

NEWSLETTER GRAND CORBIN-DESPAGNE 6

TO THE GLORY OF CABERNET FRANC

Dear friends,

First of all, allow me to begin this newsletter with the traditional New Year greetings and wish you a healthy, successful 2022 hoping that we will continue to have the pleasure of seeing each other.

The pruning of the vines began at a later date than usual in December, while January was quiet and peaceful at Grand Corbin-Despagne, offering us a chance to reflect and take stock. With the vines still dormant and a period of frosts continuing, I can take the opportunity to have a look at how my different areas of research are coming along.

Today I would like to tell you about a grape variety that is the signature of our great wines of Saint-Emilion: Cabernet Franc, which in our region also goes by the name of 'Bouschet'.

An historic Saint-Emilion grape variety

In the records of Grand Corbin-Despagne, my grandfather referred to a more significant presence of Cabernet Franc in our vineyard lasting up till the 1960s. It was the devastating frosts of 1956 which started the trend towards the present-day grape compositions in the region. Not only were there few good quality Cabernet Franc clones at that time, but Merlot also offered the guarantee of better yields, which led to the latter being the preferred choice.

When I took over the helm at the estate in 1996, only 20% of the vineyard was planted with Cabernet Franc. Today, this proportion has gradually increased to 25%, and my aim is to reach 35% very soon. This objective has been allowed thanks in particular to the work carried out by INRAE (France's Research Institute) since the 2000s, which has enabled better adapted clones. Rigorous work has also been done on massal selection, which I've carried out on very old vines at Grand Corbin-Despagne, some of them dating back to the beginning of the 20th century.

A real ally of Merlot with huge potential

In 2012, I did the grafting of the product of these Cabernet Franc massal selections thanks to the help of Lilian Bérillon, a renowned nurseryman, and was thus able to re-establish a heritage of this widely diverse grape variety that didn't result from clones. In its very essence, Cabernet Franc complements Merlot beautifully, the power and tension of the former combines wonderfully with the voluptuousness of the latter, providing a balance that has been amply demonstrated over many years. Cabernet Franc is the perfect foil for the exuberance of Merlot, and the magic of the great wines of Saint-Emilion is born of this partnership.

Cabernet Franc offers numerous advantages that make it well-adapted to climate change. It buds later and therefore is less likely to be hit by spring frosts. It is less prone to fruit set problems and more resistant to downy mildew. Finally, it maintains freshness and acidity with lower levels of pH in very hot weather vintages, such as we have been experiencing.

In order to help this wonderful, long-overlooked grape variety to thrive at Grand Corbin-Despagne, I'm making use once again of the trial pit studies I carried out over the first years I was in charge here. This highly precise mapping of the soils is a precious tool for determining which grubbed up plots will provide the best chance for this grape variety to perform at its best. So now, when conditions are

optimal, I replant with Cabernet Franc, as I've been doing over the last decade, during which I've pulled up 5.5 hectares of Merlot, in order to replant 3.5 hectares with Cabernet Franc.

A few words on the 2021 vintage, and the latest news

There's no need to reiterate how tricky the 2021 was. It's engraved in our memories. However, the latest tastings we've done after the blending have put the smile back on our faces. The wines promise to have great Bordeaux classic style. They show lovely freshness with a certain opulence, while displaying excellent balance and pretty fruit. A real Saint-Emilion!

As for our latest news, we are currently in the process of 'Biodyvin' biodynamic conversion.

In the cellars, we are working on an extension project in order to build a trials facility for micro-plot vinification experiments. For the 2021 vintage, we have also doubled the volume of our wines aged in amphorae. This ageing method enhances the retention of freshness in the wine. 2021, by the way, is a vintage in which Cabernet Franc is in higher proportion.

I look forward to getting in touch again by way of the next newsletter and urge you to come and see us at Grand Corbin-Despaigne where you are always welcome, as you will be at the Millésime Bio de Montpellier wine fair, where we shall be from 28th February to 2nd March.

Hoping to see you very soon,