

Selections



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Introducing the Great Down-to-Earth Wines of Les Cuvées du Firmament

It was mid-October and we were somewhere deep in the Minervois wine region between Carcassonne and Béziers, worried that we were going to be late for our 10:30 AM appointment with Franck Léonor of Les Cuvées du Firmament. 'Emma' (our global positioning system - so named because of "her" lovely English accent that reminded us of Emma Peel on the TV show 'The Avengers') was doing her best to guide us through the labyrinth of country roadways and roundabouts. While she hadn't let us down before, we were doubtful this time as we climbed higher and higher on roads best described as lanes and then paths.



Franck and André Léonor at Vinisud - Montpellier

We were most anxious to get there. We had first sampled the wines of Famille Léonor at trade shows in Cannes and Montpellier last February and had been most favourably impressed. We thirstily recalled the big, expressive red wines made the old-fashioned way. And, we were looking forward to seeing Franck again. Franck's family acquired the vineyard, house and outbuildings, which had been deserted for years, in 1956. Since then they have patiently rebuilt and restored the buildings and property which now comprises almost 75 acres of prime vineyards. Even though he grew up in a winemaking family, Franck chose a career in academia, becoming a teacher in Bordeaux. But the call of the Minervois and the allure of creating something very special proved irresistible. So, a couple of years ago Franck returned to the family estate near the village of Siran (and only a few kilometres from Minerve, the capital of the Cathars) in the best part of the Minervois, the northern zone of Minervois-la-Livinière to rejoin his mother and uncles André and Antoine. Uncle André is an expert stonemason and his handiwork can be seen throughout the estate. Among Uncle Antoine's many talents is his ability to speak the ancient language of Oc.



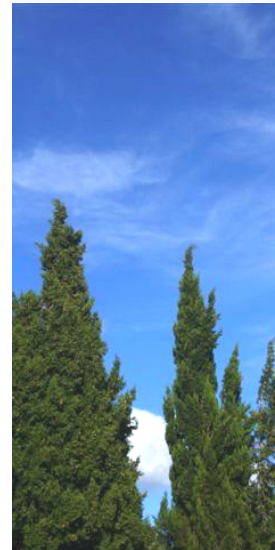
Franck Léonor and Hélène – note the wine!



Antoine, Marie Alice and André

We arrived at the Léonor house right on the dot of 10:30. Good old Emma. It had started to drizzle and two very serious dogs barked what only an optimist could call a welcome. Madame Léonor (Marie Alice) came to our rescue and showed us into their dining room where several bottles stood ready for our assault. Franck soon joined us and as he chatted with Hélène, I did what I do best ... I tasted (one must always strive for the most efficient division of labour). All that conversation can make a girl mighty hungry and, in the most polite way possible, my cohort asked if she might have a bit of bread to fend off certain starvation. Somehow, from the bowels of the house Madame Léonor heard her and within moments a marvellous spread of cheeses, meats and country pâtés appeared. Man, did it go well with the wines, and vice versa.

Their vineyard is situated on a hillside of clay and chalky soil that enjoys more than three hundred days of sunshine each year (we were there on one of the other sixty-five days – it poured as we tasted, but the vineyards have great drainage as can be seen in the second picture taken afterwards) and a most marvellous view. The old vines are bathed in the glorious scents of the surrounding garrigue (wild asparagus, thyme, rosemary, maritime pines and evergreen oaks). The grape varieties are typical of great Languedoc wines: Syrah, Grenache, Carignan and Cinsault. The Léonors do everything the old fashioned way when it comes to tending the vines and making the wines. Yields are kept low through disbudding and summer thinning (vendange en vert), harvesting is done completely by hand, the grapes are destemmed, traditional vinification methods are followed and the premium wines are partly aged in French oak for twelve to fifteen months. Incidentally, “Firmament” means the arch or vault of the skies – alluding to the over-reaching, mystical character of these fine wines.



Le Firmament

The Down-to-Earth Wines of Les Cuvées du Firmament

The Les Cuvées du Firmament brand is a recent addition to the Famille Léonor stable of wines. Existing contractual agreements prevent them from marketing their traditional brands (that consistently receive top awards and glowing reviews from the wine press) in new markets. The three red wines we are offering are made in the same way as their regular wines and are crafted to appeal to the most discerning palate.

While not yet released, the 2004 Cru La Livinière Rouge is the top rated Minervois wine (90/100) in the most recent issue of the Wine Spectator (Jan.31 – Feb. 28, 2007) and the 2004 Sous le Ciel du Minervois Cuvée Vieilles Vignes Rouge is close behind (88/100) . I am certain the vintages we are offering are every bit as good and the bonus is that they are ready to drink right now. These truly remarkable wines, winners of many awards and citations, come in **twelve-bottle cases**. We plan to place our order for them with the LCBO on **Wednesday, March 28th**.

2005 Vin de Pays de l'Hérault Rouge – (13.5% Alc./Vol.)

\$13.95



It is hard to believe that this is a vin de pays! This lovely red wine is made from 65% Cinsault, 20% Syrah and 15% Grenache. It is a dark ruby colour and offers up tantalizing aromas of ripe red berries, rosemary and new leather. It is surprisingly smooth in the mouth, possessing excellent fruit and structure with very nice, soft tannins. Best of all, it is drinking beautifully now – by itself or with traditional bistro fare. This is a wine that should be kept within easy reaching distance whenever the urge for a glass of satisfying red presents itself. Order some of this little treasure for those thirsty moments.

2003 Sous le Ciel du Minervois Cuvée Vieilles Vignes Rouge - (14.0% Alc./Vol.)

\$23.60



This is a classic Minervois red made from 40% Carignan, 35% Syrah and 25% Grenache. Yields from the vines averaging 25 years of age were restricted to 40 hectolitres per hectare. The juice spent three weeks in vats for extra colour and body and the wine was aged for 12 months in new and used French oak barrels. This is an extremely well made, full-bodied, nicely structured wine. It is deep garnet and has a nose of black currents, raspberries, plums and white pepper. The blackberries (cassis) persist in the mouth along with hints of dark chocolate, garrigue and leather. It has silky tannins and a warming, lingering finish. I found this lovely wine to be drinking very well after having spent an hour or so in the decanter and would love to have it with roasts (particularly lamb) or hearty stews (it went wonderfully well with Madame Léonor's charcuterie too). It will keep very nicely for at least five

years. Click here to acquire some classic Minervois red for your cellar.

2002 Cru La Livinière Rouge - (14.5% Alc./Vol.)

\$32.05



I wish I could send you an ounce or two of this huge, very smooth, very serious wonder to try for yourself. It is spectacular. Made of equal parts Grenache and Syrah from very old vines and low yields (35 hectolitres per hectare) the grapes were selected during two hand harvests to ensure the grapes had reached optimum maturity. The juice was held in fermentation tanks for three to five weeks and the wines were aged in French oak barrels (60% new and 40% used once) for a year. This dark purple wine has a pronounced nose of cassis, raspberry preserve, old leather, minerals and spice. It is massive, round and very smooth in the mouth with a beautiful tannic structure. The taste of black currents

continues right through the very long finish. This is a wine for passionate wine-lovers to drink now or hold for many years. One problem – Franck has **only fifteen cases** in reserve for us. Please order now to secure some for your collection.

Soon to Emerge from Arthur's Cellar

Next will be some special Côtes du Luberon from Château de l'Isolette, the brilliant white Vins de Pays Duché d'Uzès (a recent find) from Domaine Chabrier Fils, two marvellous Italian Barbera d'Asti from Poderi Rosso Giovanni and Az. Agricola Ferro Carlo, wonderful Cahors from Château Famaey, nectar from the Burgundian house of Alex Gambal, beautiful creations from Domaine de Tara, some more Parker rated Châteauneuf-du-Pape (these from Mousset-Barrot) and many others.

Special Events – Food and Wine Pairing Evenings

We are very excited to announce that we will be hosting two food and wine pairing evenings in April with not one, but two French vintners. Jérôme Caillé of Château Robin and Charles Pacaud of Domaine La Croix Chaptal will join us at Bodega Restaurant in Toronto on Wednesday, April 18th and at Thyme Restaurant and Wine Bar in Oakville on Thursday, April 19th. We are currently plotting the wine and food selections with the chefs and will give you all the details and start taking reservations in the next week or so.

Delivery Updates

We have added a new section to our website that will provide you with delivery progress reports on the wines you have ordered.

Member Feedback

We really appreciate your feedback because it allows us to improve and better respond to your requirements. Many of your suggestions have already been put into place and we are working on several others. Thank you and please keep the comments coming (jaswalker@arthursellers.com).

For the wine club to be successful, we need as many wine buying Members as possible – please forward this newsletter to likely prospects and keep those referrals coming.

Many thanks and cheers,

Hélène and Jim

PS: Our wines are also available for restaurants and other establishments that serve beverage alcohol by the glass – their prices will be a little lower because PST is not charged. If you are aware of any that might be interested, please let us know.

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