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One of the most important and unchanging memories of the 1950s
Wolfgang

SULFUR IS REAL

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Fire and brimstone, the stench of hell—this is what sulfur has come to represent for many in the wine world. It's the mark of the industrial beast, an acquiescence to the crucible of commercial homogeneity. But is a wine without sulfur more virtuous, more healthy, more honest? That's a matter of spirited debate. Though I have felt the dogmatic edge of these discussions lessen in the past few years it is still used as a purity test in natural wine circles and a flash point for natural wine reactionaries. But to understand the hot tempers sulfur can ignite, we have to take a step back and look at what it actually does to wine.

Since the ancient Romans, sulfur has been the most-used additive in wine. It helped preserve and stabilize fermented grape juice, allowing it to be shipped and transported all over the Roman Empire. Though the dyed-in-the-wool natural winemakers refer to sulfur as a 'poison,' they are usually referring to how it kills healthy microorganisms in the fermentation process—not to humans. Eric Texier, featured in this month's Press 2, is a nuclear engineer turned natural winemaker, so his opinions carry the weight of both scientific and holistic methods. When he visited Vanderbilt Ave in April, he explained the role of sulfur in winemaking: "So, roughly, when you make wine, you need two microbes, yeast and bacteria. Yeast are easy to handle, they can't do too much trouble. Bacteria are really nasty. They can be super nasty and very fast. So the problem is to handle the bacteria. We need them at one exact point in the winemaking: not before, not after. And we need to control them as much as we can. A very efficient way is to use sulfur—very efficient. Bacteria are very sensitive to sulfur. You don't need tons of sulfur, but you need a bit. And it's very safe to use sulfur. You will have very clean wine even with a tiny amount of sulfur. Sulfur has never killed anyone...but alcohol did. So I don't know why the f#@% people are arguing about sulfur. If they have to yell about something it should be alcohol."

Other toxic wine additives famously include lead, which was used in wine for thousands of years, even in the 1800s. By comparison sulfur is incredibly safe and effective. But just because it doesn't cause acute toxicity for humans doesn't mean it isn't harmless; especially for those of us who are allergic. Wine typically has less sulfur than canned tuna or commercial dried fruit. The problem is though small amounts are enough to make stable wine, the industrial scale of wine production has seen historically excessive amounts added at each stage of the process to guarantee consistency, stability, and predictability. The over-use of sulfur has changed wine aesthetically and chemically over the past 100 years, and it's not surprising there has been a reckoning. But separating aesthetic trends from chemistry is easier said than done.

Sulfites naturally occur as a byproduct of fermentation, which complicates things further. This is why you'll see 'contains sulfites' on nearly every bottle of wine, even if zero sulfur was added. But fermentation only produces about 30 grams per liter of total sulfur, and it often dissipates by the time it is bottled, meaning very little of it remains as free sulfur. Distinguishing between total and free sulfur is crucial for any meaningful discussion. If you are concerned about an allergy, or if you want your wine to age for a long time, free sulfur is the relevant data. The amount of free sulfur in a wine is dependent on how much of the total sulfur binds to compounds in the wine. Sulfur that is bound to compounds like acetaldehyde is not free and can't trigger an allergy or help a wine age for 20 years. Winemakers can calculate the amount of free sulfur that will result by using a chart that corresponds to the pH of a wine. They will need to add more



Sulfur in it's raw state and in candle form

sulfur to a higher pH wine in order to achieve the same amount of free sulfur as a lower pH wine. That is just one of many considerations that will change the amount of free sulfur a particular bottle may contain, and none of this is easy to obtain as a wine professional, let alone a consumer. Winemakers themselves probably forget since the amounts may change for each wine and each vintage.

30 grams per liter (aka 30ppm) of total sulfur is about the upper limit for most natural wines, roughly speaking. US wines can contain up to 350 grams per liter of free sulfur, and even organic EU wines can have up to 100 grams. If you've been following along, that means the total sulfur is even higher, making for a very wide range that could be found on the shelves of a typical wine shop. Of course, there is no labeling to help you out. If you happen to be sensitive, like me, it can be a problem. At 30ppm total I'm usually OK. But many commercial wines contain 10 times that amount. Sweet German Rieslings, which I love, can easily have 200ppm. At levels above 30ppm I can quickly get red in the face, irritable, itchy, and lightheaded. It's no fun. For mild cases I can use drops called

‘Sparga Detox’ that can be found online, but I have to carry around childrens’ Benadryl in case of higher exposure; not an ideal situation, especially if you need to drive. This means I’ll often err towards the loud and proud zero sulfur wines just to be safe.

But are health reasons the main impetus for eschewing sulfur in winemaking? Probably not. There are no shortage of jokes about the stereotypical natural winemaker who chain smokes, stays up drinking and doing cheap cocaine, and yet rails against the poisonous effects of 10ppm of sulfur dioxide. It’s more likely this same personality type is drawn to zero-sulfur winemaking for the thrill. It’s like tearing ass on a Harley when everyone else is commuting in a Corolla. “I used to be a climber and it’s the same feeling,” Eric Texier explains. “You know you’re on the edge, but still, it’s fun. The problem is when you don’t know what you’re doing. So bad natural wine or bad zero sulfur wine is just because people have no f#@%ing idea of what they’re doing. I can’t afford to make all these wines without sulfur, because the chance that you will have shit in your glass is kind of huge. I know my yeast, I know my bacteria, I know what they did during fermentation. The result is sometimes I can’t afford to do a zero/zero wine.”

The risk is real, and for many winemakers it can mean the difference between selling their wine or going bankrupt. The hallmark of a zero sulfur wine gone awry is the appearance of the *goût de souris*, the dreaded ‘taste of the mouse,’ as they say in France, so-called because of its resemblance to a gamey mouse cage. Sometimes it tastes like tortilla chips; sometimes it tastes like skunky Budweiser; at worst it can taste like ‘gym socks,’ my least favorite as someone who is grossed out by feet. However, the mouse can be found in kombucha, sauerkraut, and apple cider vinegar, too. It won’t hurt you. Tasting it is dependent on a reaction with the chemistry of one’s own saliva, so some people actually can’t taste it. Some lost the ability to taste it after a bout with Covid.

The mouse is a curious creature. Some wines show it immediately upon opening, some will only have it after being open an entire day. If someone tells me a wine got mousey after an hour, I just make a mental note to drink it faster, but others truly despise the mouse and feel it covers up the details of a wine’s origins and is overly distracting. Sometimes the mouse goes away after aging in bottle. Sometimes it doesn’t. These variations can create all sorts of issues for a winemaker selling their wine, from preventing placements on a by-the-glass list at a restaurant to fully damaging one’s reputation. Higher price tags come with even more scrutiny of a potential ‘rodent’ infestation.

On the other hand, it means entry into a small group that is outspoken and tightly-knit. For some, like Nadia Verrua of Cascina Tavijn or Jeff Coute-lou (both featured in this month’s Press 4), sticking to zero sulfur has won them

scores of loyal followers around the world. In France, gaining the respect of older zero/zero heroes is still a crucial way to get your wines taken seriously by the in-crowd.

Farming organically brings far more positives to the world at large than forgoing sulfur, but zero sulfur wines have always been the tip of the spear, the way to get people to pay attention to bigger issues. This approach began in Beaujolais, where the natural wine movement started in earnest as a reaction to mass producers like Georges Duboeuf, who plunged Beaujolais into a crisis because of cloying, bubble-gummy Beaujolais Nouveau. Farmed with a host of poisons and manipulated with chemicals, Duboeuf and others nearly ruined the reputation of Beaujolais permanently. Yet figures like Jules Chauvet, the granddaddy of natty wine, taught people like Marcel Lapiere, Yvon Metras, Guy Breton, Jean Foillard, and others about the benefits of trying to make wine without sulfur, as well as working organically. Their work was central to turning the region's fortunes around, and zero sulfur wines were a provocative weapon in the battle against industrial viticulture and excessive chemical farming that destroys ecosystems. The same is true in many regions, like Emilia-Romagna, where zero sulfur wines drew a clear line in the sand against the excesses of industrial, low quality Lambrusco production.

Jules Chauvet called sulfur 'the easy way'. Without sulfur, his protégés were forced to fall back on pre-industrial methods and older traditions. The 'hard way' requires a very high level of hygiene in the cellar, and the fruit itself must be healthy and of a higher quality. For many, adhering to a zero-sulfur regimen is about process more than provocation. It forces them to address the holistic health of their vines. When Eric Texier's son Martin (also featured this month) started making wine, his first vintages were pretty gnarly, and, yes, mousey. Since then he has replanted vines and embraced the idea that great wines are made in the vineyard. Not using sulfur is the ultimate test. His wines have reached another level recently. "It takes a lot of work to do nothing," Martin says.

Winemaking is complicated. Eschewing sulfur doesn't make you a better winemaker, and drinking zero/zero wines doesn't make you a better human. I've heard countless California winemakers, mostly women, talk about the 'zero/zero bros' who have made their rejection of sulfur into an overly simplistic macho club. Such a narrow view doesn't allow for winemakers to add small amounts of sulfur in order to stay in business, or to express what they are attempting to communicate through their wines.

Though it's right to point out that obsessing over sulfur can distract from all sorts of other issues from carbon footprints to labor practices, it would also be unfair to underplay the role that hardcore zero sulfur wines have had in bringing many of those same issues to the forefront. Zero sulfur wines plant a flag and touch nerves

Recently feathers were ruffled when Sylvie Augereau, the organizer of La Dive Bouteille—perhaps the most prominent natural wine fair—released the following statement ahead of the 2024 event:

“Please, again, keep your slightly too crazy cuvées at home, for those who believe that natural wines are necessarily deviant... We’re really not here to nourish this dangerous discourse. There are some additives that we prefer to certain intruders [in fermentation]!”

Reactions were not mild. Some winemakers including Axel Prüfer of Le Temps des Cerises (featured in the September 2023 Direct Press) pulled out of the event. Aaron Ayscough reported on the scuttlebutt in his excellent Substack ‘Not Drinking Poison’ and compared giving up a table at La Dive Bouteille to skipping the Met Gala.

Ayscough posted a number of responses from winemakers, including this one from Baptiste Delhomme in the Yonne: “As a vigneron, when I make a cuvée, I taste it regularly, I decide to bottle it, I decide to sell it... Which is to say I take complete responsibility for its taste and what it represents! Because it speaks of me and will make people speak of me. I made the choice of zero additives in vinification and I allow myself only the sulfur-wicking of barrels if necessary... If I don’t appreciate one of my wines and I consider it to have a ‘flaw,’ well that wine is not put on sale!... Anyway, to each their own tastes, obviously, and it can happen sometimes that we don’t master a problem that arrives in a bottle that was sold several months before... But at a salon, if the wine is served, that’s because [the vigneron] takes responsibility for it.”

Another response was from Jean Walch, who owns the wine shop Au Fil du Vin Libre in Strasbourg. “This is all a false debate,” he remarked. “I sense a need to frame, to legislate, to create standards. It pisses me off to suspect this. Free wines, living wines, that’s it. Impose nothing. Know how to wait for wines when they don’t taste good. Vignerons and retailers, let’s educate our clients to have patience. Don’t start to bend yourselves to the demands of sommeliers and wine bar merchants who want free wines without ‘deviance’ that stay intact for two days in open bottles so as not to lose the margins on even one glass. If you ‘natural’ vignerons don’t resist that, the market for natural wine will become standardized. For me it’s already well down that path. Let the consumer judge what he feels like drinking and continue to educate and explain. When people speak to me of free wines without ‘flaws,’ I start to ask myself if business opportunism hasn’t taken precedence for a certain number of vignerons, retailers, and promoters of natural wine.”

I certainly side with letting winemakers decide for themselves what they want to release to the public. They put the work in, they put their reputation on the line, and I feel it's crucial to judge their work based on their intentions instead of my own taste preferences. In a world that is increasingly homogeneous and flattened by algorithms, the unpredictability and rawness of even the most 'flawed' natural wines seems like a harmless way to rebel against such trends. Weaponization of what are essentially aesthetic preferences, on either side of the debate, seems to pit neighbor against neighbor when the real enemy is the large, industrial wine machine that overwhelmingly dominates the market and the agricultural land.

Personally, I really fell hard for wine when I discovered rustic, wild wines with no sulfur. It was like being able to handle the spiciest Nashville hot chicken, or the most putrid-smelling durian. When customers returned bottles they thought were 'bad' it was exciting to think they just couldn't handle 'real' unadulterated wine like it was made 300 years ago — as misguided a judgment as that may have been on my part (see my earlier comment on lead). Also, to be clear, I never had the heart to sell funky wines to anyone without making sure they knew what they were getting into. But the intense reactions were my first glimpses that maybe wine was not the static, stuffy luxury good it was made out to be. It led me down the road of seeking out independent vigneron, learning about organic farming, and many of the other details of winemaking I love so much. It began when I tasted something outrageous.

It's nice to not scare people away sometimes, and there are more and more wines these days from zero sulfur adherents that are less freaky and more approachable. I'd say that most winemakers we work with are more pragmatic than dogmatic, and will add sulfur if necessary.

However, as natural wine gets a little more mainstream and more wines are made with just enough sulfur to prevent the "mouse" and other off-putting flavors, I feel the need to call attention to the work of the zero/zero zealots. They pushed things forward with provocation, not incrementalism, and were motivated by a fearlessness and passion that continues to inspire today.

Making wine without sulfur will always be a high-wire act, one that can both excite an audience and push the performer. Are there health benefits? To a degree — I mean, it's an alcoholic beverage, not a keto power shake. The real benefit to me is as a flashpoint for other issues. Wine has always been an excellent medium for our own projections and sulfur is still a powerful symbol that invites many interpretations. Risk and vulnerability are key to zero sulfur wines. For all the work they require, the return on investment is not great. The rewards are in the creative process, the community it forms, and the (mostly) friendly arguments centered around this symbolic, polarizing gesture.

For those drinking them, it's a concept that is easy to grasp and it can lead to a better understanding of winemaking. Just as sushi makes you appreciate the long chain of events that serving raw fish requires, zero/zero wines are a direct line to the pitfalls and work of a winemaker. Luckily, unlike bad sushi, funky wine won't hurt you.

Cheers!

Jonathan Kemp

2NaturKinder Fledermaus 2021

Franken • Germany

Press 4 Mix/White

Do you like bats? Then this is the wine for you. 20 cents of each bottle goes to fund research on bats in Bavaria, where Micheal Voelker and Melanie Drese make the 2Naturkinder (two children of nature) wines. The bats, in return for this financial support, help fertilize the vineyards with their guano. "The bat on the label is the grey long-eared bat which has become very rare in our area," says Michael. "It's also incredibly cute and we want to help it stay around."

The wine is a blend of Müller-Thurgau and Sylvaner, no fining, no filtering, and of course, no sulfur added. Mineral and punchy with a touch of stone fruit, it's got a touch of funk and a backbone of ripping acid that makes it mouthwatering and refreshing. It's a perfect example of why the 2Naturkinder wines have become some of the most popular and accessible natural wines around. Naturally, the wine is called 'Fledermaus,' which means bat in German.

Michael's father was also a seasoned, well-respected winemaker, and part of the region's quality control panel. As such he would not be the most likely person to embrace the type of winemaking his son and daughter-in-law have been making but he has come to fully support them. Michael and Melanie began just doing 2Naturkinder as a side project in 2014 to the family's more conventional production but now they have converted everything to the 2Naturkinder approach. *Jonathan Kemp*

Cati Ribot Ve d'Avior Blanc
2022

Mallorca • Spain

Press 4 Mix/White

Mallorca, as a hot tourist spot, doesn't exactly scream natural wine destination, but thanks to Cati Ribot that is changing. She started working with her father in the 1990s when many Mallorcans were planting international varieties like Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. Now she is leading efforts on the island to revitalize Mallorca's indigenous grapes, working with the government and getting these unique varieties listed on official registers. She has also been working organically since 2012 and biodynamically since 2014.

Three of these ancient grape varieties are featured in her Son Llebre Blanc: Malvasía de Banyalbufar, Girò Ros, and Prensal Blanc. One of the advantages to native grapes is that they are thick-skinned and drought-resistant, important in a typical year like 2022 that was very hot and dry. They're grown on the northern, iron-rich part of Mallorca. Half is vinified direct press and part is on the skins and it has an amber color. None of her wines have any sulfur additions. The result is a singular wine that is snappy and complex, with an almost skunky tarragon, shiso note that is lifted up by floral and citrus elements.

Jonathan Kemp

Tavijn Ruschena 2021

Piedmont • Italy

Press 4 Mix/Red

"I'm not sure why you carry my wines, we have all the faults: Brett, volatile acidity, carbon dioxide, residual sugar, mouse..." This was the self-effacing statement Nadia Verrua of Cascina Tavijn floated to me when I visited her in 2022. She's right—her wines often have many of the above issues. But they are nevertheless charming and heartwarming, never boring. She has built a very loyal following of natural wine lovers around the world by sticking to her zero/zero approach when others would have long ago succumbed to the venal sin of adding sulfur to clean things up.

Part of the appeal of her style is that there is little changed from the way her father, Ottavio, and generations before him made wine for the locals, mostly in glass demijohns. Today they use some larger fiberglass tanks, but little else in the cellar would suggest the 21st century. On the other hand, Nadia upended the traditional patriarchal order when she finally convince her father to include her in the farming and winemaking after returning home at age 23. Nadia didn't venture afar to learn winemaking from experts with chemistry degrees, she is upholding a long tradition of rustic winemaking that is unashamedly arresting and proudly feral.

She works about seven hectares in Monferrato and focuses on local varieties like Barbera, Grignolino, or Ruché, the obscure Piedmont grape featured in this varietal wine. It's wild and spicy with some barnyard notes, grippy blueberry skin, and sage. Chewy, complex, and herbaceous, it's not shy but brimming with the exuberance and unpredictability of life itself. Pair it with wild boar sausage or pasta with some tomato, guanciale, Pecorino, and black pepper.

Jonathan Kemp



Nadia of Cascina Tavini

Platinetti Guido 2022

Piedmont • Italy

Press 4 Mix/Red

Andrea Fontana is the farmer and winemaker behind the wines of Guido Platinetti, and their motto reflects what we're thinking about when we are talking about Zero Sulfur wines this month: Experience, Tradition, Care and Technique.

The family business goes back to the beginning of the 20th century, when Carlo Platinetti and Gaudenzio Fontana, started growing vines in the best areas around Ghemme in the Alto Piemonte region. Literally translating to "High Piedmont" - the area nestled at the base of the Italian Alps lies Italy's former Nebbiolo-growing powerhouse - a region that housed vineyards as far as one could see, with beautifully terraced vineyards looking over the region. That was until the late 1800s when phylloxera struck and decimated the vines, leaving growers stranded with no means to replant.

This is when Langhe, Barolo, Alba and other regions in Piedmont took over in popularity. Only in the last couple decades Alto Piemonte has made a return to popularity, show-casing a lighter style to the popular red wines of the region that are actively battling climate change to avoid getting heavier and heavier.

Today we're proud of show-casing you a wine that I see as the platonic ideal of a red Italian table wine. This is Guido Platinetti's "Guido" bottling - a field blend of Merlot, Nebbiolo, Barbera, Croatina, Vespolina, amongst others - from vines ranging from 60 to 100 years old. It is an ode to the family's grandfather, so much so that it has become an annual tradition to celebrate its harvest - a moment when generations come together, the young and the old join together to spend their days in the vines with shears in hand.

Upon opening you'll find a wine that shows notes of red plums, sour cherries, roses and forest floor on the nose, all mixed in a hint of a funk that dissipates over the next couple minutes in glass. On the palate, the red fruit evolves into a licorice, spice and orange zest, with a hint of tobacco lingering. High acidity and round tannins help the wine carry this to the finish line, providing a tension that keeps you longing for another sip. In essence, this is what I'd want on those warm nights at the dinner table after the sun has set. It's incredibly versatile too - from pairing with grilled vegetables and cold cuts to salty snacks and cheeses - Guido is here to provide company.

Nico Haunold

Ducroux Prologue 2023 **Beaujolais • France** **Press 4 Red**

Christian's 4 hectares in Thulon, in the hills above Regnié, have been organically farmed since the 1980s and are Demeter certified Biodynamic. (The estate was originally 7-plus hectares, but Christian reduced it to 4, in order to more properly manage it himself). He has trees between every five rows of vines, with hedges on the sides and a wild proliferation of vegetation between the vines which is controlled by horse-drawn "griffages" ("scratching" or very shallow plowing). The vineyard is almost entirely self-sufficient, with horse and bull-power and natural fertilizers made on the farm. Rot and mildew are controlled by natural sprays, as Christian seeks



Christian with a new tractor

to reduce or eliminate the use of the permitted organic sulfur and copper solutions. Even in mid-winter, a walk through his vines shows the benefits of a living soil, moist and teeming with life, unaffected by the erosion and sickness of the vineyards around him. And the wines are sensational.

Light in body and low in alcohol (ranging from 10.5 to 12%), the wines are aromatically complex and alive, showing berry, plum and black fruit aromas with citrus, licorice, and herbal notes. While there is some relation to the wines of Lapierre and friends in Morgon, Ducroux' wines are consistently brighter and lighter with more changeable aromas, with more acidity and citrus character. Working entirely without sulfur-dioxide, except in problematic vintages, Christian does a small early picking, choosing high acid grapes, which starts the fermentation. A few days later, the mature harvest is added to the vat. This helps to minimize the growth of the acid intolerant *Brettanomyces* and other schizo-yeasts. There is a roughly one week carbonic maceration followed by a soft pressing. Christian's ethic of farming

and winemaking is reflected in his prices, as the health of his family, his animals and his soil, and of course the quality of his wines, are more important to him than financial gain. Thus the low cost of his wines bears no relation to their quality or the amount of work required for their production. Christian is a modern “paysan” whose work may seem unrealistic, and yet he points the way towards a more sane agriculture which can be adapted to a larger scale. *David Lillie*

Coutelou Matabu 2021
Languedoc-Rouissillon •
France

Press 4 Red

Jeff Coutelou was one of the first to be certified organic in France — back in 1987! His neighbors were not accepting of his methods. When he planted hedges to help block their chemical sprays from coming into his vines, they burned them down. Twice. Today he continues to take on work that many others do not have the patience or commitment for, like restoring obscure, nearly forgotten varieties to combat the effects of global warming; and planting thousands of olive, almond, fig, and fruit trees for future generations.

Coutelou is hardcore about not using sulfur. None of his wines have sulfur added and haven't for quite some time. This 'Matubu' is even certified organic by the USDA, which is so rare I can only think of seeing this on a wine two or three times. The rules are so strict

that it requires costly analysis and time consuming paperwork to verify there is zero sulfur in the wine. By contrast, EU wines can be certified organic based primarily on farming practices.

Matubu is 50/50 Syrah and Grenache with three days of maceration. It's juicy, it's ripe, it's a little spritzy. It's wild and undoubtedly alive, so don't be surprised if you detect a touch of animal funk and sweat in the mix. But that's not as off-putting as you might think, this is in the background. The lasting impression is of an invigoratingly joyful, exciting wine with bright raspberry, sassafras, and savory, grippy texture. Chill it down a bit and take it to barbecues all summer long.

Jonathan Kemp

Martin Texier Petite Nature
2022

Rhone • France

Press 4 White

Martin visited us in November 2023 and I was able to taste this lovely pet-nat with him in person. He has an accomplished history in the wine industry here in New York with internships at Uva and Flatiron wine stores as well as having a career as a DJ while working at famed NYC record store AI.

Martin is an extremely warm, thoughtful, compassionate, and intelligent person and he puts all these qualities into his vines and wines. All of the vines he grows have been organically grown from the outset and he never uses chemicals in his wines

save for a tiny bit of sulfur depending on the vintage, and definitely not this Petite Nature 2022!

The Petite Nature is a blend of negociant grapes with 30 year old muscat petit grain making up the majority of the blend. It has a tiny dosage of frozen grape must from the same grapes it's made from to ensure refermentation, but is completely dry. On the nose the muscat aromas jump out of the glass with its familiar pleasant floral notes, and is backed up by notes of salinity, minerality, and stone fruit. In the glass you're in for a wild ride with a wine that is teeming with florality, minerals, salinity, with the tension of a bit of gaminess. This is a complex yet refreshing wine with great depth that is complemented by funky or soft cheeses, pizza, charcuterie and the like. Keep it in your fridge for the next time you need an aperitif or summer thirst quencher! *Jeremy Hernandez*

Mingaco Moscatel Itata 2021

Itata • Chile

Press 4 White

Daniela De Pablo and Pablo Pedros have become respected all over Chile's Itata region for their farming practices. Pablo watched first hand as the vines his father and grandfather planted in the 1980s and 1990s began to wither after the first wave of industrial agricultural techniques replaced viticultural practices that had been in use for centuries. So Pablo went back to these techniques, starting with or-

ganics in 2010. They now are polycultural, biodynamic, and regenerative, with no tilling. They are the people to go to for help with anything related to vineyards and bringing life back to soils depleted by years of chemical overuse—not just vines but flora and fauna of all types.

Daniela, Pablo, and their children live among their vines in an eco-friendly house they built. They make kefir and sourdough bread in their cellar along with wine, never using any sulfur. Their Moscatel is maybe one of the best expressions of the variety I've ever tasted. The floral aromas that often dominate Moscatel/Muscat based wines are tempered by spice, earth, and orange peel notes. It's complex, layered, ethereal, and earnest, a delicious and bewitching mix of elements. Grapes are destemmed and fermented in open top fiberglass tanks with 12 days of skin maceration. Aged in neutral oak for 11 months.

Jonathan Kemp



Daniela and Pablo of Mingaco



Eric Texier at VWM April 2024

Eric Texier 'Le Clau' Vieille Serine 2020

Rhone • France

Press 2

When you taste with Eric Texier, you're guaranteed two things: incredible wine, and zero bull\$#*%. He doesn't want to be a part of a "scene," and he's been known to take shots at other winemakers when he feels like they are lying about or otherwise disrespecting the craft. He's a winemaker's winemaker—endlessly reinventing, experimenting and recording the results. He wants more than great wines; he wants to push conversations forward and nudge people to become better stewards of the land and better winemakers. He was a PhD nuclear engineer before switching to winemaking, which he did without any family land or real experience. He uses his science background in order to know how not to add things to his wine, however.

'Le Clau' is a wine that is just as contrarian as Eric himself—and just as invigorating to be around. It's made from a selection of very old vines planted in the 1930s. Texier works with an old clone of Syrah called Serine, but this plot of vines differs from his other Serine so much that ampelographers are not even sure it's Syrah. It could be an extremely rare variety such as Bravade or Exbrayat, no one is sure. It does differ from Syrah in that it has far less black olive notes and is fully ripe at lower potential alcohol levels. As such there is a through-line of electricity and freshness. However it does have some darker tinges of black tea mixed with minerals and chewy tannins, making for one of the more distinct Northern Rhone wines I've come across but also one of the most elegant, gracious, zero sulfur wines I've encountered. Grapes are fermented whole cluster with no punchdowns or extraction and aged in demi-muid for 11 months. *Jonathan Kemp*

Testalonga Bianco 2022

Liguria • Italy

Press 2

We pride ourselves on sourcing wines for our members that are difficult to find, and this one is surely one of the smallest productions around. Antonio Perrino works under 1 hectare of vines, about the size of a soccer field, in some of the most rugged terraces in Europe. It should be noted that Antonio is nearly 80 years old, though his daughter Erica is now helping him. They make just seven barrels total each year in a tiny garage in Liguria, the majority being his red Rossese di Dolceacqua. Meaning this white wine is in even shorter supply. I've only had it once before, in Torino at one of the best natural wine-focused restaurants in the area, called Consorzio. It's a very memorable and unique wine, in part due to the fact that Antonio never veered from the winemaking techniques his father taught him over 50 years ago.

The Bianco is 100% Vermentino from vines planted among 1000 olive trees Antonio also cultivates. It spends four days on the skins and is aged in barrel for a year before bottling. There is an iced tea quality, or maybe an Arnold Palmer vibe to the wine, with lots of tannin. If you close your eyes it's easy to imagine it's a red wine. There's a touch of gingersnappy Brettanomyces in the mix, adding complexity and intrigue. It is quite memorable but also delicious and refreshing. *Jonathan Kemp*



Antonio Perrino in Liguria, Italy



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