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Jefford on Monday: Gorgeous Viscera



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jeffordonmonday

I live in the Languedoc, but I try not to write about it too often: I don't want to bore you all. It's been just six weeks since the last home post, but a vertical tasting has left me enraptured, and I can't contain myself. Sorry.

Photo credit: Georges Souche – La Pèira benchlands

I'm not suggesting, of course, that these are 'the greatest wines in the Languedoc'. Statements of that sort are absurd even in long-established regions like Bordeaux or Burgundy, but they would be doubly absurd here, where much evolution lies ahead. What I can say is this. Every time I get a chance to taste these wines, they bring me uncommon pleasure. They are concentrated, perfumed, fleshy, heady, allusive and beguiling. Every bottle is drained to the last drop. As I polish the glasses afterwards, I begin looking forward to the next time.

They could be the work of a genius – except that it's hard to work out who the genius might be. Rob Dougan, the elusive London-based Australian songwriter who made this domain happen with his French-Chinese wine Karine (a London media lawyer), is one possibility – but Rob claims that he doesn't even turn up for harvest any more ("that's bad, isn't it?").

It could be Jérémie Depierre, the hugely talented young man who oversees all the vineyard work, makes the wines, and lives nearby; it might also be consultant Claude Gros, obviously a wise owl. And we shouldn't rule out the Genius Loci, of course. Something hereabouts, in the benchlands of Terrasses du Larzac, works very well indeed. My last visit came after two days of huge rain, but there wasn't a drop of standing water to be seen: the deep glacial rubble had swallowed, and digested, the lot. It's stony, but not austere; it's bright but ventilated. For the Languedoc, it feels almost Médoc-like.

The initial land was purchased back in 2004; 2005 was the first vintage. There are only 12.5 planted ha even today, but those plots produce four red wines and a white, too. The domain itself, and the grand vin, is called La Pèira (or La Pèira en la Damaisèla in full; it's mainly low-yielding Syrah with some old-vine Grenache from the domain's best plot); there's around 4,000 bottles of that. The second wine is Las Flors (8,000 to 9,000 bottles; Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre and Cinsault); then there is double the quantity again of Les Obriers, a simpler Cinsault-Carignan blend. Matissat is a pure old-vine Mourvèdre; it was meant to be blended into La Pèira from 2007, but Jérémie and Claude decided that it didn't fit, since when it has been bottled in splendid isolation (there are less than 1,000 of them). The exotic white – Roussanne, Viognier and a dash of Marsanne, though Grenache Blanc and Clairette have just been planted – is called Deusyls; there are 1,600 bottles or so.

I tasted La Pèira 2005 to 2010, and Matissat 2007 to 2010. These wines are expensive (€63

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per bottle for La Pèira, and £50 for Matissat, from Berry Bros), but worth it for anyone whose circumstances allow purchases of that sort. The decent Les Obriers is £15.95 from the same source, but I would rather save up and have one bottle of the indecent La Pèira than four of Les Obriers. Las Flors at £27 is perhaps the canniest buy: La Pèira writ small. (That's still large.)

I don't suppose they'll ever make another wine like the 2005 La Pèira (for which yields were a barely sane 9 hl/ha): this Gargantua of the Languedoc remains rich, mouth-coating, essence-like, profound, and good for a half-century of ageing. If you have any of the 2006 La Pèira — lucky you. In aesthetic terms, I think this is the most beautiful of all so far; more Venus de Milo than Gargantua. Milky, gentle, graceful, poised and Pomerol-like, with perfectly judged black-fruit ripeness and svelte, sumptuous tannins.

The 2007 is the Grange of the set: a multi-layered, exotic cocktail of everything you might want a wine from hereabouts to be, with cascading texture and depth. Just as good, for me, is the 2008: less evident extravagance than in the 2007, but more elemental complexity, as elderberries take over from plums, leather and meat qualifies the fruit, and the finish grows stonier. I once called La Pèira a liqueur of the garrigue, and the 2009 seems to summarise that deep-drizzled ripeness, perfume and incipient sweetness. The 2010 looks like another monument-in-waiting: peacock-like in terms of its aromatic allusions (plant essences, crushed roots and pounded stones). It's hard to believe that this powerful and searching wine contains no Mourvèdre.

The 2007 pure-Mourvèdre Matissat was the greatest of its own short flight: perhaps the most engagingly baroque example of this variety I have ever tasted (blackberries, mushrooms, blood, white truffle and viscera: gorgeous), and another wine that seems unlikely to die before I do. The 2008 is (like the La Pèira of that year) a much tighter, more gathered wine, with shattering concentration, Valrhona acidity, a herbal macerate. The 2009 transforms that black chocolate into gratifyingly milky milk chocolate, softens the tannins and adds a spoonful of liquorice essence. The 2010 seemed primitive and adolescent at this stage, and still trying to resolve its personality, but full of the thorny, thrumming blackberry this variety surrenders hereabouts.

Are these wines an indication of what the Languedoc might one day give us in quantity? Here's hoping.

Written by Andrew Jefford

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