

The world's best wine magazine

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Decanter

Gusbourne
ESTATE

Sandhi

GINI

Orgo

NEWTON
JOHNSON

Vértice

Saurwein

Brokenwood

HAYWIRE

David

Franz

Domaine Le Champ des Murailles

Vassaltis VIÑEDOS DE
ALCOHUAZ

Domaine *Cockburn's*
l'Aiguelière *Vita Vinea*

Hickinbotham Clarendon Vineyard

BODEGAS CALLEJUELA *Errazuriz*

Domaine Stéphane Ogier VASSE

BODEGAS RODA FELIX

Weingut Bründlmayer

THE MOST EXCITING WINES OF 2018

HOUSE
OF ARRAS

Bosman

CARA

SUR

Lustau

Raúl Pérez

EQUIPO

NAVAZOS

DeMorgenzon

FAMILLE

PERRIN

Rusuda

Blank Canvas

BURN

COTTAGE

Frederick

Stevenson

Ferrari

WEINGUT KNEWITZ

Arnot Roberts

Thymiopoulos Vineyards

ATA RANGI



PLUS • Bordeaux • Champagne • Anniversary buys for 2019

Jane Anson

'Phylloxera was one of the main topics of conversation in Oregon'

IF YOU'RE A Pinot fan, The Eyrie Vineyards in Oregon is something of a pilgrimage. This is where David Letts and his wife Diana first planted 3,000 UC Davis vitis vinifera cuttings in 1965, making it officially the first plantings of Pinot Noir in the Willamette Valley, Oregon (see also *Wine Legends*, p114).

I've loved these wines for many years, so it was thrilling to seek out the original vineyard in Oregon a few months ago. I was visiting the wonderful Domaine Drouhin – a Burgundy-Oregon estate that I have long wanted to see – and David Millman, director of Drouhin, pointed out the original eyrie tree that stands just beyond the Drouhin vines. When I left, I headed down the road to explore and then bought all the different cuvées I could find in the local shop (okay, there were only two).

I managed to catch up with Jason Letts, who has run The Eyrie Vineyards since his father died in 2008, a few weeks later. I wanted to understand more about how his father's obsession had turned an entire region on to the potential of a single variety. He told me that he had never met anyone as single-minded as his father.

'He decided he wanted to grow Pinot Noir first, and then found the climate to suit it.'

David graduated from UC Davis at a time when there were just a handful of students in the programme, and he spent a lot of time not only drinking Burgundy wines, but seeking advice on where to find a cool enough climate to make great Pinot himself. A study at Davis identified Galicia in northern Spain, New Zealand's South Island and Oregon, and I guess David decided that driving north to the Willamette Valley was less expensive than getting on a plane to Spain or New Zealand.

The fact that I can still ask his son about all of this is a reminder of how young the vineyards of Oregon are – something that is inspiring for other emerging wine regions, but also provided me with a useful lesson.

What I've been drinking this month

I've enjoyed **Raventos i Blanc De la Finca, Conca del Riu Anoia**

2015. This family has been making wine since 1497, and in 1872 Josep Raventos Fatjó made the first sparkling wine in Spain. This is mouthwateringly fresh and light in structure – deceptively so, because the citrus and elderflower flavours build gently through the palate and hang on with brilliant tenacity.

When David arrived in 1965, nobody thought there would ever be problems with planting vines on their own rootstocks. These were virgin soils for wine grapes, and the idea of phylloxera affecting them was far from anyone's mind. Planting ungrafted vines was not only cheaper, but also closer to the spirit of purity and simplicity that remains one of the biggest draws of winemaking in Oregon.

'In the 1980s and 1990s, Oregon wine tended to be populated with people who loved literature and philosophy,' agreed Jason. 'They placed more emphasis on aesthetics over financial stability'.

I was asking him about this because phylloxera was one of the main topics of conversation during my time in Oregon. It arrived finally in the early 1990s, and is still causing problems two decades later.

Rajat Parr and Sashi Moorman, who make Evening Land's Seven Springs, were pulling up the last sections of several vineyard plots that were no longer viable. I tasted a 2015 Pinot Noir from the Anden plot, with its gorgeously delicate fruit, and a wonderful 2017 Gamay Noir. Both plots were producing tiny quantities from disease-affected vines, but were now at the end of their life.

I wondered if winemakers in the region regretted making those choices in the early days, but their honest answers surprised me. While many admitted the vines were tired now, most winemakers were willing to look after them and let them be, as long as they were able to keep producing beautiful fruit.

Jason was also sceptical as to whether uprooting was really the best way to treat phylloxera. 'If you tear up vines, phylloxera will be encouraged to spread into healthier regions of the vineyard. So instead we use rootstock for new plantings only, and leave the old vines to go for as long as they can.'

Tasting those phylloxera-affected vines, I was glad the winemakers didn't rush to control everything by destroying every last trace of the louse. And as is so often the case, what I learned instead is that there are no easy answers when it comes to winemaking. **D**



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