

Jérémie Depierre at La Pèira

We first met him in a interview. It was after lunch, and running late, we arrived to see him with his feet up on the desk reading a book. Nonchalant. But Monsieur Depierre is a very convincing chap, so it was not surprising we asked him to work with us. Perhaps the only surprising thing is he accepted. Maybe at the time he didn't know what he was getting into.

The evening he arrived we had a lovely dinner at the Restaurant Mimosa, and over dinner and a stunning bottle of La Grange des Pères 2000, explained the almost supernatural faith we had in the vineyard, and how accordingly we were duty-bound to live up to it, and how if we were not to make the finest wine the region had seen since the introduction of vines a few hundred years before the birth of Christ, we should account ourselves the most disgraceful bunch put on the face of the earth.

We believed in our blessed plot, and that with serious viticultural work certain soils of our region can sing of excellence in a unique and exciting voice. Moreover we believed – to co-opt the words of William Blake – An untended vine of any age puts all heaven in a rage.

As a job description it was a little overwhelming.

Next morning, He awoke to discover that we had no chai, no office, no equipment, nothing. At the time we were in a bit of a rush to crack on working with the vineyard, and small things like offices, wineries, equipment, even a place to stay at, were relegated to afterthoughts.

So it began. Making trips to Lodève (a round journey of 50 kilometers) just to send an email. Cultivating the vineyard to a standard of excellence while having no winery to receive the grapes and no equipment to vinify with. Trying to find one's feet, a place to live, people to work, while living in the monastic calm of the Ostalaria Cardabela.

All this would have probably finished off someone fainter-hearted, and to do all this while also working with a team who seem to believe that the loaves and fishes thing really happened could not have been easy. In fact, quite something.

Gradually things fell into place. We cleared out our small stable-like area to function as a Chai, and some equipment arrived a dozen or so days before the harvest did. But as so often happens, as one thing fell into place, another thing fell out. We never had any money. Still don't really. There was no space. Barrels for ageing were squeezed between vinification tanks. One would have to climb around the Chai rather than walk during these periods (there are connoisseurs out there with bigger closets.) After that there were wines to be made, cellars to be dug, buildings to build, vines to be tendered, and an incessant stream of documents to be dealt with.

What's more at La Pèira you don't just work. You enter a world where constant and never-ending struggle becomes your daily bread. Some believe that to make great wine the vines have to suffer. At La Pèira it seems we have to suffer, and working at the domaine is sometimes akin to entering a kind of viticultural Foreign Legion.

Fortunately for us, growing and making wine for Mr Depierre is not just a job. It's a vocation.

In addition to this he is not only unflappable but unbreakable. As we have discovered in the years we have been working with him, Jérémie can move mountains and face chasms while retaining a cool head. He takes Fortune's buffets and rewards with equal thanks.

It remains to be seen, (as with so many an enterprise) whether our attempts to forge an identity for La Pèira and the Terrasses du Larzac may not be as ill-fated as the Light Brigade's push forward! But if we fall – others will lead on where we left off – working at La Pèira in the same spirit.

And one day, when the hard work, pain, and sacrifices that made this new beginning are forgotten, we will look back and see we made just that: a new beginning. Full of Easter promise. And to take words out of the mouth of Ira Gershwin: "They can't take that away".

So well done, Mr Depierre! Hope you're pleased with the wines, and with the work you've done. Thank you for showing fortitude bordering on the incomprehensible.

And if not today, let's hope that one day, you feel very proud.

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Our colleague Jérémie Depierre turns 30 today (link)