

Alice et Olivier de Moor

Chablis from Alice and Olivier de Moor in Courgis.



Alice and Olivier de Moor. And David Lillie.

Profile

Courgis is a small village 7 km southwest of Chablis where Alice and Olivier de Moor live and work. It is where Olivier grew up, and his "old" cellar, the part where he ages his Chablis in oak barrels, is underneath his grandparents' house. From the hill where Courgis sits, the view is of vineyards over hills all the way to the Chablis Grands Crus.

Olivier says the landscape has changed a lot in his lifetime, that all the woods, bushes and fallow land that dotted the hills have disappeared in favor of vines. There is a good side to this transformation", he says.

Alice is from the Jura, and the two met at a large Chablis estate where Olivier was in charge of the vineyards. Both are enologists, graduates of the Dijon enological school, with enough knowledge to take a radically different direction for their vines and wines than their neighbors.

They began their estate by planting three plots of Chablis, -Bel Air, Clardy and Rosette,-in 1989. Of their first harvest, in 1994, they kept only 15HL. They were still employed elsewhere, but quit that fall after leasing their Saint-Bris vines: 0.55HA of Aligoté planted in 1902, and 0.40HA of Sauvignon blanc from 1945. For the next three years, they worked their 4HA of vines, and in the vines of other winemakers to make a living. In 1996, they planted a large plot in Chitry (called Champagne) with Aligoté and Chardonnay.

The whole Chablis area is highly calcareous, with soils formed millions of years ago in a warm, shallow sea. So the limestone is rich in shellfish fossils like oysters (*exogyra virgula*), urchins, bivalves, ammonites. Bel Air and Clardy have a shallow topsoil over layers of harder limestone with fossils, a mix of clay and limestone that is highly draining, even more so in Clardy, which has whiter clay. Rosette has a more complex soil, and is much harder to work: its slope is up to 40% steep, and the vineyard can roughly be separated in two. The very top is eroded materials over hard Portlandian rock, the mid slope is directly over Kimmeridgian marl, and those quickly suffer from drought; the bottom part is rich, dense clay with some limestone, and ripens later: they usually do two harvests there, sometimes two weeks apart. They now consider Rosette their best plot, but it took almost ten years for them to believe in its potential and vinify it in barrels.

The St-Bris terroir is eroded debris over Portlandian rock. The clay is brown, the soil draining. The Sauvignon blanc plot has a north-west exposure, which lets the Sauvignon ripen slowly and get to optimal aromatic expression. This vineyard had 30% of its vines missing, and replacements were planted over 8 years, with local massale selection and cuttings of Sauvignon Gris from the Loire valley. In Chitry, the clay is also brown, over Kimmeridgian marls, and some silex stones are present.

The de Moor have worked their vines organically since 2005, a rarity in their area. The main improvements in their harvest work has been the transition, in 2002, from a large harvest bin to small boxes where the grapes are not crushed by their own weight. In 2007, they built a large and high-ceilinged winery, which allows them to do all their cellar work by gravity. In 2008, they purchased a second-hand pneumatic press, to treat the grapes in the gentlest way possible. There is no SO₂ used at harvest or during the vinification. Aging is done in burgundian barrels of different ages for the Chablis, and the Bourgogne Chitry. The young vines Aligoté is aged in cement and stainless steel tanks, the VV Aligoté in barrels. The Sauvignon Blanc, which often takes over a year to ferment, is aged in tanks.

There are two bottlings of Chablis: Rosette and Bel Air & Clardy, the last a blend of the two plots. These have none of the "normal" under ripeness, or the gunpowder aromas created by an excess of sulfur. Olivier believes that in another era, Chablis had a buttery and nutty character, like any Chardonnay from low yields and reasonable ripeness. He follows the same reasoning for his Sauvignon de St-Bris, which is ripe and rich. The other cuvées are Bourgogne Aligoté VV, regular Aligoté, Bourgogne Chitry, and two special early cuvées that are done entirely without sulfur, Chablis 'Humeur du Temps' and 'A Ligoter' ("fit to be roped") Aligoté.

Interview

This interview took place through a series of emails in September 2010.

OVERVIEW OF THE ESTATE:

16 harvests

10 parcels

7.1 ha

3 varietals
2 kids
1 cat

How'd you end up as vigneron in Chablis?

Olivier: The randomness of life: a complicated childhood, an unemployed mother and some vines around where I grew up. My only goal as a teenager was get out of there, so I'd spend the weekends in the vines to make some extra pocket money. I studied biology, and hoped my thesis in biochemistry would find me work. Through my studies I found interest in the wine making process, so I guess I got caught up in the game trying to get out of it!

Alice: My grandparents were farmers in the Jura. They had cows and a small amount of vines and the harvest was always a great time of celebration for our family and friends. Those memories really marked my childhood. I decided I wanted to be an oenologist when I was about 15. During my studies, I started to notice that the first thing you needed to make good wine was good grapes and this inspired me to see things from beginning to end, from the vine to the bottle.

What's the work like in the vines?

O: At first you do with what you have. In fact, we still do with what we have. As years go by though you gain more: more tools, more experience, work habits (which aren't necessarily a good thing!) But there's always that need to evolve, the desire and curiosity to see what can be done next.

A: A lot of rigor, high expectations, a serious philosophy in how to work the vines and a lot of risk taking. We try to be clean and pollute the least amount possible.

What do you think of your terroirs?

O: The press has always said we don't have very impressive terroirs. Maybe. In this old vineyard, you'd be going out of your way to try and prove them wrong, and I let them live with their vane, hasty conclusions. As Flaubert says: "To make a mistake is to conclude."

A: I guess some would say you could have better terroirs, that we could have vines that conform to our expectations. But it's all part of being located where we are.

What's the wine making process like?

O: It's as simple as possible. We work rigorously at all times and analyze what we really need to focus on.

A: As simple as possible, as respectful to the grapes as possible and with the least intervention possible. By intervening less in the wine making process, you give the wine more freedom. That freedom makes for unique, expressive wines.

What do you think of the Chablis AOC and your AOC wines?

O: I feel like I am profaning a sanctuary. A sanctuary is a place where you praise those who have lived before you. Our estate and appellation are sanctuaries. The party is over! The past efforts of our grand AOC's lets me analyze what we need to be making from its conception to its finality. As far

as the "typicality " of our wines, typicality is a semantic exercise started in the 80's which found it's way into the dictionary around 1994, so I don't really think in such terms, but I guess we might not quite fit the mold.

A: We built the estate from the get-go by working in a very specific way because: 1) we were too small to to play with the big boys and 2) we wanted to "master" everything, to be responsible for everything, especially our errors and problems. When we realized it was possible to make a living within this margin, we continued and kept pushing things further and further.

We are definitely worried about getting denied by the AOC, but we are too small to represent a true danger to the whole of the appellation. Furthermore, the gestation of the AOC is such a mess that we can always squeak by and have our little place in it. The gamble was to see if we could make a living doing what we were doing which essentially involved doing the exact opposite work of our colleagues. It worked.

We are also extremely honest which is far from the norm in the area. Olivier was recently voted in the syndicate and our contemporaries listen to his ideas. We have established a reputation as serious vigneron in the area, and have made our neighbors rethink what they are doing: these are great victories.

"La marge tient la page" as Jean-Luc Godard would say.

Did you always work organically in the vineyards with minimal intervention in the cellar?

O: No! At first I dreamed about it, but lacked sufficient funds and personal experience. But, as I've stated earlier, my main motivators are the desire to evolve and to respect history.

A: I come from both a scientific and catholic background, and science always trumped the larger than life "stories" of religion for me. I find biodynamic work to be a bit of a stretch. What matters is working cleanly. In our case we progressed into organic agriculture. What we soon realized was that it was necessary to get certified to validate what we were doing. Being certified serves as a safeguard: we can't keep a barrel of non authorized chemicals in the back of the cellar "just in case".

Your wines might be labeled as "natural" wine. How do you feel about that?

O: I still don't know what "natural" wine is. As long as there are no rules or regulations, it cannot be controlled. I do however feel that people who make what is being called "natural" wine are necessary in facing the ever growing industrialization of wine. And because everything has an opposite, excess industrialization has led to excess in the opposite direction. Natural wines are almost Baroque-esque in that they use ancient instruments to make music that might be analyzed as "imperfect"; these ancient instruments bring us closer to its original source but forces us to accept "off" notes. The constraint of choice, accepting one's limits, but in no way filtering to hide something. Baroque was meant to mean an imperfect pearl. And when a pearl is beautiful then it's like the "Girl with a Pearl Earring" by Vermeer.

A: It's been about 8 years since we've been included as part of this movement. There is definitely a "rock and roll" and "rebellious" aspect of our style of winemaking spreading in the press. And it's started to help sales so we see more and more people doing it for purely commercial reasons. In such I think the term "natural" is at a crossroad. I think it's complicated when talking about these wines because people tend to become too demanding of the wines and the people who make them.

But the people who make these wines are generally intelligent, generous□ They are great people that are a pleasure to meet.

On a theoretical level: is tasting a wine the only trustworthy criteria to distinguish how a wine was produced? Is a wine we find "good" good regardless of how it came to be? Do we drink liquid from a bottle just for pleasure? Or are we drinking a story, a person, a memory of a night well spent? Do we drink something because it's fashionable to do so or because we like it? Do we leave room for unbridled creativity with it's obligatory imperfections? Do we create charts and labels that make creativity impossible and lead to misleading the consumer? Can you trust and like all the people that buy and drink our wines?

Ideally, I hope to produce a wine that tells its' own story in function of the year, of how I felt at the time, what I had at my disposition, etc□ Every wine has it's own story. I tell these stories and the people who drink our wines know these stories. It's an "intellectual" way of drinking wine, but it's also fine to drink it for the simple pleasure it brings.

What's it like working together?

O: We've been working together as long as we've been a couple. Working together is a dynamic I enjoy and I've never thought of another way of doing things. Alice does most of the cellar work and I tend to the vines.

A: We had a few work experiences before we were a couple, but since we are together we've worked as a team. Working together brings enthusiasm at first and helps you work faster, but can get rather exhausting.

Olivier has great intellectual capabilities, handles day to day maintenance and likes projecting himself into the future: I let him do all this and try to play devil's advocate by finding counter arguments in order to see things through from both sides.

I mostly take care of the cellar, of expeditions and most of the administrative responsibilities. Olivier takes care of the vineyard and knows what direction he wants the wine to take. All commercial relations are done as a couple.

After 15 years of hard labor, we are in a period of questioning our lives and our work, and there will be change in the future...

Wines



VdF "À Ligoter"

Soil: Kimmeridgian stones on surface, Mother Rock and Clay subsoil.

Grape: Aligoté from a 1 h parcel in Chitry-Le-Fort.

Age of Vines: 17 years old.

Yields: 45hl/h

Altitude: 200m

Vinification: Pneumatic press. Alcoholic and malolactic fermentation in stainless steel. Aged 7 months in stainless steel with no soutirage. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization.



A.O.C Chablis Les Vendangeurs Masqués "A Chablis"

Soil: Rocky Kimmeridgian limestone

Grape: Chardonnay from 2 parcels (0.6 h total) in Courgis.

Age of Vines: 15 years old.

Yields: 40hl/h

Altitude: 200 m

Vinification: 36h débourage. long alcoholic and malolactic fermentation in oak. Aged 11 months in oak. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling.



A.O.C Bourgogne "Réversibilité"

Soil: Kimmeridgian stones on surface, Mother Rock and Clay subsoil.

Grape: Aligoté from part of a 0,2 h parcel in Chitry-Le-Fort

Age of Vines: 17 years old

Altitude: 200m

Yields: 30 hl/h

Vinification: long alcoholic and malolactic fermentation in oak. Aged 11 months in oak. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling.



A.O.C Chablis Les Vendangeurs Masqués "Butteaux"

Soil: Kimmeridgian soil and clay

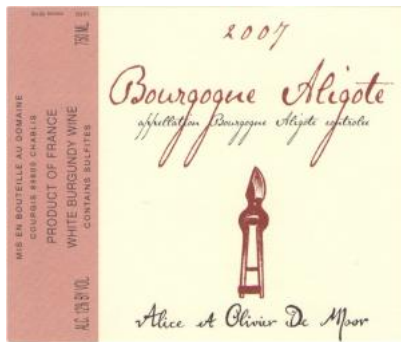
Grape: Chardonnay, from a 0,25 h parcel in Courgis.

Age of the Vines: 15 years.

Altitude: 200m

Yields: 40 hl/h

Vinification: long alcoholic and malolactic fermentation in oak. Aged 12 months in oak. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling.



A.O.C "Bourgogne Aligoté"

Soil: Kimmeridgian stones on surface, Mother Rock and Clay subsoil.

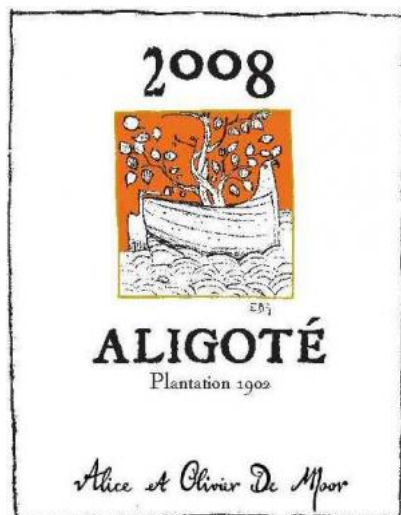
Grape: Aligoté from a 1,3 h parcel in Chitry-Le-Fort.

Age of Vines: 17 years old

Altitude: 200m

Yields: 40 hl/h

Vinification: alcoholic and malolactic fermentation half in tank half in barrel. Aged 11 months in same barrels and tanks without racking. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling.



A.O.C Aligoté "Plantation 1902"

Soil: Kimmeridgian stones on surface, Mother Rock and Clay subsoil.

Grape: 95% Aligoté, 5% Chardonnay on a 0,5 h parcel in St-Bris-le-Vineux planted in 1902.

Age of Vines: 110 years old.

Yields: 22 hl/h

Altitude: 200m

Vinification: long alcoholic and malolactic fermentation in old oak. Aged 12 months in old oak. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling.



A.O.C Chablis "L'Humeur du Temps"

Soil: rocky, Kimmeridgian limestone

Grape: Chardonnay, from a 1 h parcel in Courgis.

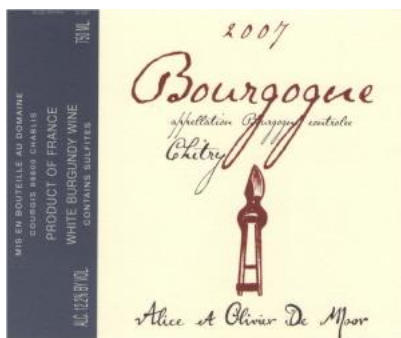
Age of Vines: 15 years old.

Yields: 40 hl/h

Altitude: 200m

Vinification

: long alcoholic and malolactic fermentation in oak. Aged 11 months in oak. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling.



A.O.C Bourgogne "Chitry"

Soil: Kimmeridgian stones on surface, Mother Rock and Clay subsoil.

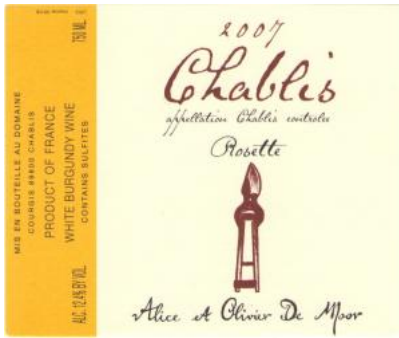
Grape: Chardonnay, from a 1 h parcel in Chitry-Le-Fort

Age of Vines: 17 years old.

Yields: 40 hl/h

Altitude: 200m

Vinification: long alcoholic and malolactic fermentation in old oak barrels. Aged in 11 months in old oak.



A.O.C Chablis "Rosette"

Soil: Kimmeridgian clay and limestone

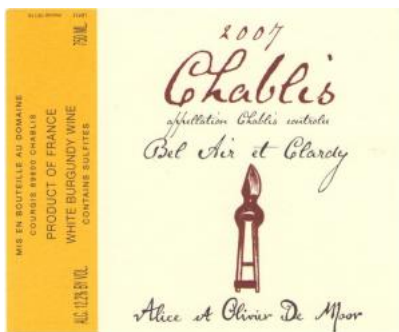
Grape: Chardonnay, from a 1 h parcel in Courgis

Age of Vines: 15 years

Yields: 25hl/h

Altitude: 200m

Vinification: long alcoholic and malolactic fermentation in old oak. Aged 11 months in old oak. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling.



A.O.C Chablis "Bel Air et Clardy"

Soil: very stony and chalky soil

Grape: Chardonnay, from 2 parcels (1 h total) in Courgis

Age of Vines: 15 years old.

Yields: 50 hl/h

Vinification: long alcoholic and malolactic fermentation in old oak. Aged 12 months in old oak. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling. No fining, no filtration or cold stabilization. Slight addition of sulfur dioxide only at the time of bottling.