

Wine Spectator

Stirring the lees with james molesworth

Posted: Apr 29, 2011 3:00pm ET

Ferraton Père & Fils

Damien Brusset has been in charge of the winemaking and Sigfried Pic has managed the business side at [Ferraton Père & Fils](#) since 2005. Since the tasting here is a bit of a marathon, we started first with the Ferraton wines that I have yet to taste from the 2009 vintage (others have been recently reviewed officially, from blind tastings in New York, and can be referenced in our online database).

The portfolio here has grown in recent years, following the Chapoutier model of appellation-based blends topped by single parcel cuvées. Ferraton Père & Fils now totals 12 hectares of vines, plus purchased fruit and produces a total of 45,000 cases annually. Exports to the U.S. have risen steadily in the last few years and now represent one-quarter of the production. This is a steadily improving operation delivering some excellent value amongst the big name appellations of the northern Rhône.

The **Hermitage White Les Miaux 2009** is predominantly Marsanne. It's ripe, round and lightly toasted with a hazelnut edge to the creamed peach and verbena notes.

The **St.-Joseph La Source 2009** is bottled; it's still a touch tight, with violet and cassis notes held in check by fine minerality. In contrast, the **St.-Joseph lieu-dit St.-Joseph 2009** is due to be bottled in the next day or two. The debut for this cuvée shows dense, sappy kirsch and plum sauce notes with a nicely focused, graphite-filled finish. The parcel features 70-year-old vines with full south exposure and managed to produce a scant 125 cases. The **Côte-Rôtie L'Eglantine 2009** is bright and lively, with a nice streak of kirsch backed by briar and sweet spice. The texture is plush, but the finish nicely focused.

The Cornas lineup has been one of the more dramatic areas of improvement here. Starting first with the **Cornas Les Les Grands Mûriers 2009**, which has a lively streak of mouthwatering acidity cutting through the red licorice, cherry compote and sweet tapenade notes. Following it, there are now two single parcel selections, starting with the **Cornas Lieu-Dit Patou 2009**, sourced from a smaller hillock on the southern edge of the appellation, with full south exposure, relatively rare in Cornas. It's dark and sappy, with lots of kirsch and blackberry fruit, ample spice and mouthfilling finish.

"It's a hot *lieu-dit*, which makes it a bold expression of Cornas. And it's taken a long time to settle in during the *élevage*," said Pic.

In contrast is the **Cornas Lieu-Dit Les Eygats 2009**, sourced from 40-plus-year-old vines from high up on the slope, resulting in fresher, more acid-driven fruit.

"Les Eygats is windy and very cool and thus it's almost always the last parcel we harvest," said Pic.

The wine is on the tangy side of the spectrum, with red cherry, plum peel and iron notes and a brisk feel cutting through the finish. Both show easily outstanding potential.

The **Crozes-Hermitage Les Pichères 2009** is new in this vintage as well. Just bottled, it's sourced from alluvial soils around the town of Pont de l'Isère, where the pebbles are larger than elsewhere in the

appellation, with red clay and sand underneath. It's still quite tight, with very brisk minerality and lovely iron, red currant and rose petal notes that drive through the finish. It's a surprisingly structured '09 as well and should unwind nicely over the next three to five years. The parcel selection **Crozes-Ermitage Le Grand Courtil 2009** is from a mid-slope parcel in Mercurol.

"Sandier soils and smaller pebbles than around Pont de l'Isère, with some limestone and granite too," said Pic. "So the minerality is more pronounced. It's completely different in style from the Les Pichères, which pushed us to bottle it separately."

Still to be bottled, so a bit more open now than the Les Pichères, the Le Grand Courtil is darker in profile, with fleshier plum and cassis, though the finish is quickly harnessed by long iron and graphite notes. It's also a touch longer than the Les Pichères but the quality here is pretty close.

The trio of Hermitage cuvées remains unchanged in '09, starting with the **Hermitage Les Miaux 2009**, a bold, ripe, wine that cuts a nice broad swath with dark currant paste, fig and graphite notes. It blends fruit from the Dionnières and Méal parcels while portions of each of those parcels are then also kept separate for the two parcel selection bottlings.

"Hermitage is always amazing because within five meters, the soil changes dramatically," said Pic. "And the vines [we keep separate] for the Dionnières bottling are older too."

The **Ermitage Les Dionnières 2009** is sourced from the portion of the parcel that is on limestone soil, as opposed to the portion with more clay that goes to the Les Miaux blend. It's racier, with a noticeable chalky spine cutting through the boysenberry and kirsch fruit, with a long, stylish finish. The more powerful of the two is the **Ermitage Le Méal 2009**. It's fleshier, with cocoa, espresso and loam notes leading the way for a core of black currant and fig fruit that waits in reserve. It's defined more by tannins than acidity on the finish, which rumbles along with authority. These are quietly among some of the better Hermitage examples in the appellation, and often check in at a relatively modest prices vis à vis the big names of M. Chapoutier and Jean-Louis Chave.

Finishing the '09 lineup is a pair of white parcel selections, both of which are planted to equal parts Marsanne and Roussanne. The **St.-Joseph White Les Oliviers 2009** is pure and unadorned, with beautiful green plum and heather notes that glide along effortlessly, followed by a rounded, flattering finish. The **Ermitage White Le Reverdy 2009** has just been bottled and is a touch tight, with a salted butter and blanched almond profile, followed by a tight chalk edge. There's a core of chamomile and verbena in reserve and this should flesh out easily as it recuperates from the bottling.

The **Crozes-Hermitage White La Matinière 2010** (100 percent Marsanne) is one of the top values in the profile. Bottled two weeks ago, it hasn't tightened up yet, with friendly chamomile and white peach flavors and a twinge of salted butter on the finish—it's a textbook Northern Rhône white.

"Mineral, mineral, mineral is the way to describe the '10s. But the depth is there too," said Pic. "As opposed to the flashy fruit of the '09s."

The **St.-Péray Le Mialan 2010** (100 percent Marsanne) is not yet bottled. It's aged in mostly stainless steel along with a touch of *demi-muid* to lend just a light creaminess to the wine. It is nicely rounded, but very floral and pure, with peach and pear notes that glide through the finish. The **St.-Joseph White La Source 2010** (100 percent Marsanne) is also still on its lees and will be bottled just before summer. It's very expressive, with enticing melon rind, chamomile and quince notes and a long, mineral-driven finish that shows the vintage's profile in spades. The **St.-Joseph White Les Oliviers 2010** (50/50 Marsanne and Roussanne) is a few shades of gold darker, thanks in part to its 100 percent oak, though none new (a steady shift in recent years).

"There are only two and a half barrels of the wine so there's not a lot of room to play. If one new barrel out of two and a half is new, it can really dominate the finished wine, so we've decided not to do it in recent vintages," said Pic of the shift.

The wine is quite lush, with more mango, quince and chamomile notes backed by a dense, mineral finish that will take a few years to open fully.

The **Hermitage White Les Miaux 2010** (almost all Marsanne with a drop of Roussanne) shows lively acidity from the start, with chartreuse, quince, chamomile and candied citrus peel notes racing through the finish. The **Ermitage White Le Reverdy 2010** is tighter and more focused, with melon rind, green fig and green almond notes taking the lead and a long, salted butter finish that sports mouthwatering minerality. It's one of the best young whites I've tasted here since Chapoutier took full control of Ferraton in 2007.

"It's been a great opportunity for the team at Ferraton," said Pic. "With Michel Chapoutier's investment, we've taken control of new vineyard parcels and improved the winemaking facility. There have been big changes."

The lone Vigonier bottling here is the **Condrieu Les Mandouls 2010**, a pure, green fig and pear peel-filled white with a bright candied lime peel and floral finish.

The **Crozes-Hermitage La Matinière 2010** is a great introduction to the vintage. This workhorse cuvée for the winery delivers a beautiful, fresh beam of violet and cassis, with a nice flicker of iron hanging on the finish. The **Crozes-Hermitage Les Pichères 2010** is winy and dark, with racy cassis, boysenberry and spice notes and lots of graphite stretching out the finish. It marries the ripe fruit of '09 with the extra racy profile of '10 nicely. The **Crozes-Ermitage Le Grand Courtil 2010** is the most structured of the three Crozes cuvées, with grippy briar, tar and graphite up front, holding the core of boysenberry and blackberry at bay for now. It's dense, but still plenty fresh, with nice drive on the finish.

There are now three red St.-Joseph cuvées, starting with the **St.-Joseph La Source 2010**, which was just racked, so it shows sappy kirsch fruit and tangy white pepper notes with a slightly angular finish, a result of it being moved. It should settle in well enough though. The **St.-Joseph Lieu-Dit Le Paradis 2010** is new to the lineup in '10, sourced from a fully south facing 0.48-hectare parcel in Mauves, which features the three soils of the appellation - wind-strewn loess on the plateau atop the slope, decomposed granite in the middle and alluvial sand at the bottom. It shows gorgeous purity, with long, flowing violet, plum and cassis notes and a lovely graphite edge on the finish. There are just 125 cases of the cuvée, well worth a search. The **St.-Joseph Lieu-Dit St.-Joseph 2010** features granite-only *terroir* and it shows a racier profile still, with mouthwatering cut to the violet, pastis and boysenberry fruit notes that course through the long, iron-filled finish. Again, there are just 125 cases produced, the price of working artisanally on steep, low-yielding slopes.

The **Cornas Les Grands Mûriers 2010** continues the upward trend of the Cornas bottling here, qualitatively, with attention-getting acidity right on the attack, followed by invigorating pastis, violet and blackberry notes inlaid with a note of sweet tapenade. The **Cornas Lieu-Dit Patou 2010** is remarkably defined and open, with saturated boysenberry, blueberry and blackberry fruit offset wonderfully by briar, sweet spice and dark tobacco notes. The **Cornas Lieu-Dit Les Eygats 2010** is much tighter though, with the briar, tapenade and chalk notes up front, while the core of black currant and boysenberry fruit sits in reserve. The finish is almost rigid now, but the acidity ripe and mouthwatering and this should stretch out during the upcoming *élevage*,

The **Côte-Rôtie L'Eglantine 2010** is a sappy, densely packed wine, with kirsch, roasted apple wood and licorice notes and a long finish. It's among the more primal of the '10 reds here. Another new addition in '10 is the **Côte-Rôtie Lieu-Dit Montmain 2010**, from the northern end of the appellation, which shows in the piercing iron, sanguine and alder wood notes that cut through the core of velvety plum and blackberry fruit.

"The wine was so dense and tight before the malo, it was really difficult to taste and see where it might be going," said Pic of the new Montmain cuvée. "But after the malo and racking, the *terroir* has really come shining through here."

Considering they have finished their malos and been recently racked, the three Hermitage cuvées are all remarkably defined and vibrant (after racking, wines typically turn backward or sullen for a period), as the minerality of the '10 vintage seems to make the wines brighter and more expressive than the '09s were at this stage. The **Hermitage Les Miaux 2010** has started to broaden out already, with velvety currant sauce, fig paste and graphite notes laced with dark cocoa. The **Ermitage Les Dionnières 2010** is dense and dark, with espresso, pastis and plum sauce notes still wrestling with one another, backed by a solid, tannin-driven finish. The **Ermitage Le Méal 2010** is the most backward of the three, with grippy, smoldering iron and charcoal notes up front, but still plenty of vivacious plum, blackberry and raspberry fruit flavors and a long spice and graphite-filled finish. As with the white Le Reverdy 2010, these three red Hermitage bottlings are potentially the best wines from Ferraton yet.