

PIERRE FENALS: BACK TO NATURE

Burgundy has lost traction with those drinking naturally. Nevertheless, I never stopped visiting and loving it. This is where the notion of terroir flourished; it should not be forsaken. There are indeed fabulous people working there and because it's so very pricey, they take even more risks by working against the popular notion. Many of their stories move me. One that I had been saving for you: Pierre Fenals. He is in Saint Aubin and his domaine, Maison En Belles Lies, is housed in a flat warehouse at the edge of town, just around the block from Julien Altabar and Dominique Derain.



Inside, oak fermenters were at salute, an anfora filled with the 2014 vintage was tucked away somewhere. I sat at a picnic table with the mustachioed farmer as he poured me his aligoté. I took a sip, not really knowing what to expect from this man who used to be a fashion marketer. It was brilliant. "How is it I hadn't known about you?"

With a shrug, Pierre Fenals said, "Well, I don't do shows," referring to the multitude of wine tastings in France and around the world. You won't see him at RAW or at Renaissance. Here is a man who would much rather stay in the vines. But in spite of himself, the word about the man and the wines is hitting the streets.

Born in Dijon, he studied science and swerved into fashion. Moving on to Paris, despite the fact that his wife doesn't drink, he became a serious *amateur du vin*. Lest you think he was just like any other business guy into wine collecting and tasting, hold that thought.

In 1985, he was at a Parisian *puce*, those wonderful outdoor flea markets where you can find anything from antique soap hooks to odd books. There, looking up at him on top of a pile of books was one by the big biodynamic daddy, Rudolf Steiner. "For no reason at all," he said, "I bought it."

He started to read. "I understood nothing," he said, laughing. Not willing to be defeated, he kept pushing on. "As a scientist I needed to understand it. So, I went to Switzerland to study."

He started to farm cows with his father-in-law. Way before biodynamic was a buzzword, he raised those bovines following Steiner.

In 2002, past 50 years of age, he said goodbye to all of that and with his wife sold off his Parisian life and returned to Burgundy to study enology. He knew what he wanted and worked with Trapet, Lapierre and finally with Emmanuel Giboulot. He started his own domaine in 2009, 2.5h in Maranges and in Haute Côtes de Beaune.



Today, he farms his own land, he buys some grapes and he also rents. As demonstrated with Steiner, fate often intervenes. A woman who he had been kind to remembered him and said, "Would you like to work my vines in Corton?" He smiles broadly at that good fortune to work with Grand Cru terroir he could not afford to otherwise. He pampers the land by working it with a horse. 30,000 bottles strong, whether his own grapes or négoce all are bottled under the négoce name, Maison.

And what of those named En Belles Lies? This refers back

to the mystical quality of the lees. "Something well known to the 17th-century monks," he said.

And he exploits them. After fermentation, he dries the barrels and rubs them inside with the lees of the vintage. About eight months later, in July, he scrapes them clean. In August, he fills the vats with water. Just before harvest, he rubs the tanks down with hot marc which he then flames. Then into the vats the new grapes go. This is a technique he picked up when apprenticing in Beaujolais.

And the wines themselves? They were plump, they were on the fruit, always balanced with savory and very terroir transparent.

We headed off to his nearby vines as it started to rain. This was in June and they had just finished flowering. The smell of the flowers, a little like Dove soap, filled the air. He had pruned well, he explained that he doesn't snip the vines and he doesn't drop fruit. "It's like an abortion to the vines," he said. And violence is not his way. Fenals is a gentle man who had delayed getting back into nature for far too long. Pushing seventy, energetic, he had the shining beatific energy of a man who had found peace. "Every day I get up and I am happy."

We should all be so lucky.



THE WINES Here are some of my favorites:

The reds are, of course, whole cluster. There's no sulfur introduced at any point.

2013 ALIGOTÉ Low alcohol at 11%, the wine is lovely and lively with pear and apple, a wash of tart salinity.

2013 MONTHÉLIE Orange, spicy. Apricot. Warming.

2013 ALOXE-CORTON Delicate elegant ethereal. Spicy aromatic.

2013 CORTON LES PERRIERES Tannins more profound. Dust. Montmorency cherry. Spice from wood and the whole cluster. A much bigger wine and needs some time to calm down. ☹️

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with intense purity. Marvelous space-age crucifers in a slightly deconstructed cheese sauce made for an elegant take on a classic British dish. The buttered and carved pigeon, medieval and ridiculously juicy. I'll take their word for it. Figure with wine about €80. But with the current exchange rate it seems like a bargain and money well spent.

LE JURA BLANC	
Jean Marc Brignot - Molambo / Arbois	
Trésor d'Aiglepierre 2004 (Savagnin) 50cl	82
Trésor d'Aiglepierre Eclairé 2004 (Chardonnay) 50cl	82
Trésor d'Aiglepierre Blend 2004 (Sav./Chard.) 50cl	82
BOURGOGNE BLANC	
Yann Durieux - Mésanges / Côte de Nuits	
Maison 2011 - Htes Côtes de Nuits	76
White Pinot 2011 - Htes Côtes de Nuits / Pinot Bl.	76
Coe d'Eau 2013 (Chardonnay)	64
Love and Pif 2014 (Aligoté)	52
Frédérique Cosard - St-Romain / Côte de Beaune	
Combe Bazin 2012 - Saint Romain	78
Les Rigottes 2013 - Bourgogne	54
Messault 1 ^{er} cru Les Genevrières 2011	182
Puligny Montrachet 2011	158
Puligny Montrachet 1 ^{er} cru Les Folatières 2011	187
Bully 2013 - 1 ^{er} Cru en Vauxry	64
Philippe Valette - Chaintre / Mâconnais	
Clos de Monsieur Noly 2002 (Chardonnay)	112
Pouilly Fuissé 2005 - Clos Reysot (Chardonnay)	112
Dominique Derain - St Aubin / Côte de Beaune	
Les Combles du Sud 2013 Saint Aubin 1 ^{er} Cru	76
Les Marges des Dents de Chien 2013 Saint Aubin 1 ^{er} Cru	84
Sur le Sentier du Clos 2013 Saint Aubin 1 ^{er} Cru	76
AUVERGNE BLANC	
Pierre Branger - Montagnat / Pay de Dôme	
Johanny Rotter 2012 (Savagnin)	79
Gone to Hall 2013 (Pinot Gris)	64
LANGUEDOC BLANC	
Antony Tortal - adige / Hérault	
Cuvée du Ba 2013 (Terret Bourret)	38
Château 2013 (Chassan)	42
ITALIE & GRECE BLANC	
Gian Marco Antonini - Granda / Larian	
Bianco 2012 (Prosecco/Malvoisie...)	89
Palino 2010 (Prosecco/Malvoisie...)	59
Le Coste 2010 (Prosecco/Malvoisie...)	66
Dario Primic - Gorizia / Vénétie	
Pinot Grigio 2012	62
Ribolla Gialla 2011	62
Bianco Trebbi 2011 (Savignone/Chard/Pinot Grigio)	62
Franck Cornelissen - Solchchiata Etna / Sicile	
Manphel et '91 2012 (Carricante/Greco/Catola di Valpe)	72
Alberto Carretti - Varamo / Parma	
Vej 2006 (Malvoisie)	58
Vej 2011 (Malvoisie)	58

Le Clown Bar

114 rue Amelot, 75011

Paris, France

+33 1 43 55 87 35

Open Wednesday to Sunday

Lunch 12PM-2:30PM, dinner 7PM-10:30PM

THE PUNCHDOWN Just re-opened is The Punchdown, one of California's most beloved wine bars. When I stopped in to give D.C. and Lisa congratulations, I was not surprised to see the space packed and the vibe happy.

