

Happy new year! Welcome to the January wine club.

In these cold times we seek comforting, engaging wines. This month we're looking at Banyuls, a sunnyshiny winegrowing area edging the Mediterranean Sea, edging the Franco-Spanish border.

In Banyuls they make fortified wines that are classic pairings for chocolate. To make this wine, called rimage, winemakers halt fermentation by adding alcohol to preserve sugar. It's definitively in the category of sweet wine, but it has great acidity, and is lighter in body, texture, and alcohol than many other dessert wines. This wine is a classic pairing for chocolate. Even if you're someone who always skips dessert, you may be pleasantly surprised by this wine.

Beyond the Rimage and rosé the region is famous for, Banyuls offers so much. Last year over a trip to San Francisco I became more acquainted with this vigneron Alain Castex and his work in Banyuls-sur-Mer. Along with Bruno Duchene, Castex has founded a vibrant natural wine community. While winemaking in the region has always tended towards traditional, these three wineries show a unique respect for the land. You have to love what you do here - while beautiful, it's challenging to scale narrow slopes of schist with the sea breeze howling. That wind is also a blessing, warding off rot and mold, and thus making it less necessary to spray cooper, use sulfur or other treatments.

These are confident wines, secure in their Mediterranean energy.

We greatly appreciate your support of the wine club this January. We hope this set helps you to drink well while staying warm.

With appreciation,

Cubby, Nathan, Catie O, Mac & Katherine

## Casot de Mailloles, Roc Blanc, 2016

Casot de Mailloles is really coastal, as you can see:



Founded and cared for by Alain Castex, the domain is now under the direction of Jordi Perez. Alain is really beloved for his leadership in this region. He still makes a little wine that's very hard to find in a garage shared with other vigneron. Jordi worked alongside Alain for two vintages before taking over completely in 2016.

The wines are notable for their embrace of ripe fruit and open, deceptively light structure. They show fresh, bright fruit character but are not shy in their savory character.

In addition to preserving Alain's well-known vineyard-specific bottlings (Soula, El Niño, Visinum), Jordi has also found new vineyards to work with. The Roc Blanc is one of these. It's 100% Syrah light enough for fish but bold enough for charcuteries.

Suggestions to cook:

Potato soup with a little chorizo, cod with olive oil  
breadcrumbs, marinated black olives.

### **Bruno Duchene, La Luna, 2016**

Bruno is originally from the Loire Valley, where his family had a thriving business selling farm machinery. Before starting his career as a winemaker, he was a wild mushroom distributor in the Loire Valley and Burgundy, which is when he became interested in wine; meticulously made, natural, non-interventionist wines in particular. He went to work with Frédéric Cossard of Domaine de Chassorney in Saint Romain for nine months to learn how to make it. He now resides in the town of Banyuls, where he produces wines from some of France's hardest-to-work vineyards. He owns 4 hectares spread over 4 parcels, all on schist but with enough exposition and micro-climate variations to keep it interesting. Banyuls' and Collioure's vineyards are notorious for being extremely low-yielding, and very difficult to work mechanically, which means an ever-increasing number of people have abandoned some of these legendary sites.

Bruno produces three reds: La Luna, La Pascole and L'Anodine (the latter is only occasionally available in magnums, now at the shop ☺). All three wines are made from Grenache and a tiny bit of Carignan. He bottles based on the distinct agricultural practices he performs on the different parcels. For La Luna, he lets grass grow free. It has wild, beachy, sunny, uplifting energy, but a firm backbone and a tender little hug of fruit.

Suggestions to cook: Lamb cassoulet, pasta with mushroom and butter bean, baby bok choy with oyster sauce

## **Domaine de la Tour Vieille, Rimage,**

In 1981, Vincent Cantié and Christine Campadieu took over two small, family-owned domains where they had grown up, in Collioure and Banyuls, respectively. Together, they farm vineyards planted on steep, schist terraces overlooking the sea, where they are constantly exposed to the fierce and wily wind known as "La Tramontagne." This constant wind not only ensures naturally low yields, but also keeps the grapes free of mildew with little need for pesticides or copper sulfate. Their vineyards are so steep that cultivation must be by hand, and extensive irrigation canals and walls (all made from the schist rock) are their only prevention against soil erosion, although there is almost no soil left to recede! These canals snake down the hillsides, separating the parcels. At harvest, the grapes are carried up and down the mountain in baskets. This method of farming, while extremely challenging, preserves the traditions of their ancestors. Such ideals have inspired two documentaries, *Wine From the Heart* by Yasha Aginsky (2002), and a short film sponsored by Project NOÉ for the defense of the European viticultural heritage.

Though the majority of the Tour Vieille holdings are planted with Grenache Noir, they also work with Grenache Gris, Grenache Blanc, Macabeo, Syrah, and Carignan. They have several single vineyard bottlings of Collioure, and several cuvées of Banyuls, from Christine's family's holdings. The heart, soul, and hard work that go into crafting these wines make their labor of love all the more delicious.

Suggestions to cook: chocolate soufflé, chocolate chestnut cake, poached fruit flambé