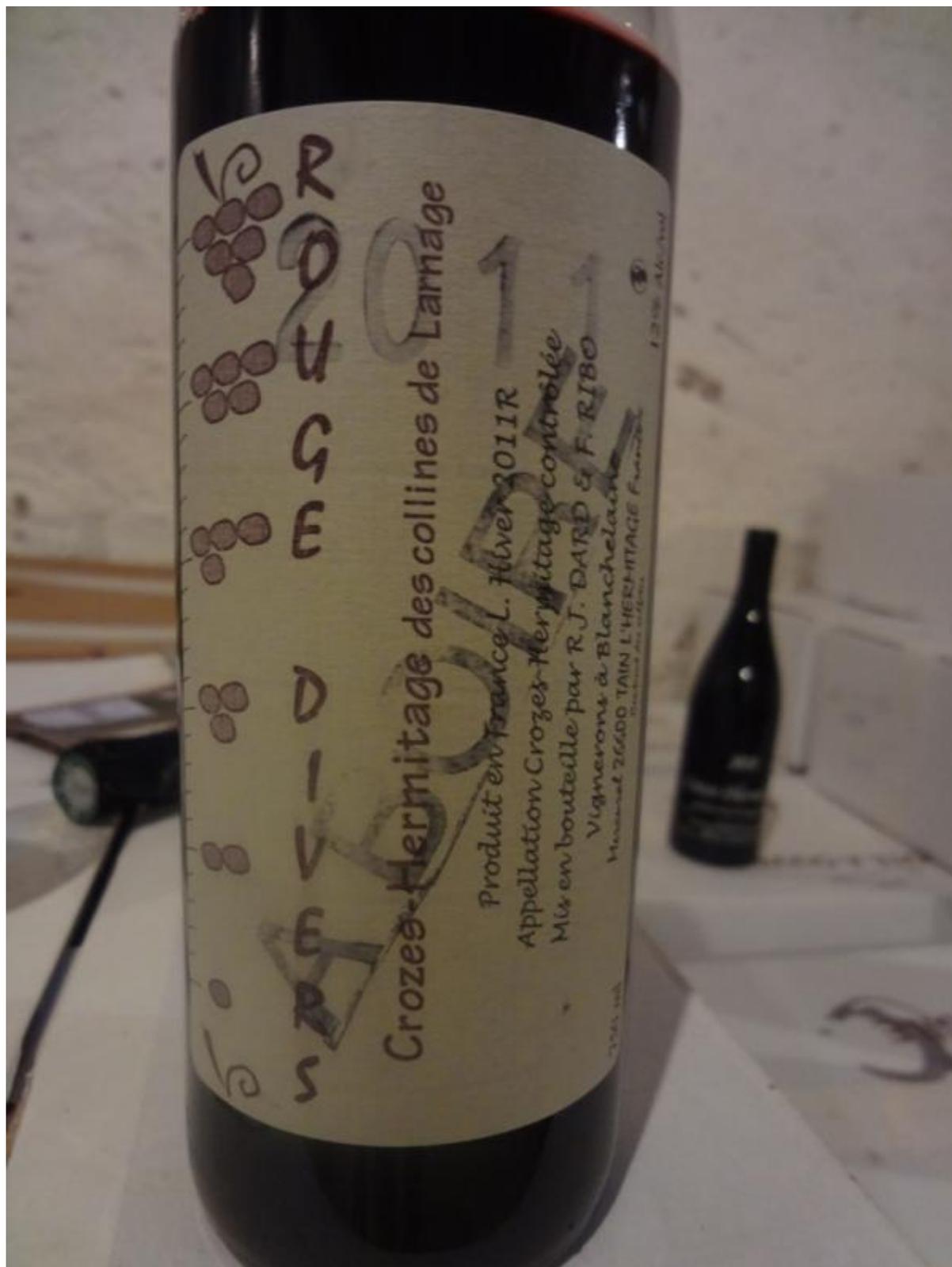
In the cellar, we got to taste all the 2011's.



As many of you know, Dard & Ribo are amongst the pioneers of sans-souffre winemaking in France, and the reds have been this way since the 80's. For the whites, René-Jean explained that up until a few years ago, they'd always used to add a little bit of sulfur at press. But over the last decade, they

have developed a technique where they rack the juice after press WITHOUT doing a *débourage*. As the wine ferments, the gross lees are physically pushed out through the top of the barrels. This means they have to constantly clean up the overflow until fermentation is over, but this way, no sulfur! Once the fermentation is done, they then rack the wine.

We also got to taste *Rouge Divers*, a Crozes-Hermitage nouveau!



This bottling, which they've been doing since 2005, consistently infuriates their neighbors and probably Inter-Rhône if they knew about it. Why?

1. It's a primeur, so it is released in January. Not very serious Crozes!
2. It's in a transparent Bordeaux bottle, which is not typical of Crozes! And look at that color!
3. There is a big stamp that translates to "*Drink Now*" on the label. That's just not serious Crozes!

That was the visit. I wanted to do an interview, but René-Jean's lady-friend showed up and things just progressed into drinking some 2010's and hanging out. There was so much I wanted to ask, but I'm sure there'll be another opportunity. As we were about to leave, I stepped out for a second to check on Zaggy. Just then, a very tall, curly haired man with glasses was parking his tractor. Having no idea who it was, I politely said hello and went back in. It turns out it was François Ribo! By the time we'd figured out it was him (after all these years, Denyse wanted to meet him), it was too late: he'd gotten back on the tractor to work some vines! The mystery continues...