

On the “divin” with Roman Guibert – Mas de Daumas Gassac



One of Languedoc's icons is also a success story in terms of transmission. Mas de Daumas Gassac, originally a simple farm nestled in a small valley north of Aniane in the Hérault hinterland, was bought in 1971 by Véronique and Aimé Guibert. Henri Enjalbert, a professor at the University of Bordeaux III and a geographer specializing in vineyard geology, accompanied them and identified a terroir of glacial sandstone reminiscent of certain Burgundian soils: this was to be the catalyst for the Guiberts' winegrowing adventure. They soon planted Cabernet Sauvignon, uncloned and sourced from the great Bordeaux châteaux, followed by a multitude of grape varieties reminiscent of their travels. Finally, in 1972, they built a semi-underground winery adjacent to the underground springs that run through the valley. 1978 saw the first vinification under the guidance of renowned oenologist Émile Peynaud. Nothing was easy for these pioneers, but their talent and style were eventually recognized worldwide. Once their red wine had been acclaimed by the greatest critics, these avant-gardists concocted their bubbles: the Frizant rosé sparkled in 1981, and its success confirmed the family's understanding and intuition for consumer trends. The only thing missing was a great white wine, which was produced in 1986. Alongside these flasks, Aimé Guibert launched Moulin de Gassac in 1991.

The estate employs 40 people and extends over 50 hectares planted with vines, but several hundred with Mediterranean forests surrounding the plots. It is now run by the couple's five sons: Samuel, Gaël, Amélien, Basile and Roman. For us, the latter bows to the exercise of the "Divin".

When do you decide to join the estate?

I was a student who didn't like it. As soon as I graduated from high school, I wanted to go and join my older brother Samuel in New Zealand. He was working for Montana Wines. I spent a year there and realized my love for the place and for wine.

I came back to Carpentras to do a BTS. The region fascinated me, and that's where I met the incredible Serge (of the eponymous restaurant). I remember his kindness: he lives wine, he's so generous. In 2001, I was making wine at Trévallon, finishing my BTS, and Samuel was already at the estate. Dad opened his arms wide; he was super welcoming. In 2002, I came back to benefit from his experience.

You're surrounded by four of your brothers. Is working with your family always easy?

For over twenty years, there have been ups and downs. Every year, we've put a lot of our intelligence and goodwill into improving the way we work: we're all managing directors, in turn; every three years, one of us takes over the presidency. A majority vote is needed to approve management, investments, farming, sales and winemaking decisions. We take longer to make decisions, but they are powerful, and we don't go back on them. The way we work is very healthy. Everyone brings his or her own personality and experience to the table, enriching the life of the domain. What binds us together is that we all have a very strong past here. We are ambassadors but also defenders of the place.

How do you divide up your roles?

Samuel, 53, manages the estate, overseeing Mas vinification and export management. He studied geography at the Sorbonne. Basile, 40, oversees vinification with Samuel, and oversees exports to Asia and communications. He studied political science. Amélien, 46, oversees IT; he studied law. Finally, Gaël, 50, oversees the winegrowing side and human resources; he studied math. I'm in charge of sales in France and harvesting is the best part: you finish early and party! I'm the best-known Guibert among grape-pickers, and my brothers are jealous!

What do you see as the keys to Daumas Gassac's success and long-term future?

It's the idea of not being in fashion. We're aware that Daumas Gassac is a symbol, and we're also aware of its uniqueness. It's not easy to understand: we're rooted in the Languedoc, we're viscerally attached to our region, but we have a deep soil that's found in Meursault, plant material that comes from all over France, a depth of color that's more Médoc-like and a

freshness that's reminiscent of northern vineyards, and all this outside the appellation. This calls for education. In this chemical-free vineyard, certified since 2024, buried in the wild garrigue that characterizes our wines, there's an alchemy. Added to this is a special climate: June, July and August have phenomenal amplitudes, just like in the deserts. The thermometer often plunges at night, so we can drop to 6 or 7°C in July, which has a marked effect on the wines.

« The first years were almost bankrupt, as no one wanted the most expensive local wine in the world.»

For a long time, before ambitious winegrowers settled in, the Mas was isolated in this hinterland. How did you bring the world to you?

The first years were almost bankrupt, as nobody wanted the most expensive local wine in the world. Finally, the Anglo-Saxon press fell in love with us at first sight, which helped us get off the ground. Private friends also agreed to buy a few cartons in advance to support us, en primeur. It was a brilliant but desperate idea, and that's how we came up with the system we still use today: 100% of our production is sold on allocation. We make a point of never forgetting our first loyal customers.

And then there's our multicultural harvest: back in 1978, Mum put an advert in "Midi libre" and a dozen Madagascan students turned up. The first 15 harvests were done with them, then the second generation arrived, a population of singers, who sang in the vineyards, and the atmosphere endures.

Following two humanitarian convoys to Romania and Poland, Mum forged links with families who came over, and this has continued with the second generation. Every year, their friends and cousins come. We have around ten nationalities, based on word-of-mouth... There are also French people, retirees and students, making a total of 45 to 50 cutters. Recruitment begins in January and Basile selects; we want human quality at every level.



Daumas Gassac was ahead of the curve when it produced a rosé sparkling wine in 1981. How did the idea come about? What is the result today?

There were many reasons for this. The first was romantic: during a trip to Italy, my parents fell in love with sparkling wines. Then we wondered what to do with very young vines. A second wine? We weren't for it. Our Frizant, more fruit than terroir, is perfect for young vines: today, with 40,000 bottles, it's a free electron that doesn't fit into any box, vinified in closed tanks, with no added sugar for fermentation. I call it the Third Musketeer, because it's part of the estate's DNA.

What do you see as future trends?

There's a search for freshness, digestible, authentic wines, through the world of naturalness. With today's tools, we can go very far in this vision of naturalness. There was a time when you had to be highly concentrated, but today you need mouth-filling mouthfeel, explosive fruit, but delicate textures. Because wine can also be enjoyed outside mealtimes.

What do you think of Trump's threats to the wine industry?

It's very worrying, as we've seen in the past. But it's not just that, I dream of the year when a French government presents us with a balanced budget forecast, and we enter an optimistic year. It's easy to write blank cheques: politicians are only in their own time, and we'd go bankrupt if we managed like that.

How do you feel about an industry that aims to destroy 100,000 hectares?

For years now, we've been seeing cooperatives close and private wineries open in our villages, but the results are still worrying. We're heading for a catastrophic future, the landscape is going to change, and we're not being defended on a European scale. Consumption is falling, I'm not convinced by the alcohol-free route, and French production is destined to decline and move towards excellence. Without expecting much from the public authorities, I think it's a shame that the cultural aspect of wine isn't considered. It's incomprehensible that we're in a country with so much history and so much wine, and yet wine is considered a drug! Wine education cannot be opposed to moderation. We infantilize people by demonizing them, we lack creativity, so we punish them. Aside from revitalizing the wine economy, it's important not to kill it off. On the other hand, it can be qualitative, integrated and beneficial to social life. Bans make people want to do the opposite.

You have a daughter, Louise, who's 15. What shall we drink to her wedding?

I've put a bunch of 2009s aside. We'll be drinking a Prieuré Roch Goillotte 2009. I vinified the 2023, an internship at the age of 45, and it was magical. That's what's so great about wine, you can call each other and there's a warm welcome.