

THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2009

Pascal Doquet Sans Soufre



First of all, let me emphasize that I am not a no-sulfur junkie. I have no less of a passion for natural wine than anybody else, but I am not a member of the religious order of Natural Wine, and I have a healthy distaste for anything resembling dogma, fanaticism or inflexibility of belief (unless it relates to football). I am not of the opinion that sulfur is intrinsically evil or that wine is automatically inferior when sulfur is used in its production. And just to throw a little elbow in that direction, I have tasted enough brown and oxidized wines (distinctly different from *oxidative* wines, mind you) that might have actually been improved if their makers hadn't been so dogmatic about this whole no-sulfur thing.

So now that that's out of the way, I can get on with telling you about this champagne that I'm drinking. It was actually opened two days ago, when I was down in Vertus with Pascal Doquet: he poured a pair of wines blind, and told me that they were in fact the same wine except for one detail. I guessed it on the second try—my first guess was that the oak was different, as it was so much more raw in one of the wines, but after that I did guess that one of them was made without sulfur. It's a 2007 from Le Mont Aimé, same grapes, same press, all vinified in barrel. The only difference is that part of it was sulfured and part wasn't.

The two wines are indeed remarkably different, even from the moment that the bottles were opened. The Avec Soufre version is tighter, crisper, yet it feels a bit unfriendly. It's like a sulking kid that just sits against the wall and pouts all through recess. Even now, two days later, it feels like it's fighting its wood, refusing to really integrate and become harmonious. The Sans Soufre is richer and fuller in aroma, and balances its oak much better at this stage. As with most good unsulfured wines, there's a certain voluptuousness about it, something sensual and visceral: in French, you might say it's *gourmand*. Pascal warned me that the unsulfured wine declines much more quickly after opening and that it ought to be drunk up soon, but even now, two days after it was opened, it feels generous and expressive, without any signs of fading. It's more oxidative than the sulfured wine, to be sure, but it's in no way oxidized. Right now, it tastes really good.

These won't be released until maybe around 2012, so they still have a long way to go in their development. How they will appear three years from now, I have no idea. Will the sulfured wine integrate better with its wood? Will it appear much fresher than the unsulfured version? Will we regret not drinking the unsulfured wine back in 2009 when it was still vibrant and delicious? Only time will tell.

POSTED BY PETER LIEM AT 22:53