



AURIC PACIFIC

“selling wine with passion!”

## Auric Pacific Fine Wines

Issue 27

Dated, October 23, 2006

Written by Andy Tan

Someone has recently asked me whether or not I am a "Euro-beautiful" snob? Since I have frequently declared my love for Burgundy, Piedmont, Bordeaux, Rhône...etc.

Yes, I confess my love for wine coming from the former mentioned regions. However, I equally admire and has great respect for numerous producers coming from the new-world counterparts. What I often stress was, my preferences have everything to do with what **Matt Kramer**, famous quote of **Wine of Fear** or **Wine of Conviction**. **Wine of fear** refers to wine that is made based on market-calculation, in other words, wine made primary on the interest of marketplace. Wine of predictability. **Wine of conviction** on the hand is from man and woman that has courage to voice their beliefs, offer wine of individualistic, prized distinction above everything else. Wine that reflects it's sense of place.

Recently, I read Matt Kramer's column in **Wine Spectator** (probably "The" most interesting page of the entire magazine) questioning many Californian Syrah to be lack of varietal distinction. His statement later was argued by one of the famous Pinot Noir (recently into making Syrah) specialist, **Adam Lee** of **Siduri Vineyard** that those "white peppery" missing Syrah can equally be as thrilling.

For me, there are far too many guys out there are making Wine of Fear, with predictable fragrance of ripe fruits and cosmetic-enhanced new oaks sweetness. All those wines warrant one thing - "the return of sameness". There are too afraid to make something that works against the current fashion, too fearful of offending those influential critics. They trade-in the potential chance of showing their unique site to their own self expression. These days, not only did those wines reflect anything about their lands, very often, they don't even taste like their grape. So, my question is, if you like Syrah (in this case, cool-climate Syrah), why compromise a syrah that has no "pepper" notes? It's like, if you thirst for pinot noir, would you do without the pure bright berries fruit of this variety has to offer? The absent of varietal distinction, is already a deficiency.



### Northern Rhône – Part One

This issue, let's focus on the wine of **Northern Rhône**, where you will find plenty of pepper fragrance....

When northern Rhône is mentioned, name such as **Chapoutier, Guigal, Paul Jaboulet-Ainé** came immediate to mind. However, there are many quality conscious, wine of equal sublimely producers, due to their size and limited resources, were unable to reach out to a larger audience and compete in the same league with those giants. I hope my following efforts could somehow give those guys a chance to regain their well deserved recognition.

**Côte-Rôtie** (the roasted hillside) is probably the most famous area of northern Rhône. It is one of French's oldest vineyard that was first initiated by the Romans during the first century. The same terrances and steep hillside where the vines were grew have remained unchanged over the last 2,000 years. One of the world's steepest hillside vineyards are from here (about 1,000 feet in height with gradient between 30-55 degrees), which were subsequently divided into two main slopes, **Côte Blonde** and **Côte Brune**. Among this two main slopes, there are some five dozen of *lieux-dits* (sub-plot).

The **Côte Brune**, the northernmost slope that is marked by clay and iron, making wine of firmness, power, with noticeable tannin and obvious weight. The famous *lieux-dit* includes, Yves Cuilleron's La Viaillère, Guigal & Rostaing's **La Landonne**, Guigal's **La Turquie**, JM Gérin & Cluse;-Roch's **La Grandes Places**, Jamet's Le Truchet.

**Côte Blonde** on the other hand consists of more sandy, granite soils. Wine here tend to be more fragrant, rounder and supple. Noticeably more accessible than those of **Côte Brune**. *Lieux-dits* such as **La Mouline** (owned solely by Guigal), **Lancement** (owned by Stéphane Ogier), La Garde (managed by René Rostaing) are all found here.

In Côte-Rôtie, up to 20% of Viognier is permitted to be added to the Syrah blend, which this highly aromatic white has credit for contributing part of the majestic bouquet of Côte-Rôtie. Since Viognier does not flourish in the heavy clay-and-iron-based soils of **Côte Brune**, almost virtually, all viognier in Côte-Rôtie is planted on the **Côte Blonde** side.

As controversial as **Bob Parker** these days, no one should diminish his early contributions for the Rhône valley. If **John Livingstone-Learmonth** was to be credited for his introduction of Rhône wine to the outside world, then, it was Parker who responsible for the popularity of this once unknown quality region of France.

I often think that both **northern Rhône** and **Piedmont** share many similar aspects and undergo same kind quality revolution. Besides the fact that, both regions are made predominantly from one grape variety (**Syrah** for northern Rhône and **Nebbiolo** for Piedmont), both regions share the similar background of long historical track in making wine and are both guarded with traditional winemaking practiced that oenologist and modern winemaking gadgets almost none exist.

Thanks to Parker, the iconic figures of this two areas, **Angelo Gaja** for **Barbaresco** and **Marcel Guigal** for **Côte-Rôtie** were discovered and later, flourish. Their success has inspired many of their previous grape suppliers to bottle their own and take on the same path in introducing more single-vineyard crus and aging their wines in small new French oak barrel. In addition, the increased lucrative business also saw some youngsters returning to their family winemaking root. Those open-minded, well-traveled, educated young winemakers with their continual pursued for excellent have injecting a new force in this two increasing popular wine growing regions.

In **northern Rhône**, there are mainly two schools of winemaking - **traditionalists & modernists** (similarly in Piedmont). Traditionalists aimed to preserve the tradition on how **Côte-Rôtie** should be made and taste like. For them, wines should be austere in their youth and achieve fullness and depth with age. They often do not destalk (or partially destemmed) and neither the wines sees any new oak, but instead, they can spend up to 30+ months in large wooden *foudres*. Old vine is essential for them and their wines can take up to a decade to shed away their early formidable personality. **Gilles Barge**, **Albert Dervieux-Thaize** (father-in-law of René Roasting), **Marius Gentaz-Dervieux** (vineyard leased to René Roasting now), **Robert Jasmin**, **René Roasting** (for me, he is not entirely traditionalists nor modernists, but somewhere between. However, his style shows little of wood influence and generally as austere as those old-school in it youth) are some fine representative from this school.

Like Angelo Gaja, **Marcel Guigal** pioneering in introducing small new oak aging for **northern Rhône** and are among the first to release his luxury single-vineyard cuvée **Côte-Rôtie La Moulin, La Landonne and La Turque**. Modernists like Guigal prefers to pick late in order to obtained a riper fruit. In the cuviery, they adopt the practiced of *élevage bourguignon*, with pre-fermentation cold soak, 100% destemming, whole cluster fermentation, *pigéage*, aging and malolactic in 100% new oak cask. Their **Côte-Rôtie** generally are profoundly rich, even at their early age, with burgundy-like texture that contrast with those edgy, rustic traditionalists. Equally, they are marked by obvious ripe fruit richness and succulent, sexy personalities.

### **Domaine Jean-Michel Gérin**

Gérin aged his Côte-Rôtie in 100% new oak casks. His top cuvée, Les Grandes Places spend up to 20 months in barrel. I have several experiences with his **Champin Le Seigneur** and **Les Grandes Places**. I witness little cold soak influenced on his cuvées and his wine can be quite tannin in their youth. However, it is more textured and denser on the palate than most traditionalist. The concentration combined well buffered tannins can somehow resemble those of Bordeaux.

12 bts. 1999 Côte-Rôtie "Champin Le Seigneur" at 105.00 each (Parker's 90 points)  
6 bts. 1999 Côte-Rôtie "La Landonne" at 295.00 each (Parker's 94 points)  
6 bts. 1997 Côte-Rôtie "Les Grandes Places" at 145.00 each (Parker's 90-91 points)  
6 bts. 1999 Côte-Rôtie "Les Grandes Places" at 325.00 each (Parker's 95 points)  
12 bts. 2001 Côte-Rôtie "Les Grandes Places" at 145.00 each (Parker's 89-92 points)

### Domaine Jean-Paul & Jean-Luc Jamet

Jamet's style reminded me a lot in common with **Joseph Roty** of **Gevrey-Chambertin**. Both are very intense and punchy. Concentrated and marked by dark raspberries, cassis, charred new oak-licorice, with spice intertwined with sweetness. Quite velvety but tangy at the same time. This house-style is not shy at all and clearly to me, one of the more powerful example from Côte-Rôtie. The *pain grillé* and spicy nose is quite a knockout experience.

23 bts. 2003 Côte-Rôtie at 108.00 each (Wine Spectator's 96 points)

### Domaine Stéphane Ogier

I am proud to be the first to discovered the beautiful and sexy Côte-Rôtie made by Ogier here before everyone else start to include them in their wine list. The family owned just 2.5 hectares (slight over 6 acres) in **Côte-Blonde** and has a significant holding in *lieu-dit*, **Lancement**. Previously, the family were just grape growers and supply their fruit to **Marcel Guigal** and **Max Chapoutier**. Michel, father of current winemaker/owner, Stéphane Ogier, started to bottle his own and market commercially some 15 years ago. Prior joining his father, Stéphane received his education in viticulture and wine making at Beaune in Burgundy. He subsequently worked in Rhône and south Africa before returning to his family operation in 1997. The winemaking style here is quite modern, with 100% destemmed, 15-day cuvaison, 18-24 months of aging in small oak casks. However, with Ogier, his wood handling is as masterful as those of *bourguignon*. Rarely noticeable, but rather, came as a supporting role. You always can count on his classic "white pepper" note, which is partially contributed by the viognier's fragrant. Then, you get this subtly build sweetness (quite candied), that slowly rise to a crescendo and linger throughout the palate. It reminded me so much like **Comte de Vogüé Musigny**, but only this time, is from Syrah grape. Ogier sexy, suppleness Côte-Rôtie is equally vibrant and precise. Perhaps, stylish is best word to descript this charming juice. (P.S. sorry to over throw with such wavy praises on this film. Each time when I drink Ogier, I seem to discover more reasons to like them.)

8 bts. 2003 Côte-Rôtie at 88.00 each (Wine Spectator's 94 points)

18 bts. 2001 Côte-Rôtie "Les Embruns" at 135.00 each (Tanzer's 91 points)

69 bts. 2003 Côte-Rôtie "Les Embruns" at 118.00 each (Tanzer's 91 points)

6 bts. 2000 Côte-Rôtie "Belle Hélène" at 290.00 each (Parker's 93 points)

9 bts. 2003 Côte-Rôtie "Belle Hélène" at 280.00 each (Tanzer's 92-95 points)

### René Roasting

Among the new generation winemaker in Côte-Rôtie. No one can claim to be more experience than René Roasting. He learned his traditional winemaking techniques from his father-in-law, **Albert Dervieux**, and uncle **Marius Gentaz**. Along with that, he also inherited some of the most prized old vines of Côte-Rôtie - **La Viaillère** (90-year-old), **La Landonne** (Marius Gentaz's 70-year-old). There are no rules in Roasting's winemaking approached. For him, man should adapt to what the nature has to offered and each year, the weather is different and thus, they yield different fruits. Roasting has a strong emphasis in cellar sanitation. His primary fermentation took place in stainless steel fermenters that attach with automatic *pigéage*, similar to those I have seen in **Château Haut-Brion**. His decision on destemming lies on the vintage and the parcel of *lieux-dit*. Over the years, he has slowly moved away from new oak cask and instead chosen to use the larger demi-muids, which he is convinced, are the best size of oak vassels to age his Côte-Rôtie. If you are looking for immensely profound, sexily succulent, lush Côte-Rôtie? This film is not your cup of tea. Roasting's Côte-Rôtie required age to bring out it full potential. In addition, in his winemaking, he stressed freshness, vibrancy, delineation above everything else. His wine is always elegant, with adequate natural acidity, which give purity and transparency to the wine. However, in their youth, it can be quite edgy and chewy at the same time. Given time, one will ultimately be rewarded with more velvety, seductively smooth, flavorful Syrah that can only came from one planet earth - **Côte-Rôtie**.

**\*Please note that, the following wines will only be available for delivery toward the end of November.**

108 bts. 2004 Côte-Rôtie Classique at 98.00 each (Tanzer's 87-89 points)

24 bts. 2004 Côte-Rôtie "La Landonne" at 138.00 each (Tanzer's 90-92 points)

30 bts. 2004 Côte-Rôtie "Côte Blonde" at 150.00 each (Tanzer's 92-94 points)

## Central Otago Pinot Noir Tasting



Our weekend in-house tasting of Central Otago Pinot Noir saw some interesting turnout. I must say, I know very little about the World's most southerly winegrowing region of central Otago. I could not justify myself to speak very lengthy about the producers or their recent vintages. However, the attention that gather from the pinot noir coming from this region has motivate me to work on my research before tasting the list of pinot noir producers below, which came across as alien to me.

I was first drawn to this region by my love for pinot noir or burgundy at large. I seek to find a good alternative to the French counterpart to ease my impatient palate and my limited financial resources. As we all know, good vintages from burgundy requires time to reach their fullness, and the better producers, crus does

correspond well with their price tag. My first bottle of pinot noir from central Otago was from Blair Walter's **Felton Road** (guess, everyone else share the same experinece). I was however even more impressed by **Gibbston Valley's** Reserve Pinot Noir, which I was fooled by my former business partner in blind that I have mistaken it for a French (rare for me these days to make such error). It shows you how high the quality one could expect from this cooler region of New Zealand.

A brief geographical tour of this region. Central Otago at large could be subdivided into two broad zones - **Gibbston Valley & Cromwell Basin (also includes neighboring district such as Bannockburn, Bendigo and Alexandra)**. Gibbston Valley is mainly the mountainous vineyard that enjoys cooler growing condition due to it's high elevation. The lower elevation of Cromwell Basin is generally warmer and due to the dry growing condition (10 inches of rain a year), grape usually ripen early (three weeks early than most Gibbston Valley's vineyard). The lower elevated vineyard in Cromwell Basin is also more susceptible from frost, which is a common natural occurrence in most Central Otago. However, the sub-soil here is much similar to those of Burgundy, with stone, schist and underneath with clay. Nearly all the central Otago producers uses Cromwell and its neighbors fruit.

We started off the tasting with few whites from **Kawarau Estate** (Cromwell). **2006 Sauvignon Blanc** with nice citrus fruit, mainly lime-skin like. Light and refreshing, but quite straightforward. Zesty and slightly tart finish. **2004 Reserve Chardonnay** with distinct wood treatment nose of toasty, nutty element. Quite dense and good layers, but I was more impressed with its firmness (quite punchy) and focused frame. Also, the fruit did not fall into the conventional tropical fruit cocktail of many southern hemisphere chard. **2005 Reserve Chardonnay** offer rather tight nose, more acid-influenced palate and somewhat tasted watery. No way in the league of their 04. The finishing also shown strong present of lime-like acid?

**2003 Otago Crown** (from Gibbston Valley fruit) impressive color and tinge of purple (cold soak?). Quite candied that dominated with liqueur-like dark cherry, black raspberries. Slightly leaning towards jam. Like most pinot noir from this area, the palate is quite cool, which unlike many Aussie's pinots, which tend to shown more alcohol and came across more heady. Very fruit-oriented palate and quite velvety. One of my top picked.

**Pisa Moorings** - famous holiday home of Cromwell. Wine is made by New Zealand famous flying winemaker, Dean Shaw. **2003** - Not particular deep hue and shows a distinct difference style that has much in common with Californian pinot noir. More viscous, liqueur-infused nose. The palate look to be cold soak-like fruitiness and almost taste like syrup. Quite fleshy and lack the velvety textured of Otago Crown. Shown more evident of alcohol. Fortunately, the cool palate and well sap finish help to keep thing in place. **2004** - Deeper more purple hue. Shown distinctly more elegant and acid-buffered palate. Clearly more focus and reserved, but

the lightness seem to do with either underachieved in ripeness or over crop? Somehow hollow in the mid palate. **2005** - Denser color of all. Similar theme of 2003, with alcohol-infused, voluminous palate. The fruit sweetness also suggesting from dehydrated ripeness, which later is also evident on the dry tannin finish. The palate however has this interesting beacon-fatness, which recalled many Californian Pinot Noir that aged with its lees.

**Van Asch** - owned and made by the famous veteran New Zealand winemaker, Henry Van Asch with fruit sourced from Gibbston Valley. **2003** dense but not brilliant in color. Nice mineral-iodine infused cherry, raspberry nose. Quite fat, with distinctly more syrup-like sweetness. Some exotic, dehydrated fruit element emerged, but in an appealing way. also shown stalky element toward the end (no destemm?). Overall, I enjoy this one. **2002** is a disappointment. Aged clearly made it stamp on the color. Quite stalky palate, with aged plum, tarry element. Also, I found some green-herbal element, which shows that this vintage might have harvest in an drought condition where the fruit achieved the alcohol ripeness but not phenolic.

**2005 Wooding Tree** (Cromwell) - Denser color of all. Shown less pristine nose of briary (yeast?) odor. Quite intensely masculine that dominant by liqueur, black berries and currant. Rich and sweet with touch of earth. This is one of the few that I do not get my usual cool-pitched and sappiness, which made central Otago pinot noir so appealing to me. The grapefruit-like acidity toward the end also look odd. Too obvious acidification maybe?

**Kawarau** - this Cromwell producer claimed to be all organic farmed vineyards. Not surprised to learn that, **Dean Shaw** is their master winemaker. **2005** see the trace of Shaw's American pinots like character. From stressed vine either by trellising (high density planting) or simply from late-picked fruit. After my several training lessons with **Benjamin LEROUX** of Comte Armand, I could almost effortlessly pick up that the wine's ripeness is achieve from physiological ripeness or dehydrate sweetness (which is the most accurate way to tell from new to old world pinots). This clearly from the later source. It has an impressive start, and fail to persist with it's palate. **2004** shown more promising element with brighter, cooler palate, offers mixed of red and black berries with the returned of sappiness finish. Very elegant and balance. I will vote for this pinots if only the mid-palate was more substantial.

**2005 Rocky Point** - made by Prophet's Rock with fruit sourced from Pisa and Bendigo areas. Berry-scented, fruit bomb style, which hardly stir my excitement. Cold soak sweetness and fatness that is hollow on the middle that ended with acid-adjust like finish. Too conventional and not at the same high standard set earlier.

**Alexandra Wine Company - 2004 "Davishon"** - Healthy ruby color that delivers pure red and black berries fruit. Savory with lees-fatness that is both supple and juicy. I like the acid-preservation in this wine, which was more balance and less awkward. **2005 Prophet's Rock** is denser, more confectionary sweetness. There are also more obvious woods treatment here, which in this case, help to firm up the generous palate. Darker more high-tone fruit with toffee, mocha sweet oak charged. However, this is still one of the best 05 I have tasted. More complete.

**2004 Dry Gully** - fruit sourced from Alexandra and wine made by Dean Shaw. Attractive viscous, sweet black cherries, dark berries with hint of Vosne's spice. Silky and the persisted sweetness is both attractive and sexy. The wine finish with cleansing acid-sap that was well delineated. If only there were more stuffing, which could easy score as one of my best wine.

**Lindis River** - I did not intentionally leave this wine towards the end, however, this is simply the best of the whole lineup. Owner, **Holger Reinecke** is originally from Germany and not surprise, burgundy was his idol which later inspired him to create his own pinot noir. Consultant winemaker is Dean Shaw. However, I could see the owner's participation here. **2004** Striking bright fruit with red berries, raspberries (distinctly red fruit) with wave of violet and rose petal that is both pure and inviting. Mineral-coated (wow!) raspberries on the palate that is quite multi-dimensional and layered. The underpinned acidity has kept the wine both lively and elegant. This is among the few that has truly shown a good middle-core density, which explains why it stands out from the crowd. **2005** clearly more substantial and more obvious sweetness. Despite that, this showy juice has good energy on the palate, which prevents it to become overwhelming. This lack of the balance and purity I seek on their 2004, the slightly obvious alcohol and wood handling also prevents the wine to show more transparency and details. However, this is highly attractive, sexy Euro-pinots style. It would be interesting to place this wine along with 2003 burgundy (drought year for burgundy), say, Chambolle Musigny (which has both the sexy fruit and mineral) in blind to see if anyone could spot which is Lindis River, which is Chambolle. Bravo Holger.

(\*Interestingly, I took the bottle of Lindis River for dinner after the tasting. Amazingly, the wine held throughout the next three-four hours. Impressive.)

All prices quoted for per bottle in Singapore dollar. Prices indicated "in red" are inclusive of 5% GST.

Free delivery for purchases of S\$350 and above, otherwise S\$15 per delivery will apply.

50 Kallang Avenue, #06-06 Noel Corporate Building, Singapore 339505,

Tel: 65-6291 1947 Fax: 65-6294 1947, Email: [andytan@auric.com.sg](mailto:andytan@auric.com.sg) Website: [www.apfw.com.sg](http://www.apfw.com.sg)