

AUTUMN 2022 ₹300

Sommelier INDIA

THE WINE MAGAZINE

BORDEAUX FUTURES

Vintage 2021 – Complicated
page 30

SULA

STRIDING
CONFIDENTLY
AHEAD

page 24



SHOBANARAYAN

wonders why the Languedoc region is not better known having tasted the wines during a visit to Mas de Daumas Gassac

The languid wines of Languedoc

In a seemingly short span of time, Mas de Daumas Gassac has earned a stake among the top wines of the world

Languedoc needs a “train puller”, says Samuel Guibert. We are standing atop a hill with a spectacular view of Mas de Daumas Gassac, a domaine founded by his father, Aime Guibert and mother, Veronique 50 years ago. Today, Samuel and his three brothers, Basile, Roman and Gael, run the estate. Their 1982 red wine made it to the Decanter Hall of Fame. Equally, their white wines have received rave ratings from wine critics like Andrew Jefford. In a seemingly short span of time, Mas de Daumas Gassac has earned a stake among the top wines of the world. The question is, why is the region not better known than it is? Given the “Bordeaux bashing” that is going on, why can’t Languedoc up its “cool” quotient?

Samuel pauses when I pop this question. It is sunset and the air is perfumed with the honeysuckle fragrance of the Coronilla flower (*Coronilla valentina*). Below us and all the way to the horizon, we see vineyards bordered by forests. Aime Guibert wanted to raze the forests down and plant a contiguous plot of vineyards over the 50 hectares that the family owns. His wife objected.

“My mother said, ‘I will divorce you if you cut

down all the trees’ and my Dad listened to her,” says Samuel.

Keeping the forests turned out to be a good move because it protected the vineyards from the elements – wind, hail, frost and rain. Bees and butterflies populate the land. The family is planting more trees, says Samuel, creating more forests.

If you talk about wines from Languedoc, Mas de Daumas Gassac always pops up, along with Gerard Bertrand, founder and producer of biodynamic wines. The problem, according to Samuel, is that you need more Domaines than just two in order for a region to flourish.

“How did Burgundy become, well, Burgundy?” he asks. “Because there were many winemakers who aspired to make wine at a high level. And you need more than one or two names to become train-pullers – to bring tourists and wine lovers to a region.”

The Guibert brothers are trying. Basile Guibert who lives in Singapore and looks after Asia is a warm and passionate vigneron. He clearly loves his family. In interviews, he talks about how his parents bought the land in Languedoc soon after they married. They both loved good wine and the land. Once they acquired what was then

farmland, they wondered what to plant.

Aime’s friend, Henri Enjalbert, was a reputed geologist from the University of Bordeaux. He visited the Guiberts, analysed the soil and noted that it was good for growing wines. “He said that the soil was unique and could produce grand crus in 200 years. My parents heard the first part of the sentence and not the second,” laughs Basile.

In 1972, Aime and Veronique Guibert planted their first vines, 17,000 cuttings from traditional Cabernet Sauvignon and many other types of grapes from exotic and rare varieties of vines that they picked up during their travels. Consider their delicious 2020 red. It contains 71% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Syrah, 5% Tannat, 4% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, 3% Petit Verdot, 2% Pinot Noir, 2% Malbec, 4% *variétés rares* such as Barbera, Nebbiolo, Dolcetto, Armigne, Arnie, Bastardo, Saperavie, Tchkaveri, Montepulciano, Areni Noir, Tchekavesi, Souzon, Brancellao, Carmenere, Abouriou et Plavac Mali.

It wasn’t always this way. Languedoc was known for plonk, entry-level wine even though the region is among the world’s largest wine-producing regions. Aime Guibert had ambitions of changing not just his destiny but Languedoc’s destiny. He persuaded their friend, the famed Bordeaux oenologist, Emile Peynaud, who consulted with Château Margaux, Château Haut-Brion and other iconic wine producers to come down and advise them. Today, their top cuvées are named after their mentor.

The strategy worked. By the mid-90s, they were compared to top estates. “The Guiberts really paved the way for the rest of us,” says Isabelle Thillaye du Boullay, who runs Domaine de Pelican nearby. “They showed us what was possible.”

Some of their wines are available in India distributed by Nikhil Agarwal of All Things Nice (Mumbai) who sells five wines from the



Moulin de Gassac range. Try their refreshing Faune Vin Blanc and well-chilled Chardonnay during this hot season, or the red wine, Elise.

Aime passed away in 2016 and today, his wife, Veronique is the matriarch. Petite and gregarious, she has a Master’s degree in psychology, Ph.D in ethnology, studying the Irish, and is a hypnotherapist, painter, wonderful cook and mother of five sons.

When she learned I was vegetarian, she invited me home and made a terrific dinner with asparagus and aubergine parmesan. “Emile Peynaud used to love my aubergine dishes,” said Veronique. “He said that it went well with red wine.”

As I drove back after dinner, I thought about Samuel’s statement. Which other estates would join hands with Mas de Daumas Gassac to become ‘train pullers’ for the region? Mas Julien is a highly rated Domaine but the “owner likes to play soccer on Saturdays,” say locals admiringly – meaning that he doesn’t have the single-minded focus needed to elevate the region. Château Capion down the road is owned by a Russian who has poured money into the estate but is an absentee landlord. That leaves Gerard Bertrand with his array of businesses including hospitality and the Guiberts. Burgundy in contrast has at least 33 grand cru vineyards and countless premier cru ones. Will the Guibert boys persuade their contemporaries to pump enough passion into their wines so that it becomes a Languedoc wine movement? That may be a story for the next 20 years. ♦

Chardonnay and Faune Vin Blanc, refreshing wines from the Moulin de Gassac range

The wines are available in India distributed by Nikhil Agarwal of All Things Nice (Mumbai) who sells five wines from the Moulin de Gassac range