

Château Tour du Moulin, Fronsac



Quiet but sure Vincent Dupuch heads up Tour du Moulin, so named for the windmill that once graced the high ground where he lives and makes wine. The domaine's little cement fermentation vats were put in by his grandfather after the First World War, and stand about five feet tall, as if made for Lilliputians (most cement wine vats, by contrast, are enormous affairs). Paradoxically, the grandfather was a larger-than-life man who in his forties married a girl in her late teens and thereafter sired fourteen kids. The Napoleonic heritage laws subsequently fractured the domaine into bits for these kids. Vincent, when his time came, got the little house with the little winery attached and not much more. By then the vineyards had all been sold out of the family, and Vincent spent his formative years buying back the parcels that his grandfather had once farmed.

Today the wine of Tour du Moulin comes from 28 vineyard parcels, totaling 17 acres, in the limestone hills of Fronsac. The vineyard breakdown, reflected in the wine's blend, is 80% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc, and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. The oldest vines are Cabernet Franc, growing in a parcel planted just after World War II.

Fronsac is geographically quite an elevated appellation, full of steep hills and twisting roads—this is not the typical Bordeaux landscape of extensive vineyards on level ground. It's a unique and beautiful region that rises high above the confluence of the Dordogne and Isle rivers, just across from the far flatter appellation of Pomerol. In the old days, Fronsac wines were known as *vins de médecins* because of their power and color, and they were used to doctor weaker wines. Indeed, the historic record long ranked Fronsac's wines above the neighboring wines of Pomerol and St. Emilion. The potential today is enormous.

Modest domaines populate these hills, their small vineyards growing wherever a well-exposed site presents itself. Some of these domaines crop as much as they can and go for maximum production; others, following fashion, have grander ideas and give their wine the 3-star oak treatment with all the bells and whistles that go along with that. Then there is a small cadre of traditionalists committed to making a difference.

Vincent Dupuch is one of the leaders of this cadre. He is a soil expert and a specialist in *terroir*. He was brought over to Napa Valley in 2003 by Christian Moueix to consult for Dominus, and he has been asked to return. He is firmly in the Moueix school, if you will, sharing a preference for length and elegance, as opposed to the thick, very ripe "technological" wines currently in vogue. "Le sucre," he once said, "est pour les enfants." (Sugar is for kids). His wine—and he has only one, not bothering with a fancy luxury cuvée—has exquisite aromatics, moderate oak influence, supple, earthy fruit, and mineral-laden finesse.

Tour du Moulin is fundamentally a classy Fronsac, and a superb value in Bordeaux.