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In Faugères, Stunning Wines Reflect Nature, the Heart of Terroir

Nov 1, 2021 Cindy Rynning

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While in the Languedoc, I spent an afternoon and evening in Faugères where I embraced the community spirit, experienced never-ending hospitality and was inspired by all who were excited about the area's future. With a bold ten-year plan, *"Fine Wines by Nature"*, firmly in place, sound environmental practices promise continued success for the region, its people and wine aficionados who crave wines that reflect all of nature, the heart and soul of its terroir.

The small, artisanal-style appellation of Faugères adjoins the lower foothills of the Cevennes in the Upper Languedoc – about 20 km north of Beziers and adjacent to the Monts de Faugères. Covering 5000 hectares, only 1900 hectares are under vine. Seven villages with 57 wineries and one cooperative produce about 55,000 hl of wine per year. The vast

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majority of its production remains in France – only 13% of the total are exported. Reds and rosé wines are comprised of Syrah, Grenache, Lédoner Pelut, Carignan, Mourvèdre and Cinsault. White wines are of Roussanne, Vermentino, Marsanne, Grenache Blanc, Viognier and Clairette.



Small woodlands, garrigue and other elements of a diverse environment are intermingled with vineyards and each is crucial to the fragile ecosystem.

What makes Faugères quite unique in the Languedoc, though, is the soil: 100% schist amongst the rough and stony terroir. Yields tend to be low and, in many ways, it's been difficult for winegrowers to farm this somewhat arid land during the summer months. In Faugères, the Mediterranean climate offers abundant sunshine and heat, yet heavy rains and wind in the autumn and winter may occur.

Despite the infertility of the land, schist provides a well-draining component. Water trickles through and is stored deep underground. Vines, then, are forced to grow deep roots in order to find the water. In the searing hot summer, water stress is high, but thanks to the schist (forming sheets and cracks in the rock), roots are able to reach deeper for its nutrients. Schist tends to contribute to the wines' roundness with mineral, floral and fruity notes.

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Nature is at the heart of the terroir: they are not vines in the middle of nothing. In Faugères, it is vines in an environment of scrubland that have a strong impact on the typicity of our great wines. It is unique and not relocatable, it is the

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very essence of appellations of origin. Nathalie Caumette,
President of the AOP Faugères, April 2017



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Concerned members of the Faugères wine industry are striving to "understand the ecosystem and adapt their techniques in order to safeguard it for the future." *"Fine Wines by Nature"* sets the example by connecting its winegrowers with their natural surroundings. The plan's primary goal is to get as close to the winegrowing ecosystem as possible. But how?

Among other strategies, a strong environmental commitment is already realized – 83% of wineries have utilized at least one agri-environmental technique. 70% of the wineries and over 50% of vineyard areas are involved in organic viticulture and biodynamics – there's a plan to completely eliminate the use of herbicides. 19% of the wineries have achieved HVE (High Environmental Value, level 3) and there are 2 collective washing stations for agricultural tools available to preserve water quality. Of further importance is the use of grass cover in the vineyards, the restoration of dry-stone walls to deter soil erosion, an implementation of mixed farming and hedge planting, the maintenance of rivers and streams and an introduction of agri-ecosystems. By all accounts, the environmental future is bright in Faugères.

Established in 1939 is Faugères' sole cooperative, Les Crus Faugères – Mas Olivier. I was more than impressed that during one of the last (and perhaps busiest) days of harvest, their team took time to share their wines

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and talk about the region with our group – community spirit at its best. After a fascinating tasting of wines along with a quick tour of the winery, we had dinner with a plethora of producers at Domaine Ollier Taillefer.



Proving that the very special wines from Faugères are incredibly food friendly, especially with classic dishes from the region, our menu of Wild Boar Stew paired with older vintages, Pélardon des Cévennes (goat's cheese from the region) and dessert of Baba with Fine Faugères was one of the most memorable.



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Apparently, wild boar are nuisances in the vineyards, but in a stew? An appreciated ingredient! Savory and textured, accompanied by potatoes, onions and vegetables, the dish begged for sips of the red wines of Faugères. The fresh and creamy Pélardon exuded beautiful aromas and each bite was a lovely pairing with the bright, lively white wines and rosés, as well as the reds.



When the dessert of Baba was placed on the table, intense aromas of brandy burst from this little cake of deliciousness! Domaine Ollier-Taillefer Fine Faugères 2006 is a regional, niche brandy that matures and gains complexity in oak barrels. After five years at least (usually 10), Fine Faugères is bottled. Fruit forward with salinity and tobacco aromas and flavors, this beauty was soft and round on the palate with a lingering finish. (The first distillation of this local wine dates back to at least the 18th century and its first mention is in the inventory of the cellars of Empress Josephine at the beginning of the 19th century.)



6 Notable Wines from Faugères

During our exceptional dinner, conversation flowed as much as the wine! Following are just a few of my many favorite swirls and sips from Faugères.

Château Chenaie Les Douves Blanches 2020 – A lovely surprise awaited me with this glass of 70% Roussanne and 30% Viognier. On the nose, candied apricot and herbs led to flavors of pears, caramel. Fresh and creamy, the wine was aged for 6 months in oak and has the ability to age for 5-8 years. This wine was a joy to sip with the Pélardon cheese and fig jam.



Domaine de la Reynardière Cuvée Prestige Rosé 2020 – Snappy and vibrant, this rosé was a blend of 80% Syrah and 20% Grenache aged in stainless steel. Each sip was everything I wanted in a lovely rosé – balance, layers of fresh flavors of red fruit, bright acidity and a lingering finish.



Mas Olivier Les Crus Faugères Mas Olivier Bio Rosé 2020 – A refreshing blend of 60% Cinsault and 40% Grenache was a brilliant aperitif when our group arrived at Domaine Ollier-Taillefer for dinner. Notes of sweet red berries (strawberries!), juicy watermelon, guava and bright minerality were exceptional and complemented an array of small bites including tapenade, cheeses and charcuterie.



Château Chenaie Les Douves 2017 – Glorious purple in the glass with peppery, toasty aromas, each sip offered fresh red currants, hint of blueberries and cherries framed with firm yet velvet-like tannins. A blend of 75% Syrah, 15% Mourvèdre and 10% Grenache, the wine was aged for 12 months in oak and was a brilliant match to the stew.



Château de la Liquière Nos Racines 2019 – Of Carignan from two vineyards each over 100 years old and Grenache, the name “nos racines” refers to the deep roots of the ancient vines as well as the achievements of several generations who have worked the land. Ripe, dark fruit on the nose and concentrated palate were notable and offered a lovely accompaniment to not only the stew but the Pélardon cheeses.



Domaine Florence Alquièr Rieutord 2017 – Elegant and complex with notes of florals, balsamic and graphite on both nose and palate, what's not to love? The blend of Syrah 50%, Carignan 30% (vinified using carbonic maceration), Grenache 15% and Mourvèdre 5% was aged in mostly stainless-steel tanks with just a brief time in oak.



*Note: If you're unable to find the wines mentioned above at your local wine shop, please look for available choices from Faugères with similar styles and prices.

Cheers! ~ Cindy

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