

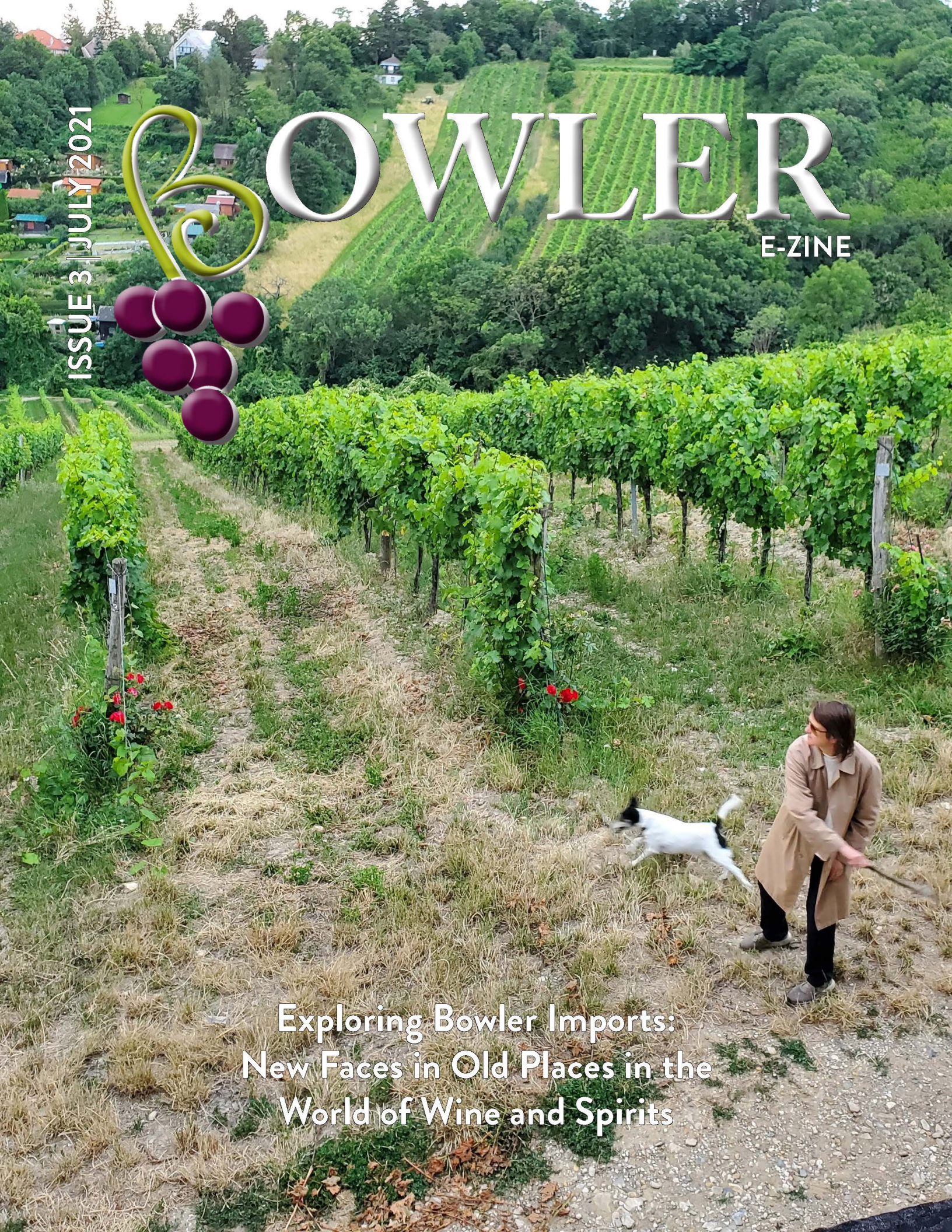
ISSUE 3 | JULY 2021



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# WELCOME

Every two years or so, someone comes around with a new idea to shake up, or in current parlance, to disrupt, the status quo, with promises of a new way of selling wine that will fundamentally change our lives by making access to your favorite wines easier and cheaper--often with delivery included. These people and ideas come and go every few years. "Take out the middlemen!". Of course often what they mean is, "I'll be your middleman --just a little cheaper because of my special algorithm".

Admittedly sometimes these disruptors have ideas that contain some value, like some of the direct-to-consumer models I've seen, and selling wine over the internet can be convenient. And yet, despite the infusion of money and promises of a better, cheaper, algorithmic wine future, our system of importation and distribution continues to be a valid and important model--supported by consumers. Why?

The wine industry and wine culture in America maintain their vitality because they are not controlled completely by large corporations. The state-by-state regulations against monopolistic practices set up shortly after prohibition protect smaller companies like Bowler and many others who work hard to find and bring to the market wines which would otherwise not be available, like a **small grappa producer from Piedmont, a tiny new family-run estate in Saint Amour or a two-man New Zealand start-up** with limited production working biodynamically.

There are so many new and exciting wines from familiar and unfamiliar regions to learn about, that it takes time, dedication to your craft and a good palate to make sense of it all. In other words, it takes a good importer--and a solid distribution system--to support these new wineries and distilleries. Because of our work, as well as that of other quality importers like us, the market now offers both the experi-



enced wine lover and the casual wine drinker a range of wines and styles, the likes of which I have never witnessed in my 29 years in the business. This is a good thing and should be supported, not eliminated. So join us in celebrating the work and experience of the Bowler team while you enjoy this, our third Bowler E-Zine.

- David and Gab Bowler



# SPIRITS EXPLORATION



## Sipping on the History and Production of Grappa

by Rick Long *Spirits Portfolio Manager*

*I will never forget the first time I met my father-in-law, Dr. Galeota. Eager to make a good impression, I gifted him with a stunning grappa housed in a hand-blown glass bottle. He demanded to know what I had paid for it and after hearing the price he couldn't stop laughing. He mused, "After we sold all the wine we made during the depression in West Buffalo, all we could afford to drink was the grappa we made from all the stems and leaves." My my, how far grappa has come.*

*Grappa's gentrification from a regional poor man's drink to sophisticated after dinner drink on menus all over the world was not realized until Italy's post war economic boom. Furthermore, it was not until the 1960s that they started producing single variety grappa from fresh pomace; a big departure from grappa distillers with traveling stills, making grappa from mixed winery leftovers.*

*Grappa's origin stems back to the eighth century in the Middle East. This accounts for an eight hundred year head start prior to the advent of grain mash distillates in the 16th century. The Moors spread grappa through Europe, bringing their distilling techniques to the Solerno Benedictine monks who used grappa to preserve their medicinal herbs. There is written evidence dating back to the 14th century, which traces Italian grappa's origin to the foothills of*



*Mount Grappa in the northern Alps, Trentino-Alto Adige, and Valle D'Aosta.*

*Very popular with workers, grappa became part of an everyday diet, providing extra calories and keeping field hands warm during the winter months. The growing popularity of the spirit led it to be licensed and taxed by the end of the 15th century. It was not until the late 18th century that Italy's oldest official grappa maker set up their grappateria in 1779, trading under the name Bassano del Grappa.*

*Grappa is made by distilling the skins, pulp, seeds, and stems of the leftover pomace from winemaking after pressing the grapes. The flavor of grappa, like that of wine, depends on the type and quality of the raw materials used, as well as the hand of the maker and the distillation process.*

*The spirit takes its name from the Latin word "grappapolis," which means "bunch of grapes." Grappa is a protected name in the European Union\* and to be classified as Italian grappa, rules must be met and standard practices followed.*

*Grappa must be produced in Italy, the Italian part of Switzerland, or in San Marino. The spirit must be distilled between 35-60 percent alcohol by volume and must be produced from pomace, meaning that the direct fermentation of grape juice is not allowed. The first fermentation and distillation must occur on solids with no water added. This is usually done by steam distillation, so as not to burn the pomace. The stems and seeds are co-fermented with the sugar-rich juice, which produces a small amount of methanol. Due to the fact that the methanol must be carefully removed during distillation, Italian law requires winemakers to sell their pomace to grappa makers.*

*The law has significantly cut down on grappa moonshiners.*

*This brings us to Grappa Castelli. Bowler is very proud to offer these single variety grappas from a family owned and operated, small-production distillery in Piedmont.*



**Distilleria Castelli - Piedmont, Italy**  
Luigina, Cristina, Alberto, Sergio

*\*The use of the word grappa in the United States is still allowed and falls under the Class definition of brandy.*



In 1963, Giuseppe Castelli bought the ancient Eugenio Levi distillery. Hailing from Campodolcino, the renowned Levi family had been dedicated to distillation dating back to the year 1700.



The Castellis were able to renew the existing equipment at Eugenio Levi and the distillery was put back into operation under the Castelli name in 1967. Castelli grappa is now produced by the third generation of the Castelli family. Proud to be a small firm, the whole family follows this tradition with devotion and passion.



Sergio Castelli and his wife Luigina Bo oversee every aspect of production with their son Alberto and daughter Cristina each playing important roles. Luigina makes all the decisions on what pomace is chosen and which distillate is preserved for aging and bottling. All of the

distillery's pomace is sourced from local wineries with whom they have long standing relationships, with many of their producers farming their vines organically.

The fresh pomace is transported to the distillery in small containers and aged in an oxygen-free environment; they store the pomace in compartments made from wood, braced with sand under a layer of plastic tarps that are replaced every year. The sand is used to keep the plastic adhered to the pomace, creating a vacuum and keeping it oxygen free for a minimum of six months. This special aging process helps to deepen the flavor and structure of the finished grappa.

Once the pomace is ready, with steam from their column still, they can distill 1000 liters of alcohol to 80% ABV in a 24 hour period. The grappa then rests for a minimum of two years in stainless steel tanks before bottling decisions are made.





# Distilleria Castelli

Grappa dalle Langhe dal 1963



**Grappa Arneis**  
(6/750ml)

100% Arneis from the Roero, grown in marl and sandstone soils from the Pliocene era. 40% abv. Aged for two years in stainless steel.

**Grappa Barolo**  
(6/750ml)

100% Nebbiolo from Barolo and Monforte d'Alba. 43% ABV. Aged for five to six years in stainless steel.



**Grappa Barolina**  
(6/750ml)

100% Nebbiolo from Barolo and Monforte d'Alba. 50% ABV. Aged for six years in stainless steel.

**Grappa Nebbiolina**  
(6/750ml)

100% Nebbiolo from Roero and Langhe. 45% ABV. Flavored with an infusion of apricot wood for two to three months, then aged for four to five years in stainless steel.





# UP AND COMING



## Amélie and Charles Sparr: Looking Forward in Alsace

### An Interview with David Bowler

by Michele Peters *French Portfolio Manager*

**Michele Peters:** How did you hear about Amélie and Charles Sparr?

**David Bowler:** They were looking for distribution for their small domaine and I got an e-mail from Charles. When he mentioned where they were located, near Colmar, and which Grand Cru vineyards they worked with, it immediately piqued my interest. When I started learning about wine and Alsatian wine, those were some of the top vineyards that I weaned my palate on.

**MP:** So it was the specific vineyards that caught your interest?

**DB:** Yeah - Brand, Hengst, and Mambourg are located there and they were made famous by

Zind-Humbrecht and others... And Colmar, it's one of the best places in all of Alsace. Look, Alsace suffers from too many Grand Cru. But these are some of the most deserving of Grand Cru status. Amélie and Charles Sparr own a small domaine, twenty hectares; it's a young couple; it's their fourth vintage; they seem forward-thinking. Everything about it looked good. But you know me, I wanted a good Pinot Blanc. That's my test for a good Alsatian producer. I love Pinot Blanc! And I prefer the drier style to the sweeter style.

**MP:** For me, what is interesting, and this is one of the things that has always impressed me about you, you have an incredibly open



mind, whether it's a winery or an individual. We are all busy. We have a lot on our plates. But you always are open, whether it's for an informational interview or a new winery. You are very good at looking at everything.

**DB:** Thank you. I learned that from Willy Abramsky...at Crossroads. When I was working there, I said to him, "Willy, why do you see all of these different sales people all day? He said, "You never know, I may miss something!" I thought it was good advice and I've carried it with me. You never know. Something out of the blue, suddenly does well. It's happened to us with both people and wineries!

...you need to look at everyone as an individual and assess quickly whether or not there is something to offer. This was easy, with the Grand Cru that they have, it was interesting...as long as they don't screw it up...

**MP:** You've always loved Alsace even though it's not very popular right now.

**DB:** There has been a confusion, or a perception issue...there are a variety of styles in Alsace, like in Germany, and it has not done the region a service in terms of acceptance into the US market. We like things black or white. We like to know whether wines are going to be dry or sweet. And let's face it, sweet wines have not enjoyed a renaissance of any type. Germany has gone all dry and that has been challenging, but dry German wines sell. Austria is a good example - there is no confusion in the style there. These are dry wines and they have a grape that Austria is associated with, even though you and I may prefer Riesling over Grüner, but it has an identity. The first problem with Alsace is that people think that the wines are sweet and German!! Alsace is French! Yes all of the city





names and the vineyards sound German... yes. (laughter) The people are French, but the geography somehow stayed germanic. Throw that into the mix and you've got a recipe for "slow to market." So what! What do we care? We just like the wines, right? I do prefer the drier style. Especially for Pinot Blanc, maybe not bone dry. I like richness. These wines have some richness, but remain dry in style.

**MP:** So does this mean that the Sparr Pinot Blanc passed your test?

**DB:** Yeah! They don't make a lot though.

**MP:** Can you talk about the Sparr style? It checked all the boxes on paper, what was your experience when you tasted?

**DB:** They do have some cuvées that have a little RS in them from what I recall, but generally they are in the dry style. But look,



Gewurztraminer should have a little RS or a sense of sweetness to it. And Pinot Gris also. You can have a totally dry Gewurztraminer, it is true, but Pinot Gris and Gewurz will take a little sweetness and richness. But Riesling, I like them in the drier style. They also make a Muscat which was interesting to me. The orange wine is Gewurz right?

**MP:** Yes, it is mostly Gewurz blended with, well, a different blend each vintage. The 2019 was blended with Muscat and the 2020 was blended with Pinot Gris. Each vintage is from a different grand cru site.

**DB:** These are vanguard wines from the region. This is a couple that is savvy. They have tasted wines from outside of their own backyard and they seem to know about the wider world of wine. And that's also interesting to us. When we come across a young couple that is willing to experiment because

they have traveled and tasted elsewhere and they bring that experience back to their own domaine, that's always interesting and you see that a lot with this generation of winemakers.

**MP:** Yes, for sure.

**DB:** And they are dedicated to biodynamics. That's almost a given now when we look at wineries. Of course they are biodynamic or at least organic, but it's still a small percentage of the world; but it's important to us.

**MP:** Where do you see these wines fitting? Do you think these will be interesting to people who are looking for traditional Alsace or will people be more interested in the Sparr's interpretation of Alsace?

**DB:** We have dealt with this before. Are you selling the place? Are you selling Vosne Romanée, or are you selling the grower? Sometimes you're doing both. I think the hook is, first and foremost, the wines themselves. Secondly, we are promoting *them*, Amélie and Charles, and the work they are doing. It doesn't matter where the wine comes from if it's interesting. Well of course it matters, but when the wine is in the glass, what matters is that the wine speaks of something

greater... not some bland wine that could be from anywhere. Yes, they are from Alsace, they show their terroir. They are thoughtful growers. It's about them, the style of wine they are making, and then that they are from Alsace.

**MP:** Yes - they are distinctly Alsace, except maybe the orange wine.

**DB:** Yeah... you could start with the fact that they are from outside of Colmar, the heart of the best terroir in Alsace...the fact that they are making Brand and Hengst. They are not some experimental couple with low-end terroir. They are experimental with *GREAT* terroir. It reminds me of Charles Lachaux in Vosne --who is a friend of theirs, by the way....

**MP:** Yes - a new interpretation, a new voice.

**DB:** And you know me - I don't like to get stuck on anything! I want my palate to be challenged. Otherwise things get boring. I like to be challenged... with wine... people... situations... music.

**MP:** It's part of your open mind!

**DB:** I'd rather look forward than backward!





**Winemakers:** Amélie and Charles Sparr (owners)

**Founded:**

- 2013 (sold fruit to négociants)
- First bottled vintage: 2017

**Farming:**

- Certified organic and practicing biodynamic.
- Work with high training for more leaves, more photosynthesis, more energy for the vines.
- Use plant infusions, such as nettle, chamomile, dandelion, and horsetail, for treatments. Use copper and sulfur as needed.

**Holdings:**

- 20 hectares, of which, eight are Grand Cru (Sporen, Hengst, Mambourg, Altenbourg, Brand).
- 20% each Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer. 15% each Pinot Blanc and Pinot Noir. The balance is Muscat and Pinot Auxerrois.

**Cellar:**

- Work with whole clusters and use a slow and gentle press.
- Fermentations happen spontaneously, without any added yeasts.
- Aged on the fine lees for eight to ten months.
- Rieslings are made in stainless steel and everything else is fermented and aged in Stockinger oak barrels (225L and 600L).

**Style:**

- Very fresh and lively with a panoply of citrus and pit fruits. Intense minerality and dry.

**Wines available in the US:**

“Cérisier en Fleur” Vin de France NV

“Liberté Mambourg” Orange Vin de France 2019

Pinot Blanc “Pensée” 2018

Pinot Noir “Jardin d’Eden” 2018

Riesling “Sentiment” 2017

Riesling Brand Grand Cru “Légende” 2017





# A CLOSER LOOK



## Saint-Amour from Top to Bottom with Gregory Barbet

by Matthew Christoff Westchester Sales Representative

*We were somewhere around Saint-Amour on the edge of the Mâcon when the Gamay began to take hold...*

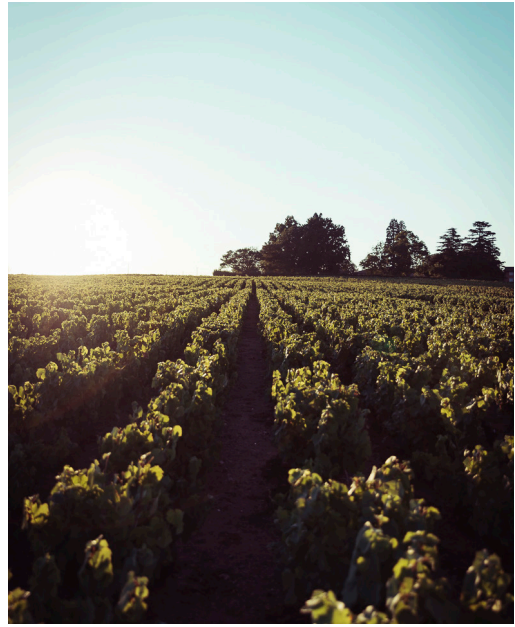
In December of 2020, at the end of an utterly bananas year, it had been years since the Gamay vines of Beaujolais enjoyed a real winter slumber. The overworked, sleep-deprived vines throughout Burgundy's southernmost region finally fell into a proper state of dormancy during a cold snap between January and mid-February of 2021, which ended up becoming one of its coldest winters of the last decade in Saint-Amour.

As the vines indulged in some much needed rest in the village of Saint-Amour, Gregory Barbet spent countless days and nights like most of us, perpetually pent-up in his home. Gregory's home happens to be Domaine de la Pirolette, at the top of a hill in Saint Amour, which overlooks the surrounding hillsides. While I spent my New York winter eagerly awaiting the onset of spring, Gregory, like so many vine growers throughout Europe, could not help but feel an all too familiar anxiety about the coming of bud break, and the frosts that might potentially follow.

On March 22, 2021, Gregory was kind enough to spend some time with me on Zoom to dive into his expertise on Beaujolais and his home of Saint-Amour.



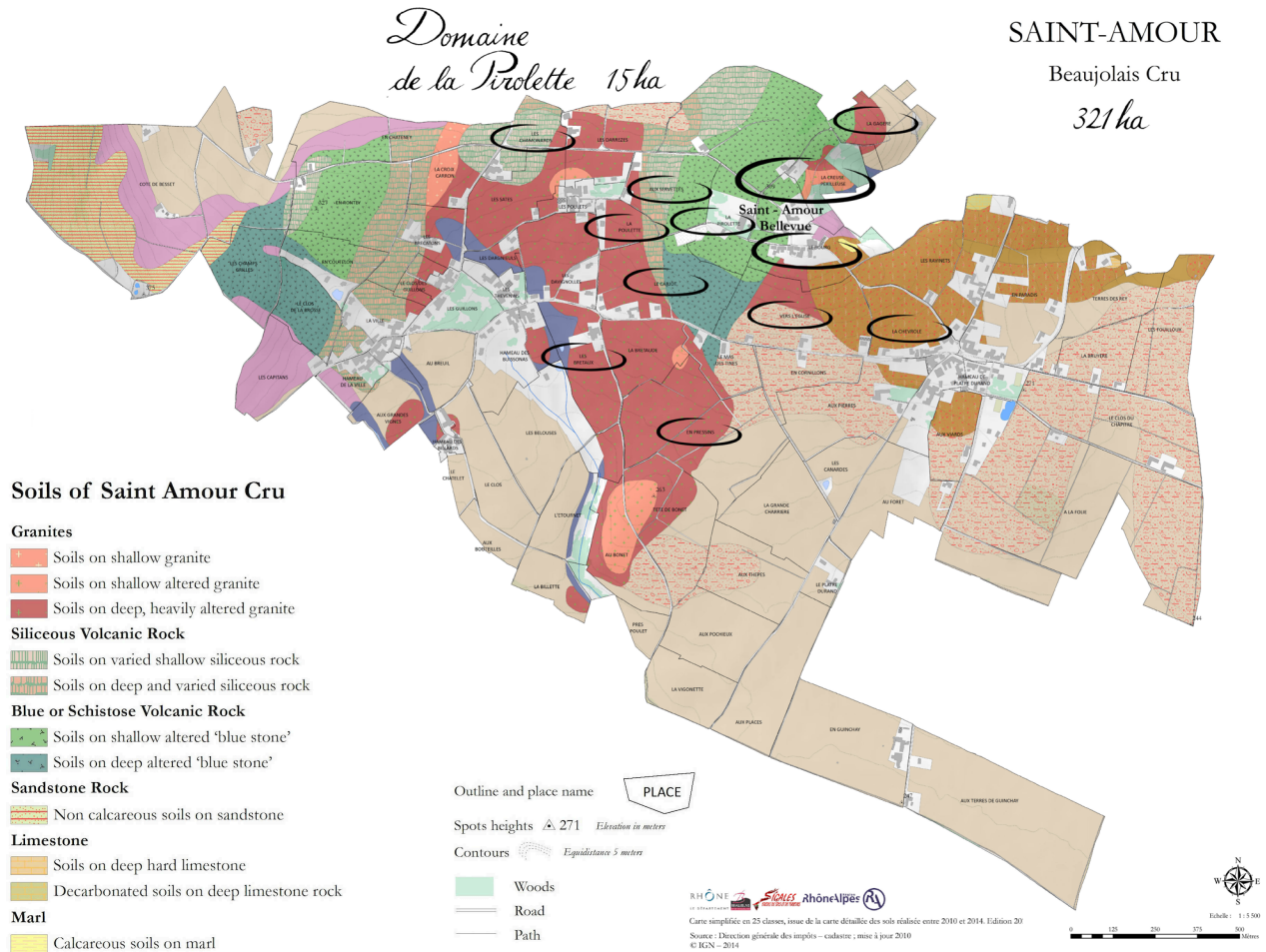
The Barbet family has a long history of wine production in the region, with familial ties to the founding of Maison Jean Loron in 1711, before the French Revolution. Françoise Barbet, spouse of Jean Barbet, was the daughter of Jean Loron. Loron is a négociant and they own various estates throughout Beaujolais' northern Crus and southern reaches. Each winery owned by Loron is run independently and they make very traditional Beaujolais. Jean Barbet (the name has been passed from generation to generation) worked



with Jules Chauvet in the 1950's and 60's to study the alcoholic and malolactic metabolism of fermentation, carbonic maceration and making wine without sulfur; Jean Barbet used to say, '*Jules est ma science et ma conscience*' because he was extremely knowledgeable and wanted to produce pure wines reflecting their specific terroir.

With such a breadth of experience across the region, it was interesting to hear from Gregory that no village may be more deserving of a closer look than Saint-Amour. While it is one of the smallest Crus at only 320 hectares—compared to Morgon and Brouilly for example, which are planted to 1,100 and 1,300 hectares respectively—Saint-Amour has all of the soils you can find in Beaujolais. Gregory explains, “it is difficult to characterize ‘what is Saint-Amour?’ because, depending upon the area...you can produce different types of Saint-Amour, but, globally speaking, it is fruity and spicy.”

As compared to Loron's historic Saint-Amour estate, Domaine des Billards (located at the bottom of Saint-Amour and planted on erosion-based soils), Domaine de la Pirolette is located at the top of the hill and its vineyards surround the winery, from the top to the middle of the slope, showcasing three different terroirs: pink granite (fruity, floral, elegant), blue volcanic soil (structure, power), and clay with flint (peppery fruit). It should also be noted that Pirolette is a passion project that stands apart from the Loron family of wines. After all, Gregory was



shopping for a home, not a winery, when he came upon the estate that would become Domaine de la Pirolette.

Because Saint Amour’s soils are so diverse, Pirolette produces two single vineyard bottlings each of which capture a specific terroir of Saint Amour: “La Poulette” and “Carjot.” “La Poulette” is planted on pink granite and produces an elegant, floral wine with a lot of energy. The “Carjot” vines are planted on blue volcanic soils and create a more powerful, dark-fruited wine. Only 2,400 bottles of each are made per vintage.

In the cellar, all wines are vinified in cement for a 20 day fermentation (give or take, depending upon the vintage), with a gentle extraction through the use of a wood “grille” (think French press coffee), with a mix of whole bunches and destemmed grapes. As a way to reflect and enhance the elegant, delicate terroir of “La Poulette,” cement eggs are utilized



for aging, producing fruity, flowery, energetic characteristics in the glass. For “Carjot,” the fruit is vinified half in barrel and half in cement egg, allowing the power of the blue volcanic terroir to soften in barrel, while retaining its black-fruited backbone and purity in the cement. Thanks to the limited volume of production, the single vineyards are aged longer than the village cuvée. The village cuvée is bottled the summer following the harvest. “La Poulette” and “Carjot” are aged for an additional three months and bottled in November.

What does all of this add up to? Well, Gregory jokingly says with a smile, “within the next decade, my dream is to become the Château Thivin of Saint-Amour.” His admiration of the legendary estate is later expanded upon, stating that he loves the Thivan’s focus on their terroir, the classic style of winemaking, and their overall philosophy. This is a brand of confidence I



can get behind, though I feel that what Gregory seeks with this project is actually much simpler than Beaujolais fame and glory. As our conversation came to a close, the essence of the region, the estate, and the individual came into view, as Gregory closes, “I live in Saint-Amour and the lifestyle is great. We have three restaurants and a lot of diversity in the population. Though it is a small village, it is a great way of life.” When I say to him, “I cannot wait to come back,” I really mean it, because, while I’m New York born and bred, Beaujolais always feels like home.

*At the time of writing, there remains more than a dozen available cases each of “La Poulette” and “Carjot” 2016, which is a wonderful, bright, balanced vintage. The 2018 village cuvée is also available and it is the kind of juicy, fun vintage I want to be drinking right now, showing density and ripeness, without losing lift.*



# HOW TO



## Moselland: Behind the Bunny

by Evan Spingarn *German and Special European Selections Portfolio Manager*

Driving north on the winding L47 along the Mosel river in southwestern Germany, you will pass mile after mile of colossally steep vineyards bristling with Riesling vines. Inarguably Germany's most picturesque landscape, the Mosel is punctuated by a series of villages whose timbered, slate-roofed houses nestle in clusters along the riverbank. The heart of the country is an area of twists and curves just a few miles long known as the Middle Mosel, wherein lies the town of Bernkastel (pop. 6,675) home to the legendary Bernkasteler Doctor vineyard. Inhabited by humans for over 3,000 years and a documented wine center since at least the 12th century, this charming riverside jumble of hotels, restaurants, medieval churches and outdoor markets is a place largely untouched by modernity. Yet just at the edge of town, barely a half mile from the village center, is a building whose sight from the road brings the storybook reverie to a stop. A massive white box with horizontal windows, surrounded by a parking lot planted with international flags, it looks a bit like an airport Sheraton laid on its side. Twice as long and constantly thrumming with activity is an adjacent 50,000 square foot cinder block trucking garage, filled with green eighteen-wheelers coming and going via a two-lane blacktop that subsequently feeds them onto the autobahn and out to the larger world. This impressive industrial complex houses offices, laboratories, factory space, and the machinery of a global agri-business that constitutes the largest and most technologically



advanced winemaking co-op in all of Germany. Its name is Moselland.

If you sell inexpensive German wine in quantity — at a supermarket, a retail chain, or a group of fast-casual restaurants, for example—



chances are you're already in business with Moselland, whether you know it or not. Many popular brands sold in America start their life there, contracted annually by importers who need decent wine with predictable character at VERY low prices. If there's a kitty cat, a polka dot, a big letter X, or a short, pithy name on your Riesling and you're charging your customer under \$12 for it, odds are it was produced at Moselland.

Why? For the same reason that you can't get Napa Valley Cab under \$20 anymore unless it's made at a co-op or shared bottling facility. In Napa it's just too expensive to own land, buy fruit, and make wine without charging a fortune for it. In the Mosel, the problem is mainly geographical; the same steepness that makes the vineyards so magnificent also makes them notoriously expensive to work. Tractors can't make it up the hills and harvesting requires multiple passes by experienced, specialized pickers. Furthermore, the low prices the global market will bear for most Rieslings will not allow growers to make a decent living. That is why many vineyard sites are being abandoned these days in the steepest areas, especially the northern slopes approaching Koblenz. It is a cultural loss as well as an economic one.

That is where a company like Moselland can step in and make a difference. As a large co-op that buys fruit from multiple farmers, Moselland can afford to produce wines that economies of scale make profitable. Because they set minimum runs for their buyers (mostly national importers), they are guaranteed a certain amount of capital to keep things moving smoothly. Also, they work mainly in large tanks with mechanized and systematized controls over the entire process, which keeps costs and risks to a minimum. Riesling is a grape that responds well to temperature-controlled vinification in steel with minimal "winemaking" like oak-aging or long macerations. Even very fine wine can be made this way.

I visited Moselland for the first time in May of 2018 in hopes of “finding” (i.e., contracting) a wine which suited my needs as a German importer with an increasing national audience. I went with Willie Gluckstern, a.k.a. the Wine Avenger, our “man on the ground” for sourcing inexpensive wines in Europe; (and the Svengali who introduced me to German wine almost three decades ago). His fantasy was to create a wine that Bowler would import that he could call “Dr. G,” an arch riff on a wildly successful sweet Riesling brand already made in the Middle Mosel. The difference was, where that wine was made in tens of thousands of cases at 40g/l residual sugar, this wine would be small production and dry—a modern take on an “Intro Riesling 101” that would actually elevate the category with its stylishness and quality. It had to be Mosel, it had to be dry, and it had to be under \$10. Therefore, it had to be

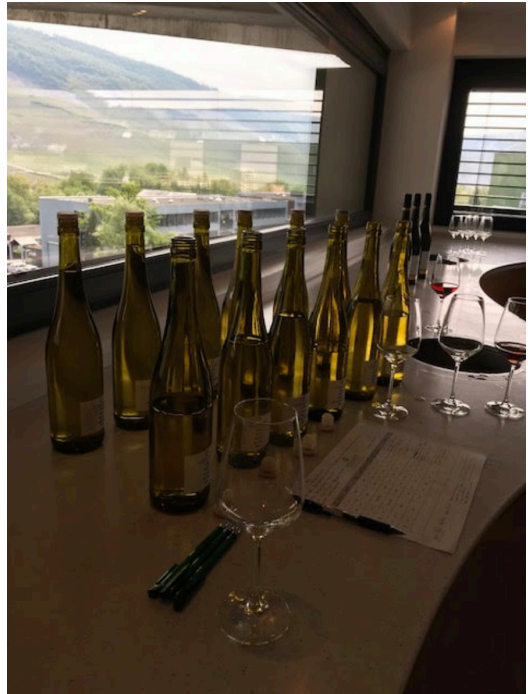


Moselland.

I found our visit to the sideways Sheraton disorienting but also somehow exhilarating. Coming from a “fine wine” background, I have spent my fair share of time in small, dark cellars with rows of oak barrels and dirt on the ground, chatting with winemakers about yeasts and local politics. This was a completely different scenario. Upon our arrival in the early morning, we were met in the lobby of the building by a greeter who took us upstairs to where we would conduct our tasting. Our route led us past gargantuan steel tanks in regimented rows, then through a huge central space filled with conveyor belts, bottling machines, tanks, tubes, and metal catwalks, noisily humming with activity. The sheer scale and complexity of it was flabbergasting. It reminded me of the final scene in *The Terminator* when Sarah Connor is being chased by Arnold Schwarzenegger’s murderous endoskeleton through a giant factory filled with robotic industrial machines. This didn’t look like winemaking; it looked like a Japanese car factory. Cool as hell though. Three million cases a year are made at Moselland, and this is the only way that kind of production happens.



Upstairs we met Michael Probst, Moselland’s Export Director, and truly one of the most professional, likeable, knowledgeable men I have ever met in the wine business. In a spacious tasting room with picture windows overlooking the river we found a table set with about a dozen samples of wine in small clear glass bottles, coded with numbers and letters. The numbers were quickly recognizable: they were acid and sugar levels. Each wine had been prepared for us by the master blender in a graduated range of styles, from bone-dry to the top end of *trocken* at 9g/l RS (Residual Sugar). The wines were also grouped by “terroir” if one can refer to it that way in this situation: one set of wines was from the flatlands of the Mosel and the other came from the *steillagen* or steep slopes. Flatland fruit is lower in acidity and quality, and consequently less expensive. I knew where my interest lay, but it was a good exercise to compare them.



We chatted while we tasted and Michael taught me a bit about his business while I described more specifically what I was hoping for in “Dr. G.” I looked for what I always do in white wine: compelling aromas, pleasing flavors, keen balance, and a long, clean finish. We pushed aside a few wines that did not provide these – and thereby eliminated all but one of the flatland samples and cut the steep slope wines down to three. Then we tasted again. One wine was clearly deeper with better acid and more structure than the others, and Michael confirmed it was the best of the lot from a single site, but there wasn’t much of it. It also felt a bit like it could use some fruit and a point or two of sugar to freshen and plump it up. The audience for this wine would not be interested in cellaring it or exploring its intricacies with food; it had to be refreshing and sippable on its own. In the end, we blended two samples together, the fancy-tasting one and a simpler, fruitier cuvée that seemed a little facile by itself but added just the right note of fun when it was added to the final blend. It was thrilling when the distractions dropped away and things became clear. When we tasted the final blend from 100%

*steillage* fruit at 7g/l RS and about 7g of acid, it felt like the wine suddenly clicked into place and became the obvious choice. We agreed on the amount (small potatoes for Michael, but a leap of faith for us); the dollars were right and the wine would be in our hands within a few months. It was a very civilized way of doing business. Since that first vintage we have made a “Dr. G” Riesling Dry at Bowler every year from tank samples FedEx’d to our office by Moselland. We taste, compare, and choose. The results have sold beautifully.

Aren’t wines from small family farms better than from a big co-op? At the highest level, yes; I don’t personally believe it’s possible for large-scale co-ops to produce *grand cru* bottles. But the wines can still be delicious in the hands of a good winemaking team. Most of the production in Europe comes from co-ops. More importantly, the service provided by a co-op paying farmers for their fruit without necessitating that they make wine at their own risk serves an enormous common good.

“Dr. G” is genuinely delicious and has introduced hundreds of tasters to the joys of dry German Riesling in a witty package at a friendly price. I hope everyone who reads this article opens a bottle tonight, ponders these issues, and draws their own conclusions about “Dr. G” and the significant work done at co-ops like Moselland.







## Deep Dive into Deep Down and Steadfast Views of Organics in New Zealand

by Kit Brickel *Assistant Portfolio Manager*

Clive Dougall and Peter Lorimer are the winemaking duo behind Deep Down, a small New Zealand project that started in 2019. Having centered their careers around wine early on, they brought their experience-- which included a deep knowledge of organic winemaking methods and understanding of how the wine trade works-- when they started their own project, Deep Down.

In 2007 Clive took a job working for Michael Seresin, a well-known New Zealand cinematographer turned wine lover and vineyard owner. At the time, Seresin's vineyards were unique because all 200 hectares were farmed organically. This was almost unheard of in New Zealand but Clive decided to take this as an opportunity to learn and grow. With a lot of trial and error, he developed a passion for organics and was able to transform the entirety of the winemaking on top of all the vineyard practices. Today, people see him as a key player in the New Zealand "Organic Movement," but he believes this is simply a way to protect the environment thus giving and giving back to the community.

Peter has a vast background in the trade, having worked in a variety of high end restaurants and hotels in many different countries. As a sommelier, he developed extensive knowledge

of wines from all over the world. At Deep Down, Peter is the mastermind behind all things marketing—and the wines are now represented in many countries including the US, China and Australia. When we received the initial email from Peter presenting his wines, we weren't sure it was a right fit for Bowler as we did not have an extensive New Zealand portfolio, but with his perseverance and stealth he was able to sneak a sample in through our building's back entrance. Once we tasted it, we saw that their philosophy aligned with our message as a company and agreed it was a great match.

Deep Down is a small project with four wines that yield a couple of thousand cases to spread to all of their markets around the world. The pair purchase fruit from small, single vineyard plots in Marlborough that are all farmed organically and in their mind, by “good people.” In turn, the wines are a beautiful expression of the New Zealand terroir. Though we only get a few hundred cases of the Sauvignon Blanc each year, we are proud to be their importer as the wines from Deep Down are exciting, affordable and offer our customers an alternative “typical” New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc style with something fresher and much more interesting than the commercial ocean of the usual New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc.



Clive Dougall



Peter Lorimer

**Kit Brickel:** Just to start off, I would like to go into detail about your careers in the wine industry.

**Clive Dougall:** There are a lot of similarities between Peter and I, though I'm English not a Kiwi. My first “wine job” was at the age of



18. I worked in a wine shop, and soon started running the place, it became a passion. At 23, I started traveling and had a thought, “I want to be a winemaker.” Everyone thought I was crazy, a boy from London wanting to make wine? That only pushed me to get there. At 29, I was interested in organics so I applied for the assistant role at Seresin, the number one organic winery in New Zealand. I got the job and after working for a week my boss said, “I’m moving to New York and I want you to take over my role.”

**KB:** Wow!

**CD:** I had 100 hectares of high profile wines for Michael Seresin. It was a huge undertaking but I just winged it! The company developed at the same time as I did, they were certified in the vineyards but the winemaking wasn’t organic. I saw the opportunity to really push and learn. We soon converted to biodynamics and I got to test the boundaries of winemaking. When that journey ended after about 12 years, I had made the first certified organic wine in Marlborough; organics became fully ingrained in me. Suddenly my passion made me the “organic man.” I’m a normal man but I’m an organic man.

**Peter Lorimer:** He makes a lot of dream catchers, very hippie like, a million tattoos, doesn’t shave and showers once a month.

**CD:** Not really...

**PL:** I’m far less interesting, I also started at a wine shop when I was 18 and then I worked in hospitality. I worked in bars in Australia and in restaurants in London as a sommelier.

**CD:** You’ve missed something... He missed a bit of his career because he was juggling. He was a juggler in Melbourne, making money. He traveled, he’s an amazing juggler.

**KB:** David Gordon is pretty good with juggling as well. Maybe when you come visit we can have a juggle off!

**PL:** It’ll be perfect. Clive can do the tastings and I’ll just do the juggling.

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When I was in London, I was a buyer for a hotel called the Dorchester. I had a crazy budget so I tried wines from all over the world. I went back to New Zealand and had a consultancy for eight years, where I represented five New Zealand producers and developed markets for them around the world. After, Clive and I met and we decided we wanted to

create a project that was exciting. We wanted to create wines that we liked and reflected us. Our plan wasn't to take over the world and sell millions of bottles, we just wanted to make a little living for ourselves, farm properly and do the right thing.

**CD:** We both had experiences working with European wines so we didn't want to make a typical "Kiwi" Sauvignon Blanc. Honestly, we don't drink those; we drink European wines. The winemaking we do puts our wines in a middle place, there are some Old World characteristics with texture, along with the bright and 'punchiness' of the New World.

**KB:** I was actually going to ask why you guys are seemingly against the "typical" New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc we often see on the shelves or in a restaurant.



**CD:** These Sauvignon Blancs aren't expressions of a place, they are expressions of the science and technology that goes into

winemaking. The grapes are obviously important but there's an industry around yeasts, enzymes, heaps of sulfur, etc. On the contrary, we utilize natural fermentation, no or low sulfites, and no other adjustments.

**PL:** To us, there's an honest expression of Marlborough, with organic grapes and minimal sulphur in-bottle rather than this technological wizardry. That "typical" style is massively successful and there's a space for it but there is no better feeling to us than going into a restaurant and the sommelier saying "ah, I'd actually drink this wine." I would hope that people over there are a little bit proud to put it out.

**KB:** A little? I am excited and proud to be representing it so I'm sure others are to show it. Have your vintages varied with production size or procedures at the winery?

**PL:** In our first year we made 1500 (cases), in 2020 we made 2200 cases and that's a total between all four of our wines, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot & Arneis. We're building from the ground up, but that's 50% growth.

**CD:** Next vintage we plan on 2500 cases between the four wines. There have been



some production shortages with Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc this year. In terms of vintages and adjustments I think it's just getting to know the sites more. We're always developing but in winemaking there is a certain lack of control. There is a little destiny in our wines, which makes them interesting, I haven't tampered with it much. Starting off, we were playing around with malolactic fermentation with the Sauvignon which wasn't part of the plan but it started to happen and we had to make a decision if we wanted to follow through with it or not. We're happy we did.



**PL:** In terms of the Pinot Noir, we had a tough time deciding what we wanted to do as it isn't a typical grape of the region. We wanted to make something bright and fresh, like a Northern Rhône or a Beaujolais. After picking, we treated the grapes softly and let the wine age. We tasted it after six months

and expected it to need more time. It was actually so delicious and bright so we bottled it at the same time as our Sauvignon Blanc. It was quite the brave step and we didn't know how it was going to be embraced, but we trusted our gut.

**CD:** That's what a bit of our tag line for Deep Down, it is all about trusting your gut and trusting your intuition. It's what we do with wine making and everything that we do really. We sneak into the back door of distributors!

**KB:** Well we're happy you did. There are a lot of behind the scenes things that take place with developing new relationships with distributors. I'm sure it was the same for you when you started with your growers. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

**CD:** We have three growers for the four varieties, The Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and the Sauvignon get harvested by our growers, and then I take the tractor to the winery. The Arenis is so small that I just handle it with a small group. I'm based in Marlborough so I visit the vineyards often. We don't have our own vineyard yet but growing grapes is a real passion of mine.

**PL:** We looked at different sites around

Marlborough, we wanted the right grapes and the right science based on the soil but also to work with good people as well. Anyone in the organic space here is pretty much a good person.

**KB:** Just judging by your business model, I thought that was the case. I think this kind of leads into my next point. I wanted to talk about organics in New Zealand. You are so ahead of the curve environmentally but I don't understand why more people aren't farming organically in winemaking. I know there's a very small percentage.

**CD:** Yeah that's a good question. There's a perception that New Zealand is really great at protecting the environment and mostly that's true but there are inherent behaviors that New Zealand farmers have in terms of using herbicides. A lot of growing and farming is heavily focused on production and yields. In the fifties when chemicals came into the system in New Zealand, it gave us an opportunity to grow and compete with the other "big boy" countries. So there is a little bit of apathy towards organics for people in New Zealand, they still care about the environment but now the pressure isn't on to

do everything perfectly because the land is still young "pristine," able to produce high yields. Right now, people are really excited about things like recycles and deer farming, venison is great. I find that there is always a "new thing." You have to remember that New Zealand is such a young country, only around 100 years old. It was built on pioneers with bare land having to make a living. There's a pioneering spirit of the people in New Zealand that is ever changing. It doesn't have the history of generations of people farming that land. Kiwi's also don't like conforming that much and organics is seen as a way of conforming to a set of rules. Though I see them as a positive thing because you're yielding great results. In a few weeks they are coming out with a new percentage of organic vineyards in New Zealand. I'm expecting to see about seven percent.

**KB:** That's hardly anything.

**CD:** It's getting much bigger in places like Central Otago where the price of wine is much higher. Marlborough is known for cheap Sauvignon Blanc. To make this price point, you need a big return on the land and keep pricing down. As soon as you say, I've



lost 20% of my yield because I'm doing it organically, you can't hit that \$13.99 point on the shelf. There's all this pressure. This year was a particularly small vintage, with a shortage of Sauvignon Blanc in the region. That puts prices up for growers.

**PL:** Typically these large scale "Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc" wines are owned by offshore companies like Accolade, Kim Crawford and Oyster Bay. Those are all owned by international corporations that aren't concerned with the environment. They're worried about yields, hitting that price point, we've lost control to a point. The small people often root more for organics than the bigger guys but it's a real tug of war. I think once people start paying the same price per ton of organic grapes vs. "normal" Sauvignon Blanc, people will want to start



working more towards organics as well, the spirit is there.

**CD:** That's the best point actually, a good amount of the wineries use organic farming to an extent, the best wineries are all organic but it is hard to make that work when you have these large corporations that just want to make more cases/make more money.

**PL:** I read something yesterday that 93% of New Zealand Wines is made by seven producers. There are about 683 producers at the moment.

**KB:** Does that mean you have a reputation for being organic? It sounds like it's seen as a good thing, would you say you're influential in this society of organics?

**CD:** I suppose if we're being modest, we're the new guys on the block, and we're exciting people. We're a new face of Marlborough, wild ferments, no technology with delicious, organic wine. That's not done yet so people are really noticing. It's our identity!

**PL:** New Zealand hasn't had a "natural wine movement," there's a bit of natural wine here but it's a little bit of a struggle for people to sell in any mainstream style wine bars right now but I think people are ready for a new

story. Luckily, we've worked with many sides of the trade out here so we are really starting to believe in it.

**KB:** I would hope so!

**CD:** We've been astounded because we've developed new relationships with you and others around the world just before COVID hit, we haven't been on any market visits but wine is still sold...Luckily the wine was on ships before people could cancel their orders.

**KB:** We are lucky to have you and excited to see how each vintage develops. How has vintage variation been since 2019?

**CD:** We've been really lucky because '16, '17 and '18 were really tough, lots of rain, disease, and pressure. Last year though, was just magic, beautiful, even fruit, yields weren't too low. Although, COVID made things weird, we were all running around, not sure if we were going to get to harvest, people

couldn't even get out of their cars. Recently there have been nicer vintages, grapes aren't baked and have good acidity. This year, the acidity is amazing, grapes are ripe, and we are picking them right about now (March 2021). I'm really focused on acidity because I don't allow myself to adjust it, I need to get the grapes right. They've been magic, we've been blessed. If I wanted to put a tagline on it, it would be '19 was concentrated, fresh, '20 had more finesse to it and '21, my inclination is it's going to be somewhere between the '19 and the '20 because I learned from the '19. I don't want all the power of the '19, so I pulled it back a little bit to top off last year! You never know what will happen though!

**KB:** This project seems very carefree yet meticulous. I hope more and more people catch on to the trend, it looks like it's going extremely well for you.







# WINERY PARTNERS



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