

# Wine Tasting, Vineyards, in France

**Wine Terroirs** : Wine discovery, wine tasting and vineyards in France .

February 02, 2013

## Georgia wines in Paris



Thierry Puzelat with visitors

Le Chateaubriand, Paris 11th

I had been emailed about this tasting a few weeks prior to the event, and I decided to attend, given that the weather wouldn't be too tough and allow me to ride there on motorbike from work. I must confess that I occasionally give up on a few tastings because either torrential rains or snowy/icy conditions. I arrived at the place at around 4:30pm, the day had been bright and almost warm, especially compared with the freezing temperatures of a week before. Very good for the tasting, tastings in freezing temperatures are always hard on the wines.



Thierry Puzelat who manages to make and organize so many things beyond his own winery and his négoce, had put up this tasting centered on Georgia wines, with the help of the people of Le Chateaubriand, a restaurant of the 11th arrondissement known for its food and wine list (see picture at the bottom of this page). The emailing of Puzelat about the event highlighted the fact that these artisan winegrowers worked organically and vinified the *kvevri* way, using buried amphorae as fermenters. Most of these vintners had never travelled to France and that was an opportunity to meet them as well as to taste their wines. They came from several regions of

Georgia, from Kakhetia near Azerbaidjan (a hot and dry region), from Imeretia (in the west, a more humid area near the black sea) and from near Tbilissi at the border with breakaway-region Ossetia. There would be also wine from a

monetary, the leading monk/cellar master not coming alas in person.

Georgia, as we could read in the invitation email, has a vibrant winemaking culture and no less than 500 indigenous grape varieties still in place. While Georgia like Russia has big, modern wineries set up from the ashes of former industrial soviet kholkoz, all using international grape varieties for mass-bottling markets, the small country has also all these artisan wine farms which represent a real, age-old winemaking with a philosophy similar to the natural wine ethic, although the style of the resulting wines is so different.



Marc Sibard & Rodolphe Paquin

A few people were standing outside when I arrived and I didn't even have to show a business card, this free tasting didn't even have an invitation check, wine tastings in Paris (even professional ones) are great for that.

I'm not familiar with Georgia wines unlike Alice Feiring who has been venturing in this small country in the Caucasus. And guess who is one of the first person I recognized when I walked in? Alice. She didn't see me at first, so I began to taste in the back.

This was the end of the tasting day but the restaurant which was devoid of most of its tables was still buzzing with the visitors. Professional tastings are often held on Mondays in Paris because that's when restaurants are closed and restaurateurs and sommeliers have time to wander out and prospect. I spotted Bernard Pontonnier and also (pictured here) Marc Sibard from the Caves Augé chatting with Rodolphe Paquin of Le Repaire de Cartouche. Georgia wines seem to be more than just fancy beverages from an exotic new producing country, as this evening could prove to me. This country has, like many of its neighbors by the way, the potential to be among the leading wine regions in terms of authenticity and sense of place.



Out of this world

The first table I walked to was of course a mystery for me, the labels of the bottles being either covered with indecipherable characters (couldn't these guys just print their thing in Russian ?) or with strange English winery names. This table was the one of a winery named for example Our Wine, I didn't picture the labels but the carafed whites were so appealing that I probably thought that the bottles outlook wouldn't help understand the wines. Amazing wines indeed.

\_\_\_ Our Wine Rkatsikeli 2011 (don't tease me if I misspell these wines/varieties names). Our Wine is the name of the Domaine. The link is not for profit but the tasting notes describe the thing quite well. Wonderful golden color. The nose is complex and intense. Exceptional, an eerie dry style of wine, seems very mineral with some aromas of crispy dry leaves. This is a blend of two varieties, of which I'll give you the name later ;-)

\_\_\_ OurWine Tsarapi 2011. Another striking white. Blend of three varieties here. Also carafed, they're both on the picture, don't ask me which is which now, although I knew when I shot it. The mouth feel is different, with a touch on the side of the mouth similar to some sort of thin paper, this is a thin-textured tannicity, very elegant. These whites have a bit of an oxidative character which make me think that they can age very long.

\_\_\_ Akhoebi 2011, a red (Saperavi). Nice concentration. Interesting tannicity, well integrated into the wine. Powerful wine. These wines should cost around 15 or 20 Euros here in France, I need to ask Thierry who overlooks their distribution in France



Alexandra, with Gaioz Sopromadze

Arriving at 4:30 was not without risk, and I couldn't taste the wines of Gaioz Sopromadze (Domaine name : Sopromadze's marani) because the bottles were empty. Georgians speak no French at all and very little English, if any, so communication was sketchy. Russian is still the lingua franca of the former soviet republics, and I could use my meager knowledge to help translate what Gaioz wanted to tell to Alexandra, a French amateur of natural wines whom I befriended here. He actually was trying to tell her that he regretted to be already married, otherwise...



John Wurdeman & Alice Feiring

I could find time to say hello to [Alice Feiring](#) and chat a few minutes with her. She had arrived the previous day and had of course a busy schedule of winery visits and wine fairs, the next weekend particularly in and near Angers in the Loire. She is pictured here with John Wurdeman. There were 3 Japanese women behind at a table who seemed to have reached heights of delight with the wines of the small Caucasus region. I was myself tasting the wines of an Italian woman who was also taking part to the event, when I shot this picture.



Iago Bitarishvili

Among the visual souvenirs I had of Georgia there was a magic movie made in the soviet times by a director named Otar Iosseliani, the movie had a very long name : Once Upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird. I watched this movie many years ago and I just remember that it was like no other, an incredible avalanche of impressions and poetry. That's a bit my impression with several of these wines from Georgia, particularly the whites, they're certainly from another planet. The next table I walked to was the one of Iago Bitarishvili, the man behind Iago's Wine.

Iago's Wine, Chinuri 2011. Village of Chardakhi. Iago's Wine is the name of the winery, of the cellar, it's an English name and if the few wine farms I came through here are representative, English names are the trend in Georgia. The wine is carafed and has this gorgeous gold/amber color. The mouth is just from out of this world, quite impossible to describe. Very classy and elegant, no equivalent.

The wine is made the Georgian way, in clay amphorae which are kept burried to the neck into the ground. There's been a skin contact of 6 months for this wine, which counts a lot for the final result. Iago who speaks some English explained to me how the skins do some sort of natural filtration on the wine so that it gets clear after the process.



Soliko Tsaishvili, Alice Feiring, Nikoloz Antadze

Here on the left you can see Soliko Tsaishvili who from what I understand is one of the men behind the Our Wine estate, and on the right, this is Nikoloz Antadze of the Antadze winery, a tiny 3-hectare family venture. No need to say that the various Georgian estates present that day work in an organic and no-additives philosophy, first because that's the way they have been doing for ages in their respective families, and second because the soviet-era isolation prevented them to be exposed to the influx of sophisticated biotech tools and products. Georgia is said to be one of the first place in the world where wine was made in large volumes and the fermentation in buried amphorae is still the norm. As a reminder of the age of winemaking in the region, Armenia is home to a winemaking operation in Areni which was dated back to 4100 B.C.

I missed Antadze wines because there was no more of it when I arrived.

Alaverdi Monastery Cellar, Kakheti 2010. White. "Dry unfiltered amber wine". Exceptional wine. Again. It's like if it radiated from inside the mouth.

Alaverdi Monastery Cellar Kisi Kakheti 2011. Beautiful, with an enjoyable gliding feel.



Gela Patalishvili & John Wurdeman

Pheasant's Tears is probably the most well known winery among the small group of wineries being exported through the natural-wine distribution channels. It is closely associated with the personality of John Wurdeman, an American painter who first settled in Russia in the 1990s' and then moved to Georgia where he fell in love with the country and people and where he met his wife. Wurdeman met Gela Patalishvili, the winemaker in 2005 while he was painting along a road in the Alazani Valley. Patalishvili was driving back home from his vineyards on his tractor and the two became friends, Pheasant's Tears being set up in 2006 as the result of their common project. Several partners from Scandinavia joined the venture and this is now a 5-strong team at Pheasant's Tears who play a decisive role to put the spotlight on the artisan winemaking of Georgia.

\_\_\_ Pheasant's Tears Chinuri 2011. White. "Dry unfiltered amber wine". No notes, sorry.

\_\_\_ Pheasant's Tears Mtsvane 2011. White. From a 1,5 hectare plot, 60-year-old vines. Quite mineral in the mouth, straight forward mouth. Nice wine.

\_\_\_ Pheasant's Tears Kisi 2011. White with a darker color. Quite a classy mouth, a bit of a drying feel though, at first try. Not very aromatic.

\_\_\_ Pheasant's Tears Rkatsiteli 2011. White.

\_\_\_ Pheasant's Tears Tavkveri 2011. Red. A bit sugary. Quite powerful.

\_\_\_ Pheasant's Tears Shaukarito 2011. Red. Gets swallowed easily, enjoyable fruit and seems to have a good length.

\_\_\_ Pheasant's Tears Saperavi 2011. Red. Generous nose with ripe peony and other expressive summer flowers in the evening. In the mouth, modest substance but enjoyable drink.





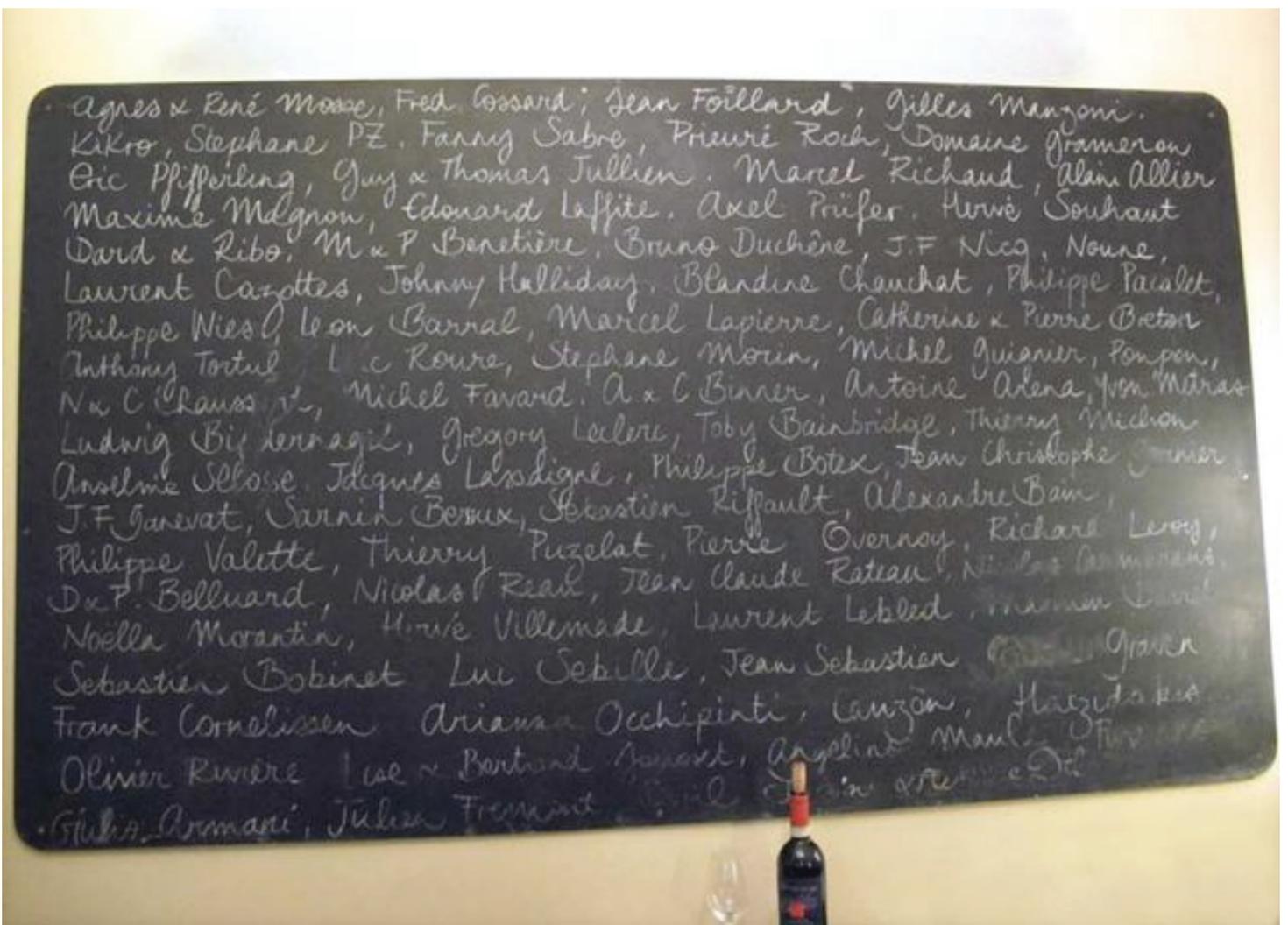
Francesca Padovani

There were also a few non-Georgian wines at the Chateaubriand tasting, and I tasted a few wines of the Padovani sisters who make wine in Montalcino south of Sienna, Italy. Their Fonterenza estate is farmed in biodynamics and the twin sisters got the help of Thierry Puzelat and Pierre Overnoy in their natural winemaking initiation.

Here are two wines which I liked particularly :

\_\_\_ Campi di Fonterenza Pettirosso 2011, a red. The mouth has beautiful aromas of generous leaves. A light wine with a peppery side and sugary feel that is rather enjoyable.

\_\_\_ Campi di Fonterenza Lupetto 2009. Cabernet Sauvignon (90 %) and Sangiovese (10 %). Intense and beautiful, a real pleasure to drink, superb wine.



THAT is a wine list....

I may disclose a secret here with just one picture : the list of estate/winemakers found these days in the cellar of Chateaubriand, although they may have other, hidden gems not listed here. I knew the place was a sought-after venue for demanding wine amateurs, now I have a better grasp of the vinous landscape.

We haven't tried the restaurant yet, but it is now among the respected newcomers in Paris which again put the 11th arrondissement on the front seat regarding the new bistros with a great wine list. The outside of the place is quite humble with a period storefront blending perfectly in the atmosphere of the Avenue Parmentier which is a very average street with nothing special about it.

Read Aaron's piece if you want to know more about a dining experience at Chateaubriand.

Thierry Puzelat is helping these vintners find a market in France and Europe, here is the Puzelat page on Georgia wines. Here are Puzelat's imports from Italy, Spain and Chile.

This video shows the Imeretian winemaking method with the amphorae being completely buried into the ground (more than just to the neck) for months.

Watch John Wurdeman in this video explaining his awakening to artisanal Georgian wines during a lecture at TEDxTbilisi.

Wine news straight from Georgia (in English).