

# Alice et Olivier de Moor

## 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 vigneronns 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...