



LE SOULA

Vin du Fenouillèdes - Terroir d'altitude



Revue de presse

2004 & 2005 & 2006 & 2007

Financial Times

Jancis Robinson

31st July 2004

Whites that are entertaining

The trouble with having been a specialist writer for nearly 30 years is that I tend to overlook the most obvious subjects for articles. We ancient wine writers tend to search irritatingly for the new rather than revisiting familiar territory which is chiefly familiar because it is so useful to our readers. With that in mind I offer you, as I take off for a four week summer break from The Financial Times, some suggestions for white wines suitable for entertaining. I shall assume that Weekend FT readers are generous but not boundlessly extravagant hosts, so will ignore the cheapest wines available.

.....Top wine of three made by this enterprising producer on Italy's Adriatic coast. I have never come across a Verdicchio with anything like this intensity. Firm, dense, not oaked but a special selection late picked fruit from his finest vines, well worth the premium. It slightly reminded me of the miraculous **Le Soula Blanc 2001** (a previous wine of the week here)made from low yielding vines in Roussillon by the talented Gérard Gauby. Both wines should knock the socks off any real wine lover for being so unusual and so particularly good. These wines are notably high in both extract and acidity and would be good with poached salmon or white fish.

Purple Pages

Jancis Robinson

30th July 2004 Late extra - AB Vintners sur Le Soula :

Gérard Gauby...The 'King' of the Roussillon & France's greatest winemaker ?

A rash statement you might think, but when you consider that Gérard Gauby does a lot of consulting work for some of Burgundy's top winemakers you begin to realise in just what regard he is held in France. Finesse and elegance are the hallmarks of great Burgundies, yet it is the search for even greater refinement of these elements that has led these Burgundians to Gérard's door, as he is considered the master. It is this quest for finesse and elegance that has led Gérard to establish his new estate, Domaine Le Soula. He has vines and viticulture in his blood; from a very early age he spent all his holidays with his grandfather in the family vineyards and left school the day he was eligible, so that he could join his grandfather full-time. He then set about creating his existing estate, Domaine Gauby, producing his first wine in 1985 in Calce not far from Perpignan in the south of France. Since then he has gained an intimate and detailed knowledge of the region, its soils and its climate. This expertise and local knowledge enabled him to find specific vineyards in the commune of St Martin de Fenouillet that are now the foundation of Domaine Le Soula. There are two very important points as to why these vineyards are special. Firstly, they lie at significant altitude (two of them are the highest vineyards in the Roussillon) and secondly, the type of soil which is decomposed granite with limestone washed down off the mountains, very similar to that of the hill of Hermitage. The altitude of between 450 and 600m above sea level is paramount to the quality of the fruit. It is just as hot during the day but considerably cooler at night. This slows down the maturity process; it can take up to a month longer than lower down, and this allows is an extra month for the all important phenolic elements (where all the flavour comes from), in the grape's skin to develop much more complexity and completeness, which considerably enhances the finished wine.

The soil of decomposed granite and the limestone in particular plays a crucial role in retaining acidity. The torrid temperatures of the Roussillon mean that the level of acidity can start to drop before the grapes are fully ripe and acidity is vital to the overall balance of a wine. So with the altitude allowing a longer ripening period, the soils help to retain the acidity over this time as well and it is these two elements that Gérard has been searching for.

The vineyards are farmed organically and the soils worked to encourage the roots to go ever deeper; in fact, some of the vineyards are so inaccessible and steep that the soils can only be ploughed with the help of a horse, as no machine can cope! The result of this viticultural practice, combined with the altitude and the soil type is low yields of very concentrated, fully ripe grapes. When you add in the human touch of Gérard's mastery in the cellar you have what we believe to be the finest wines that have come out of the south of France. 2001 is the first vintage here and judging by this and the elements of the 2002 and 2003 still in cask we are convinced that Domaine Soula's wines will become some of the most sought-after in France.

They have already received great critical acclaim as well as having been taken up by some of France's top Michelin restaurants. They have also been well received here with both the white and the red being available at Le Gavroche, and the Waterside Inn at Bray has adopted the 2001 red as its house red wine !

Financial Times

Jancis Robinson

10th December 2004

Dry whites for celebrations

This week, some smart dry white wine to serve over the holidays.There are also some fascinating whites from an entirely 'new' part of France...

Le Soula Blanc 2001 VdP des Côtes Catalanes

This is probably the most exciting new white wine to have come my way in many a year. From the hills around Maury in Roussillon, and made by Gérard Gauby, it is a seriously, and unexpectedly, fine wine with real minerality and spine. The 2002 and 2003 are increasingly luscious (if perhaps not as long-lived) and available ...with some magnums too.

Financial Times

Jancis Robinson

23rd September 2006

Le Soula Blanc 2003 Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes, Roussillon

This minerally, full-bodied but piercing dry white blend of Grenache Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Marsanne and Chenin Blanc has been one of my favourite French whites since its first vintage 2001 (wine of the week long ago). It's a joint venture between UK importer Richards Walford, biodynamic convert Gérard Gauby and local grower Eric Laguerre. Since then however the upper Agly valley inland from Perpignan has been invaded by a host of other outside investors. Chapoutier of the Rhône, Thunevin of St-Emillion, Tom Lubbe of South Africa and at least two Masters of Wine have bought vineyards here and are making increasingly exciting reds and whites from the area's small, intensely flavoured grapes. From a magnum and a heatwave vintage, the 2003 now seems ready to drink and, with its similar structure, should impress any lover of fine white burgundy.

Less alcohol please, we're winemakers

If you don't enjoy drinking, as opposed to tasting, wine, this article is not for you. But if you like the sensation of an intriguing, perfectly balanced, lightly stimulating liquid insinuating itself into your system in perfect harmony with the food you're eating, stay with me.

Wine has been getting stronger and stronger over the past few years, as has been noted before on these pages. The average alcoholic strength of the thousands of wines tested by the Australian Wine Research Institute, for example, rose from 12.4 per cent in 1984 to 14.2 per cent in 2002 – and it's still rising. The phenomenon is apparent all over the world – because of climate change, more powerful yeasts and agrochemicals that allow farmers to delay harvest, and winemakers' desire to make wines with tannins and flavour concentrated as possible – not least because these are the wines that tend to win most favour with wine critics (who, let us not forget, tend to taste rather than drink the wines they score).

This usually means leaving the grapes on the vine longer and, often, reducing the crop pathway through the growing season by cutting off a proportion of the grapes to concentrate the flavour. The only problem is that vines are anticipating this, so vignerons are finding themselves in a vicious circle.

This is not just painful for drinkers nursing hangovers after drinking what used to be their daily ration, it can also entail higher excise duties or an outright export ban, as I reported here in July. The riper the grapes, the lower

the total acidity and the greater the risk of wine faults such as excessive Brettanomyces and volatile acidity, as well as muddy, indistinct aromas. There are also doubts that these wines will age as gracefully as their predecessors. And it is, after all, wine's ability to flower into something miraculous after years in a bottle that distinguishes it from all other drinks.

It is not surprising then that there is a perceptible uprising among thoughtful wine producers who feel things may have got a little out of control.

Many winemakers have been quietly adding water to high-alcohol wines to make them more palatable, but this hardly seems cricket. It can still leave unappetisingly overripe flavours plus lower concentration – and it particularly grates, of course, with grape growers who are paid on the basis of weight by the happy hosepipe winemakers.

More sophisticated options include subjecting the wine to techniques such as the so-called spinning cone that literally spins the alcohol out of it, and the reverse osmosis process offered by the likes of Clark Smith at Vinovations in California, but these are relatively expensive technologies that generally require moving the wine from the original winery. An Australian outfit, Memstar, has come up with a mobile technology that subjects the wine to what they call evaporative perstraction which, they claim, is more convenient and, like reverse osmosis, allows the winemaker to choose exactly which alcohol level shows the wine at its best. Each wine, it is claimed, has a perfect

"sweet spot" of strength and can be fine-tuned like a radio to achieve it. And then there is a Bordeaux company that claims it has the ability to reduce any wine to a drink of just 6 per cent alcohol involving no loss of flavour. Mas Bunan of Baudol has already trialled this, while Pirramima of McLaren Vale swears by Memstar.

But all these techniques seem to be fiddling after the event. Would it not be better to end up with the right alcohol level in the first place? Surely the

Jean-Michel Deiss has reduced alcohol levels by planting the vines much closer together so they have to send down deeper roots and work harder

vineyard holds the key to returning vines to some sort of balance? In California, where irrigation is the norm, the problem is seen as one of encouraging vines to build up sugars more slowly than flavours and tannins, and there is talk of withholding water at crucial points in order to distract the wine into doing this.

The purist Jean-Michel Deiss of Alsace reports that he has managed to reduce the alcohol levels in his unusually intense wines, with no loss of flavour, by planting the vines much closer

together, so that they have to send down deeper roots and work harder. But vineyards are in general replanted only every 30 years or so.

Perhaps the most dramatic conversion from producer of high- to low-alcohol wines is Gérard Gauby, son of one of France's most celebrated rugby players. Gérard forged his own reputation for big muscles not on the pitch but in wines grown in the Agly valley west of Perpignan. His Muntada, which regularly notched up nearly 15 per cent alcohol, enjoyed a worldwide following. But in the late 1990s he became increasingly convinced that there was something rotten about vineyards that needed constant applications of

chemicals and annual crop-thinning before the harvest. Since 2000 he has been completely biodynamic, drawing inspiration from Rudolf Steiner's quasi-mystical advocacy of farming with homeopathic doses and according to phases of the moon. And now his wines taste quite different – just as flavourful but with more acidity and less alcohol and obvious sweetness. They may be more difficult to enjoy as babies – especially the reds – but these wines are designed to age, and he has managed to change their vital statistics completely. The alcohol levels of some of his wines now are below 12 per cent with very high dry extract, a flavour indicator, and the all-important pHs, a measure of stability of the wine, can be as low as 3.18 (3.5 is closer to the norm, and some late-picked wines may nudge over 4). As we watched his beautifully ripe, healthy Syrah grapes coming into

his winery as early as mid August, he told me rather ruefully, mentioning his British importer Roy Richards, "this is a bit Roy's fault. He showed me all these wonderful old Bordeaux and old riojas that had aged beautifully yet were very low in alcohol and high in acid. My taste has changed completely. Now I hate overripe wines. I had to throw out three-quarters of the wines in my cellar."

"But I've had to change my methods completely and really understand old wines. It's easy to get 15 per cent alcohol if you use clones. I don't, and the more life there is on the surface of the vineyard, the deeper the vines' roots have to go. [His looks terrible – full of useful predators.] So even in 2003, the heatwave year, I got balanced wines, and the vines continued to photosynthesise even in extreme temperatures – not like my neighbours whose vines just stopped working so they had to pick way after me. I don't get great vintage variation, but I have to look after the vines all the time."

Of course in Roussillon, the warmest, driest corner of France, it is far easier to relinquish chemical fungicides, herbicides and pesticides than in more humid wine regions. The same is true in Provence, which has long had the highest proportion of organic vine-growers. Les Baux de Provence, whose vines are kept virtually disease-free by the prevailing mistral, is trying to become the first all-biodynamic wine appellation in the world.

La Revue du Vin de France

avril 2006, n° 500

Les dix dégustateurs les plus connus de La Revue des Vins de France ont révélé leurs plus belles dégustations, souvenirs d'un siècle de bons millésimes.

Antoine Gerbelle a choisi Le Soula Blanc 2003 parmi ses 5 dégustations mémorables

Le Soula Blanc 2003, Vin de Pays des Coteaux de Fenouillèdes

Restons dans le sud de la France, mais un peu plus au nord. Pourquoi ai-je choisi ce vin ? Pour que les gens ne pensent pas qu'avec l'âge un critique de vin devient forcément nostalgique, et pour insister sur le fait que même avec un bon nombre de millésimes au compteur, un dégustateur peut toujours avoir la révélation du terroir. Qui aurait imaginé dix ans en arrière que lors d'une vague de chaleur comme celle de 2003, un grenache blanc du Roussillon serait aussi élégant et minéral ? Tandis que certains grands chardonnays sont déjà sur le déclin, ce Soula a aujourd'hui beaucoup de tension et de sensualité. Une vraie leçon de la part de Gauby.

La Revue de Vin de France

mars 2005

Vin de Pays des Coteaux de Fenouillèdes Le Soula Blanc 2002

Grenache Blanc, Sauvignon, Chenin et Marsanne réunis. Chapeau bas ! Le jury s'incline devant la pureté presque cristalline de ce vin riche, intense, nuancé, équilibré sur des notes de verveine, minéral avec beaucoup de tension et de la matière. Sans parler de la fraîcheur. Prix au diapason.

Le Nouvel Observateur

7 septembre 2006

 **Dom. Le Soula**
2004

Sur les terrasses granitiques d'altitude des Fenouillède, Gérard Gauby et ses associés élaborent des vins très ambitieux, au boisé racé et dotés d'une fraîcheur supérieure. D'une haute acidité mûre, le 2004 gagne en épure. Une gourmandise ciselée à boire sans se presser.
→ 27 €

Marianne

Perico Legas

15-21 septembre 2007

GOURMANDISES

LA SÉLECTION DE « MARIANNE », SUITE

... DES CÔTES CATALANES
Domaine Le Soula



Il existe donc des vins bio buvables ! Sorte de phylloxéra idéologique, la biologie bachique – mal maîtrisée – n'en finit pas de ravager le vignoble français.

Sortirait-on enfin de l'étable ? Petite provocation de notre part, mais pour une fois que l'on échappe à un concours de vinaigriers, cela méritait d'être souligné. Propriétaire sur les hauteurs du Fenouillèdes, le talentueux Gérard Gauby produit un vin de pays des côtes catalanes que l'on aimerait rencontrer plus souvent dans la cour des AOC. Syrah, grenache, carignan et une pointe de cabernet-sauvignon, mais quelle réussite ! Une cuvée gourmande, racée, gorgée de soleil et de fruit, qui raconte avec délectation son lieu de naissance et prouve la capacité des vins de pays à montrer la voie du bon sens •

Domaine Le Soula, 66220 Saint-Martin-de-Fenouillet. Tél. : 04 68 64 35 19. Cuvée « Trigone » 2006 : 13,20 € Expédition.

The Independent

Anthony Rose

16th December 2006

Wine: A year to remember

I think it was the late wine guru André Simon who said "there are no great wines, only great bottles". How often do you find that a supposedly great bottle you've spent a fortune on or brought up from its dusty perch in the cellar turns out to be a disappointment? Or conversely, been pleasantly surprised by a wine with no apparent pedigree? I would be amazed if at least some of the bottles you've most enjoyed this year haven't been unexpected pleasures. Maybe it was the food that offset them, the company that made them dazzle, or the occasion that made an unremarkable wine memorable. For however great a wine's reputation, it's the context that makes a wine.

A trip to the Roussillon unearthed Gérard Gauby's brilliant, mineral-rich **2003 Le Soula**, Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes. Defying the torrid 2003 vintage, it's a thrillingly intense, hot-vintage-defying blend of Grenache with Sauvignon, Marsanne and Chenin Blanc.

Wine & Spirit

Anthony Rose

November 2006

Fine Wine - Three's a crowd, let's move on shall we?

French wine is often thought to mean Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Rhône. But what about the rest of the nation? **Anthony Rose** picks out some lesser-spotted gallic highlights.

2003 Le Soula Blanc, VdP des Côtes Catalanes

New wave, new age, this wonderful barrel-fermented blend of Grenache with Sauvignon, Marsanne and Chenin Blanc defied the elements in the torrid 2003 vintage to show what high altitude Fenouillèdes minerality is all about.

The Observer Magazine

Tim Atkin MW

December 2006

My wines of the year

2002 Le Soula Blanc, Vin de Pays des Coteaux des Fenouillèdes
Spicy, toasty and complex: one of France's best whites.

The Times Magazine

Jane MacQuitty

1st December 2007

100 Best Winter Wines - 25 best wines under £20

2004 Le Soula Blanc, Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes, Gérard Gauby, France

Anyone brave enough to spend £20 on this humble Vin de Pays will be rewarded with a sumptuous, spicy, pineapple and sweet hazelnut – oak scented wine – a triumphant blend of low-yielding, principally Grenache Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc grapes from steeply elevated sun-trap vineyards.

2003 Le Soula Rouge, Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes, Gérard Gauby, France

The high altitude upper Agly valley in Roussillon now has lots of foreign investors, but Le Soula was the first, and this delicious 2003, the beatwave vintage and a blend of 50-50 Grenache to Cabernet Sauvignon, heaves with distinguished, fat, bold, spicy, mulberry-stashed 14 per cent alcohol fruit.

Decanter Magazine

James Lawther MW

February 2007

A Case of Adventure

Le Soula Blanc, VDP des Côtes Catalanes 2003 ****
Hazelnut and honey. Minerally finish. Up to 2008.

Le Soula, VDP des Côtes Catalanes 2003 ****
Ripe but restrained. Dark cherry aroma. Crisp finish. 2006-2012.

The World of Fine Wine

May/June 2004

Standing Up - The World of Fine Wine tasters recommends classic and less well known wines at different levels of maturity.

2001 Le Soula Vin de Pays des Coteaux des Fenouillèdes – 15

Pale lemon appearance, with ripe, peachy, almost peach kernel aromas, pleasingly framed by nuances, toasted oak. Despite its abundant phenolic, almost Viognier-like aromas, mealy flavour and opulent texture, the palate reveals remarkably pure fruit and a striking mineral vein. With terrific intensity, in no way overblown, this is well delineated and precise, with an enlivening dart of acidity and fine driven finish. This is wonderfully well made, with a very deft touch. A stunning wine that soars above VdP status and would demand attention alongside many a middle-ranking Meursault.

Wine Behind the Label

Philip Williamson & David Moore

2005 Edition

Domaine Le Soula Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes

The white and the red here are labelled under the new Vin de Pays des Fenouillèdes in the Agly Valley. (VdP des Côtes Catalanes from 2003 vintage) Both wines are excellent and are indicative of the long-term potential of these high-altitude vineyards. The property has been developed by Gérard Gauby, Eric Laguerre, who has his own property at Domaine Laguerre, and UK wine importer Roy Richards. The key to quality is the 600m elevation of the vineyards, at the limit of ripening but where the south-facing aspect creates a sun trap. The red Le Soula blends Grenache and Syrah and the wine is extraordinarily dense, very backward young but with the potential to add layers of the complex dark mineral fruit with age. The brilliantly intense, mineral and citrus white is a blends of Rousanne and Grenache Gris. It is a benchmark Roussillon white. The vineyards are all farmed biodynamically. (DM)

Vin de Pays des Cotes Catalanes Rouge Le Soula *****

Vin de Pays des Cotes Catalanes Blanc Le Soula ****

Vin de Pays des Cotes Catalanes Rouge Le Soula *****

Vin de Pays des Cotes Catalanes Blanc Le Soula ****

Harpers

26 mars 2004

Roussillon Rangers

If the Roussillon is known for its adventurous winemakers, a core of pioneers in the Coteaux des Fenouillèdes can be seen as the region's vanguard. Monty Waldin reports on the newest spot on southern France's vinous map.

For a generation, France's Midi region has seen an influx of winemakers and investors from other French regions. In recent years, nowhere has this trend been more evident than in the previously obscure Coteaux des Fenouillèdes.

This sub-region covers 5,000 hectares(ha) of vines in north-west Roussillon, mainly in the department of the Pyrénées-Orientales but also in the Aude.

The region begins a 20-minute drive west of Perpignan and the Mediterranean coast and runs up the Agly River valley, the most northerly of the three river valleys traversing Roussillon (the others being the Têt and the Tech).

Historic remains

Vine growing is said to have begun here 8,000 years ago under the Greeks, although evidence of the oldest human habitation in Europe is documented at the European Centre of Prehistory in the commune of Tautavel. This tourist-magnet and museum relates finds uncovered in nearby caves containing the 450,000-700,000-year-old remains of *Homo Erectus*, the precursor of Neanderthal man and *Homo Sapiens*.

Gauby the Great

Wine growing received a boost when some of Hannibal's soldiers settled here in 217 BC. The modern-day Hannibal is Gérard Gauby, the key figure in the revival of Roussillon in general and the Fenouillèdes in particular. Gauby's wines fetch the highest prices of any wine in Roussillon – in the €80 range, if bought locally, for his top Muntada Côtes du Roussillon Villages red - a Syrah/Grenach Noir/Carignan blend). Burgundians Frédéric Lafarge and Pierre Morey paid a recent visit to Gauby, possibly to see how he could obtain grand cru Burgundy prices for Roussillon reds.

Although Gauby's eponymously named estate vineyard and winery is in the commune of Calce, and thus outside of the Coteaux des Fenouillèdes, he was one of the first to spot the potential of the area.

In 1996, Gauby drove up the Agly River valley to do some consulting for a winegrower with a winemaking problem that needed fixing. He identified the south-facing slopes of the Soula Valley in the high Fenouillèdes, around the communes of St Arnac, St Martin de Fenouillet, Le Vivier and Lesquerde, as offering outstanding potential.

Here the grapes experience later ripening and greater finesse than down on the Agly river valley floor around Maury, for example, where the grapes can ripen to 16% alcohol and are then often fortified into vins doux naturels, a style of wine currently in decline.

Heart and Soula

The key to the Soula Valley is the difference in elevation it offers: the valley floor has the highest Soula Valley vines at nearly 600m, while those in Maury are at around 100m above sea level and more influenced by the Mediterranean heat.

Being further inland than Maury, the Soula Valley experiences a more continental climate and grapes would not ripen there but for its south-facing aspect: Soula is an Occitan word for a 'sun-trap'. (The historic language of the Fenouillèdes is Occitan, and not Catalan, which was spoken immediately to the south.)

Gauby, his UK importer Richards Walford and a local grower ten years Gauby's junior called Eric Laguerre, who was head of the St Martin de Fenouillet cooperative as well as being an independent grower, formed a joint-venture in 2000.

Laguerre contributed vines (mainly Syrah, Grenache Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon for reds; Grenache Blanc, Grenache Gris, Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Marsanne and Roussanne for dry whites), Gauby contributed winemaking expertise and Richards Walford and its backers guaranteed the UK distribution and thus the capital to renovate the oldest vines, replant and create a small winery called Domaine Le Soula in St Martin de Fenouillet.