Mas de Libian, Vin de P□tanque 2009

25 May 2010 by Jancis Robinson
From €5.90, $10.99 and £9.99

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I assume you know all about this wine and that I am the only person left on the planet who had not come across it before a recent taste-athon organised by UK importers of natural wines Les Caves de Pyrène. It struck me then as entirely novel and thrillingly useful, being so easy to like and kindly priced.

But when I looked up availability on www.wine-searcher.com, I found retailers of this attractive bargain in Germany, Belgium, France (of course), the US, the UK and Norway - in roughly that order of ascending prices. In Germany you can find it for as little as €5.90. MacArthur Beverages of Washington DC are offering it at $10.99 while in the UK a company new to me called The Smiling Grape Company of St Neots, Cambridgeshire, list it at £9.99.

Mas de Libian, Vin de Pétanque 2009 Vin de Pays des Coteaux de l'Ardèche is made by the enterprising Thibon family on the estate in St-Marcel d'Ardèche which has been in their family since 1670. Visit their website for evidence of their style. *Pétanque* of course is another word for the game of *boules*, the archetypal early-evening pastime in much of France. This easy, soft, fruity wine is supposedly designed for casual sipping during careful throwing. The Thibons recommend chilling it in summer and certainly it tasted eminently chillable to me; tannins were hardly in evidence. It seems stuffed full of ripe (thank you, summer of 2009), supple fruit - even though apparently from young vines. This nearly-southern-Rhône-but-on-the-right-bank-of the-river Grenache is stiffened with about 25% Syrah.

A new generation has taken the domaine, which is a mixed farm, out of the local co-op and introduced biodynamic methods, even down to a trendy horse for working the vineyards. The vines are grown on clay-limestone with some flat stones and round pebbles in the mix. Grapes are picked by hand and the varieties are mixed in the fermentation vat, where they are macerated for just five days. The result is far from complex but should provide oodles of pleasure.

Quintessential summer wine?

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