

Cuvée Crunch NV Vin de Table

14 Apr 2009 by Jancis Robinson

£5.99

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Poor old Languedoc wine producers. So many of them make such great-value wine but are finding it the devil's own job to sell it - not least because the name Languedoc is still associated with some very ordinary stuff. Up in the hills there are hundreds of wonderful terroirs, capable of shaping truly distinctive wines, but most of the vigneronns who own them are very much better at farming than selling.



Domaine du Poujol (pictured above) is an exception, however. Taken over in 1994, it was one of the earlier domaines to be established by anglophones, Robert and Kim Cripps in this case. Robert had worked in the British wine trade in the 1980s, got a degree at the London School of Economics and then returned to California where he had worked a harvest during his summer vacation to work, variously, for Saintsbury, Carneros Creek, Murphy Goode - and Peter Michael, where he ended up as assistant winemaker. Kim worked for 10 years in and around the financial side of wine in the Napa Valley.

On returning to Europe, they tried Burgundy first but their search for a warmer, drier climate eventually ended in the acquisition of the 66-ha Domaine du Poujol near the village of Vailhauquès in the hills 12 miles north west of Montpellier heading for Pic St Loup. Eighteen of those hectares are vineyard and you can see exactly what is planted where on this splendidly alluring panorama of the estate.

La Cuvée Crunch NV Vin de Table Rouge is the result of the Cripps putting their heads together with an ex-employee, British wine merchant Duncan Murray of Market Harborough. Realising that what British wine lovers need most at the moment is a wine with real individuality but a low price and high convenience, they came up with a blend of 55% Cinsault and Carignan harvested in 2008 that is full of fresh, surprisingly lush fruit (a surprise for this Carignanphobe anyway) with 45% Syrah and Mourvèdre from the 2006 vintage that gives the wine real depth and structure.

This is what I wrote as I tasted it: 'Good colour, excellent attack. Round and very fruity and just the job. Some slightly bitter fruit but no Carignan rawness. All perfectly ripe. A hammock winner for this summer. Very complete on the palate. Bravo! Real personality and vitality. Bittersweet but not sweetened up or obviously acidified. Could be drunk at any temperature. 13%' By 'hammock winner' I meant that I could so easily imagine its being sipped with pleasure in a hammock in a garden in the summer.

Because it is not made from at least 85% of one vintage, it cannot carry a vintage year and has to be sold as a Vin de Table - but as any student of chic Parisian restaurant wine lists knows, Vins de Table from obscure corners of France are enjoying a certain vogue at the moment.

Here's the background to it, supplied by Mr Cripps direct from the domaine:

Crunch came about because we decided against bottling the 2006 Podio Alto [their red Coteaux du Languedoc which sells for around £10], despite a tank sample getting a respectable 15.5/20 in the RVF's [Revue du Vin de France] Classement guide. Although the wine was very good, it seemed too concentrated and would have needed 5 years bottle aging before it could be drunk. In the meantime, 2007 was looking very lovely and it seemed a shame to lose the '07s lovely soft, juicy fruit while waiting for the '06 to come around. The bulk market was not interested; the quantity was too small and most négociants had already written off the 2006s. So in 2008 I vinified some Cinsault and Carignan with the intention of blending with the 2006s in order to produce a cuvée that could be drunk sooner. In fact the blend is 55% 2008 (about 2/3 Cinsault, 1/3 Carignan) and 45% 2006 (mostly Syrah and Mourvèdre). Yields in 2008 are about 40hl/ha, but the 2006 are very low. Our average over the whole domaine was 33hl/ha, so the lower yielding Syrah and Mourvèdre were probably more like 20hl/ha.

It's not really a commercial proposition; the cuvée came about because we had some wine that we could not sell through our normal channels and Dunx needed something that he could offer for £5.99 retail. When this cuvée runs out, that will be the end of it. But I also remember from my time in wine retail, how exciting it was to find those odd lots of something fine at a ridiculously low price. Hopefully, it will give lots of other people some of that excitement.

Right, too late to work outside now, so I'm off to drink some real wine which is what we call Riesling!

It comes in a simple, friendly bottle with useful screwcap. This is not trying to be a fancy wine, but I defy anyone not to enjoy it as a distinctly superior house red. I'm afraid this 'world exclusive' blend can be bought only from www.duncanmurraywines.co.uk in the UK at £5.99 a bottle.

I see, rather to my surprise, that this is the second time I have chosen a Poujol wine as a wine of the week. The [Teras 2005](#) I chose two years ago was a more ambitious, smarter wine than this blend put together for our more straitened times. Truly a wine of the moment.

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