Dom de l□Aujardi□re, Fi□ Gris 2009 VDP de Loire

4 Jan 2011 by Jancis Robinson

From £13.75, $19.99

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There are definitely fashions in grape varieties, which makes life very difficult for grape growers since it can take a good three years after planting to produce a commercial crop of grapes and vines are generally expected to earn their keep over a life of 25 or 30 years - although some growers graft a new, more fashionable variety on to a root system developed by the rootstock for another variety. I am sensing a tiny quiver of increased interest in the variety known in the Loire as Fié Gris and in Chile as Sauvignon Gris.

What's strange about this variety is that although it is a pink-skinned mutation of Sauvignon Blanc (in fact it is sometimes also known as Sauvignon Rose), it does actually taste rather like a cross between Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Gris - both varieties that are currently rather fashionable. It seems to have the extra richness and aroma of a good Alsace Pinot Gris but the crisp green acidity of a Sauvignon Blanc.

I tasted **Dom de l'Aujardière, Fié Gris 2009 Vin de Pays de Loire** blind in a line-up of wines billed as Sancerres during a tasting of Loire fit for a Queen in the cellars of Buckingham Palace in my role as member of the Royal Household Wine Committee and found it oddly fat for a Sancerre. But when I realised it was not a Sancerre at all but a Fié Gris grown near the mouth of the Loire by Eric Chevalier at his innovative Domaine de l'Aujardière, I was forced to reassess it. I much enjoyed its combination of richness and acidity with a pure green vegetal streak to keep it refreshing.

By coincidence, Tamlyn Currin had tasted it (not blind) last June as part of a showcase of Lea & Sandeman's wares and found all of the following in it: freshly crushed lovage, tarragon, dill, fennel, celery, green capsicum, sweet juicy citrus, wild flower and grass. And here's Julia Harding MW's note on the 2008: Extreme green pea and capsicum. Intense and powerful in that tightly herbaceous style. Very distinctive, fresh and zesty. But you have to like herbal to like this. Do you get the picture? Here's a very aromatic, herbal, palate-freshener for the New Year, bolstered by 2009 richness. (I see that I found the 2007 too skinny.)

The wine is made with minimal intervention, garnering maximum flavour from contact with grape skins then the lees of the fermentation. It is bottled in April to retain maximum freshness and grape-based fruit. (Eric Chevalier also makes Muscadet and a varietal Chardonnay.) Apparently the 2009 Fié Gris was voted Best White Wine in a big tasting of the Top 100 Vins de Pays in London last year.

If you're looking for something different, whether as aperitif or to serve with grilled or poached fish or a chicken salad, this could be just the job. It certainly has a story to tell. Compare and contrast with a Chilean Sauvignon Gris such as those made by Viña Leyda and Casa Marin. Purple pagers can also marvel at the increasing incidence of Sauvignon Gris in white bordeaux by putting 'Sauvignon Gris' in the tasting notes search box.

Lea & Sandeman seem to be the only current UK retailers and charge £14.95 for a single-bottle purchase, £13.75 if it is part of a mixed dozen. Wine-searcher also finds the wine at Wine House in Los Angeles.

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