

## Pica Broca 2001 La Sauvageonne, Coteaux du Languedoc

1 Dec 2003 by JR

I make no apologies for including yet another full-bodied red from the south of France. As a category it must offer some of the best value in the world - really hand-crafted, *terroir*-driven wines available often at bargain prices.

The other day I presented 10 wines, [outlined below](#) by pp-er and Ohio merchant David Schildknecht. Basically the estate had some fantastic raw ingredients, including high altitude, varied but good-quality soils and excellent vine varieties. From the 2001 vintage it has benefited from a huge injection of cash from Englishman Fred Brown and management expertise from ex-sommelier, ex-Domaine de Poujol Gavin Crisfield who now lives at the estate near St Jean de la Blaquière just 15 minutes from Clermont l'Hérault north of Montpellier.

There are several blends, with Pica Broca being 60 per cent Syrah and 40 per cent Grenache from *grés*, a mix of grit, schist and sandstone, with some light oak influence - and very rich and satisfying (without being absurdly heady) it is too. A great bottle to cheer a dark night. And there is no desperate hurry to drink it. This wine will still taste good in up to five years, I would have thought.

The new team seems for the moment to have been more active in improving the wine than marketing it. Praise be. This situation will presumably change, and along with it the prices.

In the UK this lovely wine is available from [Virginwines.com](#), [Wicked Wines](#) of Kilham in East Yorkshire.

### International stockists and importers:

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This selection should not be taken as definitive but as a sound representation of wine styles I believe to be either stars of the future or stars currently appreciated only by wine insiders - such as yourself of course.

Riesling Smaragd Achleiten 2001 Prager, Wachau, Austria  
Terrasses du Pilat Condrieu 2001 Villard, North Rhone, France  
Pinot Noir 2001 Mount Difficulty, Central Otago, New Zealand  
Pica Broca 2001 La Sauvageonne, Coteaux du Languedoc, France  
Chianti Classico 1999 Castello di Brolio, Tuscany, Italy  
Santa Cecilia Nero d'Avola 2000 Planeta, Sicily  
Calvario Rioja 1999 Finca Allenda, Spain  
Seven Hills Merlot 1999 Andrew Will, Washington State, USA  
The Gomersal Grenache 2001 Barossa Valley, South Australia  
15-year-old Malmsey, Henriques & Henriques, Madeira

### [Notes on Château La Sauvageonne](#)

David Schildknecht, Ohio USA

La Sauvageonne benefits from its high altitude, west(Atlantic)-facing slopes and a prevailing soil of hard red schist ('Ruffes') to make Syrah of great richness, but also finesse.

This estate came to my attention with the 1992 'prestige' bottling (their fourth), which garnered high praise here and in France. That wine displayed a rather claret-like personality (even if Parker wrote 'Côte Rôtie!') and a richness and sweetness of fruit that belied its having been made from 10 - 15-year-old vines and in tank. Owner Geantet Ponce insisted he had only Grenache, Syrah, plus a few old Cinsault and Carignan vines.

I had considerable success selling these wines, but quality was spotty and Ponce was not keen on doing special bottlings for crazy Yankees. I gradually drifted away, visiting the estate now and again to taste but ceasing to commercialize.

Then, in January 2002, I learned that Ponce had sold to a wealthy London developer, Fred Brown, who wanted a trophy estate in France. 'Well,' I thought, 'if he recognized Sauvageonne as a potential trophy, he must have some serious inkling of wine.' There was time to put this address back on my Spring travel plans, and so I went, I rediscovered, and I was totally blown away.

It turns out another young Englishman named Gavin Crisfield had been commissioned by Brown and spent over a year trying to find the right property for him to purchase. When he spied the white cupola of La Sauvageonne atop its huge schistic hillside, he knew it was a beacon. Ponce not only agreed to sell, but also to 'consult'. That consists mostly in straightening out 15 years of papers and explaining to the authorities the acres and acres of - you guessed it: Cabernet and Merlot - stuck back behind the Syrah and Grenache!

The plans of the new team will make your head spin... and so will their first - vintage 2001 - results. And when you consider that they only acquired the property just before harvest and had no hand in pruning or planning prior to that... it won't take long before the world knows the name 'Sauvageonne'.

The basic *cuvée* here, 'Les Ruffes' is far from base. A blend of Syrah (40 per cent), Grenache (30 per cent), Carignan and Cinsault (each 15 per cent) vinified in tank, it sets, in its inaugural vintage, a new standard of textural richness and overall quality in an \$8 wine. Dayton consumer Todd Penrod, called it 'obnoxiously good for the price', a description I'd struggle to top that description!

The estate's flagship wine, 'Pica Broca', is 60:40 Syrah:Grenache and comes from higher-altitude, lower-yielding vines. It's vinified half in tank and half in new *barrique*. There is a lot more depth here, even discounting the more sophisticated *élevage*.

At the apex will be 'Puech de Glen', from the Syrah in the sweetest spot on these slopes (but with the same vinificatory regime as the 'Prestige'). Finally, the Cabernet and Merlot have found their own home, in a Vin de Pays called simply 'La Sauvageonne' (and puckishly contained in a heavy Burgundy bottle). This *cuvée*, a German merchant colleague wrote, 'will strike fear into the hearts of overpriced Pomerols and Napa Merlots.'

#### *Appellations:*

Languedoc  
Coteaux du Languedoc

Varieties: Syrah, Grenache, Cinsault, Cabernet, Sauvignon, Muscat, Viognier, Merlot  
Total acreage: 29 acres  
Average production: n/a  
Wines:

Coteaux du Languedoc 'Les Ruffes'  
Coteaux du Languedoc 'Pica Broca'  
Coteaux du Languedoc 'Puech de Glen'  
Vin de Pays d'Oc 'La Sauvageonne'