Ch Miraval Coteaux Varois Blanc

24 Aug 2009 by Jancis Robinson
From €10, $17

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Since we're in a mood for Provence today (see The best rosé in the world?), how about a wine with a Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie connection? This tangy Provençal white is grown on the estate that the blessed couple have used as their French hatchery, a beautiful-looking estate just north of Brignoles that once belonged to jazz genius Jacques Loussier, who installed a recording studio there, thereby putting Miraval on the international glitz map. Pink Floyd laid down tracks for The Wall there and Miraval Rosé is labelled Pink Floyd in memory of this sainted period – although UK importer Peter McKinley of McKinley Vintners says he tries to keep the font size down.

I have a blurb on this bit of real estate that is too good not to share with you:

The château hit the headlines in late May 2008 when it was revealed that Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie had leased it for three years with an option to buy, after surveying prospective properties by helicopter, with the intention of having the twins they expected born in France.

The château, in a modest vernacular style, has 35 rooms [so modest! - JR]. It is surrounded by gardens with a moat and fountains and a chapel, and by its vineyard, recently-planted olive grove and by the surrounding garrigue and woodlands of evergreen and white oak, and stone pine, Aleppo pine and maritime pine.

A previous owner, the French jazz pianist Jacques Loussier, installed a recording studio in the château: Sting recorded there, as did the Cranberries, and Pink Floyd laid down tracks for The Wall album, released in 1979. Its more recent American owner, Tom Bove, who bought the domaine in 1993 and has modernised its viticulture, which had been producing simple vin de pays, has added a spa, jacuzzi, twin gyms [thank heavens for the second] and an indoor pool.

The château is known for its wines, white wines under the Coteaux Varois appellation and red, white and rosé wine under the Côtes de Provence appellation, the Guide Hachette called it one of France's top 500 wine producers. The domaine consists of 400 hectares (1,000 acres) of which 30 hectares on the valley floor are devoted to vines.

A series of winding stone terraces following the profiles of the slopes are planted with 13 varieties of olives. The immense wine cellar of Miraval was built in 1850 by Joseph Lombot, the inventor of reinforced concrete [that's a bit of a shock], who owned the nearby domaine of La Celle.

Miraval estate is located on a site first inhabited in pre-Roman times. Today, it features fountains, ancient aqueducts, a moat, a pond and the vineyards, which produce a highly esteemed organic wine.

I often find Provençal wines overpriced but I was impressed by the combination of racy tension and density of fruit in both current vintages, 2007 and 2008, of this wine based on Rolle, the southern French name for our old friend Vermentino, inspiration for this recent wine of the week. (Many apologies to those of you shivering in the southern hemisphere for the relentlessly summery character of most of our recent wines of the week. Will try hard to sniff out a warming red for you soon.) The wine is also impressively persistent. It has the fragrance of a well-made Vermentino but an additional depth - far more grunt than the average cheap Sardinian, and a certain attractive saltiness. The 2008 won a gold medal at the Paris show this year and it also looks pretty smart – as one would expect.

The clay/limestone vineyards are Ecocert accredited and this white is 13.5%. The 2007 was holding up pretty well when I tasted it a few months ago so I would not feel you have to dash to drink up the 2008 – any time over the next 12 months

should be fine. More detail at www.miraval.com and some extra information from Monty Waldin on our forum.

It's available in the US, France and Luxembourg according to www.wine-searcher.com and in the UK McKinley Vinters have sold it to the embattled Whole Foods, who are selling it at £10.99, plus the following, who are asking around £12 for a bottle: The Wine Library of London, Partridges of Kensington, Wadebridge Wine, Imbibros of Godalming and Wine Etcetera of Midhurst.

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