Dom de l□Ecu, Granite 2005 Muscadet de S□vre-et-Maine

1 Sep 2008 by Jancis Robinson

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I found this wine via an extremely circuitous route. Hugh Johnson asked me en passant whether I had tasted a range of French wines specially selected, but not made, by Anne-Claude Leflaive of Domaine Leflaive in Puligny-Montrachet. This piqued my curiosity and I tracked them down to their UK importer Armit who, most unfortunately for the average wine drinker, sell only by the case (six bottles in this instance). Although in this case, my wine of the week is such good value, and should drink well for several years, that perhaps six bottles is a sensible minimum rather than too many.

These Leflaive selections are wines made by Anne-Claude's fellow organic or biodynamic winemaker friends (*amis vignerons*) with special front labels featuring a picture of her and back labels giving a quite admirable amount of detail, including how long to keep the wine, what to eat with it, the background of the wine and winemaker and, all important in this case, the terroir. I know that many back labels claim to give this sort of information but too often it reads as though it were generated by a computer, or very junior member of staff. In this case, the advice seems entirely credible.

The range comprises 22 wines in all apparently, and at Domaine Leflaive they have moved on to the 2006 vintage, but Armit have imported only three, all from the great 2005 vintage. Needless to say, having passed through an extra pair of hands, the wines are not cheap. In the UK six bottles of the two whites cost £62 and the red is £92. In fact the red was my least favourite. **Les Amis Vignerons d'Anne-Claude Leflaive, Pinot Noir 2005 Monthelie** is a wine from Eric de Suremain billed as Bourgogne Côte de Beaune. I found it very correct but a bit too lean and sinewy. Maybe a nice wine to drink fairly cool with some cold beef and salad but no more.

Les Amis Vignerons d'Anne-Claude Leflaive, Chardonnay sur Argile 2005 Vin de Pays de Saône et Loire seems much more successful, as perhaps one might expect from a woman who makes some of the world's most famous white burgundies. This Brionnais wine comes from that bit of south west of Burgundy that is bisected by the upper river Loire. Made from young Chardonnay vines grown on clay soil, it is admirably characterful. I found a heady scent of hazelnuts with real life on the palate with more than a hint of something mineral. This polished wine is just 12.5% alcohol. It's quite crunchy, like a crisp apple, and very confident. I gave it 16.5 points.

But, most unusually, I gave the third wine, a Muscadet from Guy Bossard (pictured above) of the biodynamic Domaine de l'Ecu, 18 points. It is a quite stunning wine which can also be found under Bossard's own Domaine de l'Ecu label. **Les Amis Vignerons d'Anne-Claude Leflaive, Melon sur Granite 2005 Muscadet de Sèvre et Maine** is one of the most remarkable white wines I have come across this year. Like the Chardonnay, it brims with life and confidence, a quality which may sound whimsical in a wine but I really do think some wines have it and most don't. This Muscadet is not especially full bodied – just 12% alcohol – but it has massive extract and character. Lime zest is one strong flavour but overall the wine is more mineral than fruity – presumably from the granite on which these Melon de Bougrogne grapes were grown - yet deliciously succulent. I found it an eye opener for its density, character and depth of flavour. I believe it is likely to drink well for at least another two years and possibly three, which is quite a feat for a Muscadet.

Apparently these Anne-Claude Leflaive selections have now been sold into Japan, Holland, Switzerland and Brazil, and winesearcher.com lists several retailers in the US and one each in Canada and Singapore under the Domaine de l'Ecu label. Guy Bossard himself has none left, and bitterly regrets the fact. In the UK, both Artisan Wines and Genesis Wines currenty stock his various geologically labelled 2006s.

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