

Alice et Olivier de Moor

Chablis from Alice and Olivier de Moor.



Alice and Olivier De Moor.

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.

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 while tending 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. The limestone here is rich in shellfish fossils, including oysters (*exogyra virgula*), urchins, bivalves and 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. The plot slopes up to a 40% incline, and the vineyard can roughly be separated in three distinct parts: the very top is eroded materials over hard Portlandian rock; the mid-slope is directly over Kimmeridgian marl, which can quickly suffer from drought. Finally, the the bottom part is rich in dense clay with some limestone, resulting in later ripening. They usually do two harvests there, sometimes two weeks apart. They consider their best plot.

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 it ripen slowly and get to optimal aromatic expression. This vineyard originally 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. In 2002, they stopped using large harvest bins and replaced them with small boxes where the grapes are not crushed by their own weight. In 2007, they built a large and high-ceilinged winery, allowing 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 of Chablis, nor are they marked by the gunpowder aromas created by an excess of sulfur. Olivier believes that in another era, Chablis had a buttery and nutty character similar to 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 *L'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 varieties

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 its 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 its 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...

Visits

This visit with Alice and Olivier de Moor took place in June, 2012.



Words and photos by Jules Dressner.

After our relaxing weekend in Montpinçon, it was a 5 hour drive to Courgis, the small village where [Alice and Olivier De Moor](#) reside. Our visit started in the cellar, which is split two ways between an older, traditional underground room that only holds barrels, and a larger, more modern space with concrete containers, some fiberglass tanks, a lot more barrels and a recently renovated tasting room. We tasted through the 2011's, which were universally great. Stuff of note:

À Ligoter: A little R.S remained this year so they filtered it for the first time ever, just to try and see the results. Also a first, this year the bottle will feature a screw cap; the idea is that the cap will indicate that this early release is a [vin de soif](#), and meant to be drunk fresh and young. It is indeed all those things, and the first shipment will be arriving stateside sometime this month.

L'Humeur du Temps: is a blend of three parcels that are vinified separately then blended: *Côte de l' Etang, Les Envers de Côte Chétif, Les Goulots de Jouan.*

Bel Air et Clardy: As obvious as this may seem to some, the *Bel Air Et Clardy* cuvée is a blend of two separate parcels. From barrel, the *Bel Air* was crisp and precise with a rich finish, while *Clardy* was on the more mineral side, with pronounced acidity. When I asked Olivier why he chose this specific blend, he explained that the parcels are the same age and have complimentary soil types; ideally, he would use this technique make every cuvée (blending a bit of Rosette with the Chitry for example, so on and so forth[]), and that single parcel wines -which A.O.C's like Chablis encourage- don't always make the best ones.

Les Vendangeurs Masqués: this négoce wine is a blend of three sources the De Moor's purchase from, including the local up and comer [Thomas Pico](#). They all work organically.

As we tasted through, Olivier joked that he must be boring us with all (four) of his Aligoté cuvées. I personally love good Aligoté, and am always surprised when I hear of French disdain for grapes or regions that tend to be loved in the US; I couldn't believe how many people told Denyse that [Jean Paul Brun's 2010 L'Ancien](#) showed them that good Beaujolais actually existed at the party in Normandy. Duh! This topic got Olivier talking about Chablis and the myth that Chardonnay has always been the only grape grown here.

"There used to be Chenin Blanc, Dammery (local name for Romorantin), Pinot Gris and there are still some Sacy vines hanging around (Tressaillié in Saint-Pourçain). Gascon was also planted for red. This was only 200 years ago. I try bringing this up at council meetings and people don't believe me, but if you do your homework you can read about this stuff."

The De Moor's also made a red this year! It's called "*Le Rouge D'Etienne*", and is named after their first full time employee; at the time he was hired, Etienne had never made whites and the De Moor's had never made reds, so they helped each other out and therefore the cuvée is named in his honor. The grapes were sourced from [Vincent Thomas](#), and only 800 bottles were produced.

After the tasting, we got to check some vines out. The first stop was the aforementioned *Côte de l'Etang*.



It was very grassy.



This is one of the parcels that they've started using a horse on over the last two years.



Notice how much better of a photographer Olivier is... He is very happy with the results, and can't believe how much stuff the horse has been pulling out of the ground.

"I've been working this soil for 15 years, and when I saw all the stuff I was missing, I told myself I was really doing a terrible job!"

Next we checked out the *Clardy* parcel. It was a good time to compare and contrast Olivier's work with that of his neighbors, which he sadly he considers a "*abandonment of work*" on their part. Here's one of Olivier's vines:



And here's one of his neighbors just a few rows down:



As you can see, they use tons of herbicide, and tightly tie the vines together to ensure as little human interaction as possible. They also trim the shit out of the vines.

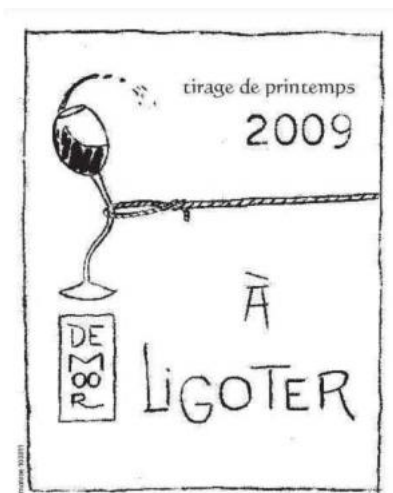
"They look like bonsai trees."

Olivier then explained how 20-30 cm of extra foliage changes everything, because they help the grapes ripen. 8 to 10 leaves above the highest bunches used to be the traditional way of knowing you had the right vine size.

"Slow maturation is what makes good wine here, and you need to do all you can to help this, not impede it."

After the vineyard visit, we hung out for a great dinner Alice cooked up for us, drank some Ganevat bubbles, Heredia Pineau D'Aunis, À Ligoter and Heredia Sparkling Gamay that naturally led to some fun conversation, hearty laughs and- at least in my case- a good buzz.

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.



A.O.C "Bourgogne Aligoté"

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

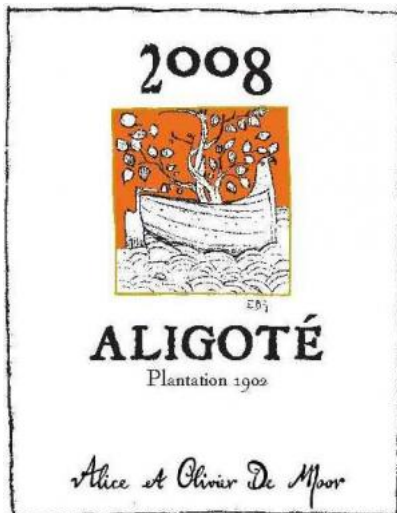
Grape: Aligoté from a 1,3 h parcel in Chitry-Le-Fort.

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.



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.



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

Soil: rocky, Kimmeridgian limestone

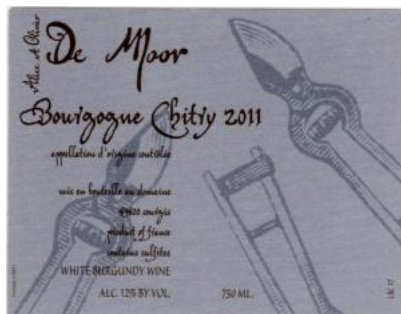
Grape: Chardonnay, from a 1 h parcel in Courgis.

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.

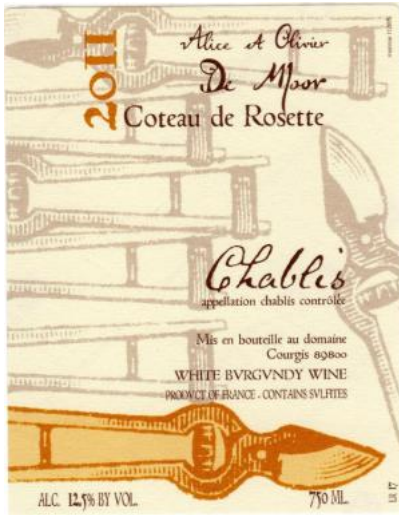
Grape: Chardonnay, from a 1 h parcel in Chitry-Le-Fort

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 "Coteau de Rosette"

Soil: Kimmeridgian clay and limestone

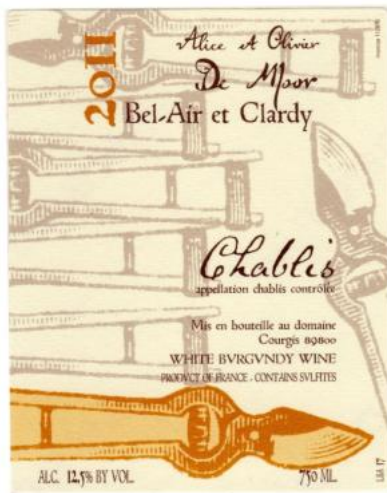
Grape: Chardonnay, from a 1 h parcel in Courgis

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.



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.