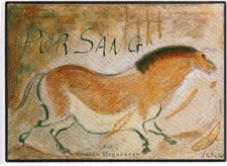


Didier Dagueneau, Saint Andelain



Didier Dagueneau was what the French call an "original". In Dagueneau's case, what was original about him was an intense competitiveness (he was the 1996 Husky racing champion of Europe). He used new oak, but not in order to apply a cosmetic veneer to a "prestige cuvée". He used new oak because he wanted the aromatic development a wine gets from "breathing" through the wood as it ages.

Dagueneau was the zenith of wine makers, according to some. Tragically, he was killed in a light plane crash on September 17, 2008. He was not only a genius at winemaking, but he also listened to his *terroir*: nothing escaped him. Dagueneau's aim was to show that Sauvignon blanc is one of the truly great white grape varieties, capable of producing wines that can match Chardonnay or Riesling for sheer quality and interest. He was fortunate enough to have a *terroir* as great as his ambition. He "only" had to add the methods, in the vineyard and in the cellar, that would allow him to realize the potential of that *terroir*. The impact of his bold wines is particularly dramatic because his vines are on the silex-rich slopes of St Andelain where the domaine has some of the choicest vineyard sites in this commune whose fame is rooted in its earth—95% clay-siliceous soil. It produces firm, very well-structured wines of great length and class whose aromas typify most the mineral, flinty, "smoky" character from which the Appellation, "Smoky Pouilly," probably derives its name.

Didier's son, Louis Benjamin Dagueneau, has taken over the winemaking at Dagueneau in a manner in which his father would be proud. He worked with his father for several years before his death and has brought the domaine, already one of the premier ones in France, to new heights with his crystalline, multi-layered wines. "I really learned everything from Didier," he says. "In essence, a wine must reflect its *terroir* and its vintage. No. 1: Wine is made in the vineyard. Everybody says that, but no one does it. You need to be rigorous and to have good sense. Second: Respect for nature. We converted to organic farming back in the 1990s. We tried everything in the vineyards and the cellar. We kept what we liked, and we ignored the rest."

The scrupulously gentle handling of the harvest continues in the cellars at the domaine. There is no pumping during the vinification process. The wine ages on the fine lees, unfinned but lightly filtered, before bottling. The wine never undergoes the malolactic fermentation. The aim is to conserve the wine's youthful fruit and not to impede the purest possible expression of *terroir*. The oak is beautifully balanced with the grape flavors and the mineral notes from the soil.

The Wines

- *Pur Sang* ["pur sang" means "thoroughbred"]: This is a truly "outsized" Sauvignon from an assemblage of different parcels of 30 year-old vines, entirely from the *argile à silex* soil of the butte. It is vinified and aged in new oak "cigar-shaped" barrels built to Dagueneau's specifications. The age of the vines makes the difference in quality and size and shows what a difference deep roots can make if the yields are kept low. The horse on the front label is a picture from a prehistoric cave painting in the "Painted Gallery" in France.
- *Silex*: An assemblage of different parcels of 50 year-old vines, entirely from the butte and only from those parcels with high levels of silex. It is vinified and aged in new oak "cigar-shaped" barrels built to Dagueneau's specifications. This rich and powerful wine, with great age-worthiness, is one of Dagueneau's top cuvées.

- *Blanc Fumé de Pouilly* : A blend from several vineyards of younger vines, this wine is barrel-fermented and aged half in stainless steel and half in large, neutral barrels. It includes some fruit from Pur Sang, Buisson Renard and Silex cuvées. The *Wine Advocate* (August, 2010) says of the Fumé de Pouilly, which it gives 90 points: "This sends shivers up my spine."
- *Buisson Renard*: From one parcel located mid-slope on the southwest side of Saint Andelain with vines that Benjamin Dagueneau considers to be his very best. The soil is silex (clay and flint). The vineyard is Buisson Menard, but Didier renamed the wine after a famous French journalist misprinted it; Dagueneau liked the new name "Fox Bush". This is a flinty, mineral-rich Pouilly.
- *Sancerre Le Mont Damné*: In the late 1990s, Didier bought a small 1/2 hectare parcel across the river from Pouilly in the heart of one of the most prestigious vineyards in the upper Loire Valley in Chavignol on the Mont Damné. The vineyard is steep and full of clay and limestone. Didier fought with both the local and AOC authorities, who finally granted him the right to plant a small portion of the vineyard each year. The vines are young, but the great vineyard site bestows structure, incredible length, and creamy texture.

Please note that we represent Dagueneau only in a limited number of states.