

Yannick Pelletier

Interview

This interview with Yannick Pelletier was conducted through a series of emails in November 2010.

What's new?

I've recently started to work with a half hectare of Mourvèdre on clay and limestone soil since 2009. I also plan to plant 0.7 ha of Grenache Gris and Blanc on schist this winter in hopes of blending it with my Terret Blanc and Gris in hopes of making a more complex white.

How did you end up a vigneron?

When I was in high school, my plans were to start a business selling French products abroad. When I was done with University, I decided to do a formation in the commercialization of wines and spirits. I worked retail for a few years at various shops around Lyon and got the opportunity to work in some vineyards between jobs.

I started to realize how much I enjoyed it, so I took some oenological classes in hopes of eventually starting my own estate. Many internships followed, mostly in conventional agriculture at first, and I eventually started working for Leon Barral, where I started to feel a true understanding of the vineyard and wine. I then worked another year at a small estate in Faugères before starting my own operation in 2004.

What is the work process like with the vines? What do you think of your terroirs?

I don't have a "process" other than working well and favoring the life of the ground and the plants. The terroir in itself is great; the schists are fantastic. The climate however, is quite challenging: scorching sun, wind, and in some years violent rain or heat waves. Not to mention the terroirs are tainted from many years of brutal mechanical work, chemicals and the plantation of "vine on vine", in other words not giving the ground time to rest and replenish itself.

The judicial term for an estate is an "agriculture exploitation". Usually, when you exploit something, you use it without caring for it or respecting it, and inevitably what you are exploiting ends up suffering in the process. Such is the human condition. Still, I'm working hard in order to restore the terroirs to where I want them to be.

What about the winemaking process?

Sorry, but I don't have a vinification process either. Whole cluster or de-stemmed, pigeages or remontages, maceration time: their are no rules, just instinct. I function heavily on instinct and taste, from choosing when to harvest right down to bottling. I make wines with the grapes, terroirs and the weather of that year. I think they've greatly progressed in nuance and complexity since I started in 2004. Of course I hope to perfect them even more in time. For example a current focus would be more finesse in tannic structure.

How do you feel about you AOC, and more specifically your wines in regards to the "typicality" of your region?

My AOC is a "political appellation" because the many terroirs are heterogeneous and have nothing to do with one another. Of course I feel my wines are "typical" of their terroirs because I do everything I can to respect them.

Have you always worked organically or biodynamically in the vineyard and with the least amount of intervention in the cellar? If yes, then why and if no, what made you change your mind?

During my many internships, I often worked in a "chemical" or "technological" manner and found no real worth or pleasure in it. When I started working for Barral I started to gain an understanding of how soils and terroirs worked, of the complete process of winemaking, from the vine to to the bottle. It just so happened that Barral worked this way and in turn I began working organically myself.

What's your take on the "natural" wine debate?

These days, everyone is making organic or biodynamic wine, "natural" wine that is also "environmentally friendly". Wine should distinguish itself by its' own merit. Certifications can't do anything and do not exist for "natural" wine.

My goal is to make a wine that lets the drinker experience his own senses, to ask themselves what they are drinking, why they like it and to want to come back to it. If they get that far, only then should you explain to them why and how wines like these are made.

What wines do you enjoy drinking besides your own?

Jura and Beaujolais.