

Terra Vita Vinum : la passion des Briand au service de vins d'exception

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Terra Vita Vinum : The Briands' passion for excellence wines



Bénédicte and Luc Briand grow 25 hectares of Chenin and red grape varieties in the heart of Anjou Noir. Their credo is to extract the best from the dark rocks of the Armorican massif to produce exceptional wines. So much so that many professionals in the trade, as well as the most discerning oenophiles, compare their whites to those of a certain Richard Leroy, who is also a good friend of this passionate couple.

Bénédicte, a graduate of the ESCP business school and founder and owner of the Vins et Indépendance winery north of Nantes from 2002 to 2014, joined her future husband Luc Briand in 2015 - an Angevin and the son of winegrowers (domaine Julien Briand) - at the PlusValue consultancy in Nantes, where he is the managing director, having previously spent 15 years helping farmers make the transition to organic farming.

Precision work

Three years later, the lovebirds headed north to change their lives, to give new meaning to their lives as close to the land as possible, and took over the reins of the Richou estate: a vineyard flirting with 30 hectares of vines, quite a chunk of land for a first experience as owners, which would become Terra Vita Vinum. Thanks to their remarkable interpersonal skills and spontaneity, they quickly forged strong links with local winegrowers, notably Richard Leroy, canvassed their winegrower friends - Mathieu and Emmanuelle Milan, Julien Guillot, Philippe Gilbert, Olivier Humbrecht, Jean-François Ganevat, the Biodivin network... - And they are working with Fabrice Redois, a geologist and professor at Angers University, to understand the essence of their soils, made up of schist, gneiss, rhyolite and granite, the ability of their terroirs to restore minerality and to plant the right grape varieties in the right places - in short, to 'put the church back in the middle of the village', to quote Luc.

At the moment:

Right from the start of their epic journey, they have been working biodynamically, favouring short pruning, limiting yields to between 25 and 30 hectares, opting for long ageing (initially 18 months, then a minimum of two years) and changing containers (amphorae, foudres, concrete eggs), cutting into their cash flow while producing a ready-to-drink cuvée that will become iconic (Large Soif), in order to be able to pay their employees.

Between 2019 and 2020, they will grub up seven hectares to gradually plant nine new hectares (savagnin, pineau d'aunis... They added five hectares of Demeter-certified fruit trees, woodland and hedgerows as part of an agro-ecological approach, banning the use of inputs both in the vineyard and the cellar, and sending over 600 samples to dozens of analysis laboratories across France before the harvest - 'Each laboratory has its own speciality, and we wanted to compare the analyses to be sure of the results', explains the couple. This titanic task is made a little easier by their five imposing Dexter cows, which help them to clear the furrows between the rows...

Grandes Rogeries, the emblematic cuvée

A few years later, the Briands have tamed their volcanic rocks and have become one of Anjou's leading winegrowers, although they remain aware that 'failure is part of the job, and so is discouragement sometimes', as they like to say, quoting Alain Aspect, winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics in 2022, even though the 2024 harvest was poor but of great quality. Work on the parcels has intensified, pruning is becoming rarer and later, pressing is long and gentle, and the juices that come out of it are exceptional. Their clientele has also changed. Their red wines, imbued with finesse and elegance, fresh and flavoursome, yet intense in aroma, and matured for at least three years, are now found on the menus of Michelin-starred restaurants in over twenty countries.

Some of their parcel-based white cuvées, already on allocation, are sold out even before bottling. Like the cuvée Grandes Rogeries, which even the best tasters struggle to distinguish from Richard Leroy's iconic and highly speculative cuvées in blind tastings. And the duo confess that 'in no way do we want to produce the same wines as Richard'. But this grand chenin has a remarkable aromatic complexity, marked by a slight autolysis and smoky notes typical of Richard Leroy's wines, which extend to floral notes, honeysuckle and white-fleshed fruit, with a strong mineral undertone. It also affirms their identity, that of a top-class estate.

One drawback, though? It would seem that, like Richard Leroy's wines, their cuvées are gradually going down the road of speculation... But their ambition lies elsewhere: to pass on their passion, tenacity and pugnacity to new generations of winegrowers, so that these exceptional Anjou terroirs, which today produce some of the finest wines in the Loire region, can grow even further.