



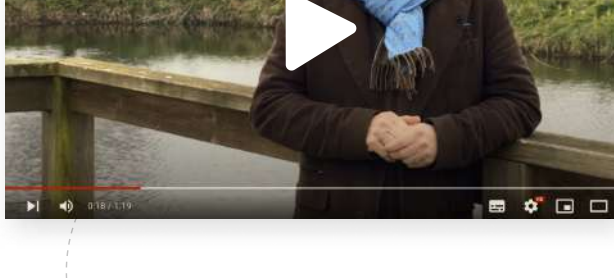
GRAND CORBIN-DESPAGNE

Newsletter No. 12

Ode to the environment

Dear friends,

While we celebrate this year our eleventh anniversary of having acquired organic farming certification in 2013, it is worth remembering that we didn't achieve that status overnight. Let me share with you some of that journey, so that you may gauge the impact that organic farming has had at our estate and also get to know what we have in store for the future, as we seek to move yet further forward.



1996



As you may know, I took over the reins of Grand Corbin-Despagne in 1996. I immediately joined a think tank set up by the Gironde Chamber of Agriculture with the object of exploring biodiversity in farming. This first introduction to sustainable environmental practices motivated me to work towards gaining certification in "Agriculture Raisonnée" (sustainable farming practices).

Having graduated in the field of microbiology and ampelography, I was naturally open to ideas on micro-biodiversity, the development of microbial life and the micro-biological activity of soils. I was also lucky enough to come from a wine-growing family that, before my time at the helm, never resorted to the use of chemical herbicides and always opted instead for mechanical weeding in accordance with good farming practices.

1998



By 1998, having carried out soil pit analyses across the vineyard, I had gained a better understanding and appreciation of the nature and diversity of my soils and subsoils. This meant that I could adapt the way in which we worked the topsoil in as precise a manner as possible. It was then that we acquired the "Agriculture Raisonnée" certification Terra Vitis, administered by AFAQ AFNOR.

2004

A few years later in 2004 (2024 being the twentieth anniversary), we began working organically in a number of our plots, and by 2008 the whole of the vineyard had been converted to organic growing. An application for official organic status was made in 2010, and certification was awarded in 2013.

2012



In parallel, as from 2012, I had eagerly joined SME, the first Environmental Management System association, which was set up by Bordeaux's CIVB (Wine Council) in order to determine the environmental impact of the wine-growing world. The association quickly acquired ISO 14001 certification which helped foster most particularly the decrease of water, electricity and fuel consumption across all wine estates.

2015



In 2015, I conducted my first trials in biodynamic farming in a plot of old Merlot vines that I was about to pull up. In so doing, I gave the plot a reprieve. The results obtained were very positive and encouraged me to adopt biodynamics across the whole of the vineyard. In 2021, I began the conversion process to acquire the Biodyvin seal.

Eager to be globally coherent, we began steps in 2022 towards acquiring RSE certification, a commitment which covers environmental, economic and human aspects. Currently, we are studying the reduction of carbon impacts, new packaging, as well as the well-being of our employees in the workplace.

What results have you achieved through all these actions? you may ask.

- We have gone back to being real vigneron, and we are delighted to have very healthy, vigorous vines. The painstaking work of observing and monitoring the vines on a permanent, daily basis is closer to artisanal-type farming.
- Biodynamic farming stimulates the vines, and these have become less productive. Even during increasingly hot and dry summers photosynthesis functions very well, and while alcoholic degrees are rising, the pHs and acidity levels ensure that the balances in the grapes are maintained.
- In taste, the wines are fresher, more fruit-forward and reveal the character of their terroirs. They express more than ever the uniqueness of our iron-rich soils.

What now?

In the same vein, in early 2000, we planted hundreds of metres of hedgerow. Consequently, on the estate today, we have no fewer than 400 different plant species, 2 hectares of woodland and a pond. I'm currently looking into the subject of plot by plot vineyard management in terms of cover crops and green fertilisers and also into whether further exploration of the idea of agro-forestry in the vineyard is of interest or not.

I've always believed in calling myself into question in order to progress, and as long as this policy works I will continue to do so.

The fact that I live in the middle of my vineyard and work there every day enables me to develop exciting new ideas on a continuous basis

My very best wishes for a wonderful, healthy and prosperous 2024!

François Despagne

Famille Despagne
Ever-present in Saint-Emilion
Owners since 1812

Château Grand Corbin-Despagne
Grand Cru Classé
Organic since 2004, officially certified since 2013

2023 : the 212nd vintage of the Despagne family
in the Grand Corbin terroir
The 28th vintage of François Despagne