**Subject: Domaine du Coulet - Wine Spectator - James Molesworth Blog - March 18, 2010**

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**The Rhône, Day 6: One Cornas, One Crozes**

**After finishing up my rounds in Cornas at Domaine du Coulet, its off to Alain Graillot**

**Posted: Mar 18, 2010 3:00pm ET**

**Domaine du Coulet**

As noted after my initial visit here, I think this is one of the single most exciting new domaines to come on the scene in the Northern Rhône since I began covering the region several years ago. Matthieu Barret makes electric wine, with vivid fruit, crackling acidity, yet still true to the taut, bracing minerality that defines Cornas. For background on this domaine you can reference my cellar notes from [October 2007](http://www.winespectator.com/blogs/show/id/Day-1-Some-New-Faces-in-Cornas_15187) and [March 2009](http://www.winespectator.com/blogs/show/id/The-Rhone-Day-8-Keeping-Some-Stubble-for-a-Day-in-Cornas_16010).

After experimenting more in his first few vintages, Barret seems to have settled in now. The domaine now totals 10 hectares of vines, all concentrated in the northern end of the appellation known as Coulet. There are an additional 3 hectares of vines in Côtes du Rhône as well. Grapes are destemmed and parcels fermented separately in stainless steel tanks, but without temperature control. The young vines are then moved to cement eggs; the old vines to *demi-muids*(large, 600-liter barrels). The various cuvées represent approximate blends of similar parcels and vine ages, but there are no hard and fast rules.

"I begin the blend in the vineyard," said the talkative and sometimes self-deprecating Barret. "And then I build from there. So they are really more 'ideas' in the end."

Barret noted that his fermentation took a little longer than usual in 2009, when most others reported quick ferments.

"The skins were drier following the drought so things went slowly in the tank. But the vintage wasn't as tough [in terms of tannins] as '05. We had better phenolic maturity in '09," he said.

There are now four cuvées produced here, in ascending order they are Brise Cailloux, Les Terasses du Serre, Billes Noires and Gore, "My bloody wine," said Barret, laughing. Yields have been absurdly low for the last two vintages, just 15 hectoliters per hectare, a level that Barret knows is neither healthy for the vineyards nor a sustainable economic model.

"I really want to get the vineyards stabilized at about 25 hl/ha," he said. "Right now they're too low and the wines can be a little difficult. At 25 you can still make the same wine, maybe better, because you have more juiciness to balance the minerality and the vineyard won't be as stressed."

*Cornas remains the most rustic appellation in the Northern Rhône, with a small but growing cadre of serious vignerons.*

To that end, Barret is adding organic compost to boost the vines' productivity.

Tasting the young vine parcel from one of the cement eggs, likely destined for the **2009 Cornas Brise Cailloux**, I immediately see the sappy, vibrant violet and purple fruit profile that is the hallmark here. It's bracing, but not as dense as the top parcels. Nonetheless, Barret is contemplating not making the Brise Cailloux cuvée in '09, because of its power, and instead, "classifying up" to the other cuvées.

The **2009 Cornas Les Terasses du Serre** is Barret's "classic"-style cuvée, sourcing fruit from the middle slopes of the appellation. From the Muzards parcel, the wine is very tight but quickly shows dark, *sauvage* notes as it airs in the glass. A *demi-muid* of juice from La Geynale is still working through its malo and shows a bit of reduction, but also opens to pure, vivid fruit with air. It's quite showy, ultimately, and coming from a warmer portion of the appellation, Barret said he just used a little to blend in, so as not to overwhelm the cuvée. The juice from the middle slopes of the Mazards and Patron parcels have been blended already, showing very sappy, intense kirsch fruit and amazing aromatic power.

Most of the parcels we try show some reduction, as Barret has yet to rack the '09 reds.

"I don't like to rack in the first year," he said. "If it gets reduced, it can be reversed. I'd rather have the wine protected more early on."

For the **2009 Cornas Billes Noires**, a section from the Arlets parcel at the top of the hill is tight, but packed, with dense, brooding fruit backed by blazing minerality, the kind that Barret wants for the cuvée. Though all the cuvées here are exceptional in 2009, the Billes Noires is flirting with classic quality, as it shows the best combination of fruit and minerality, a feat that Barret said is especially difficult in warmer years like '09, which he feels is a tad too powerful for his style.

*Matthieu Barret’s cellarhand was apparently very enthused with the prospects for the wine in this barrel.*

"Years that are cooler, even with some rain, are really not a problem because Cornas is always warmer than elsewhere in the north, and it drains so well," he said. "The heat gives us extreme fruit, the fine granite soils give us the minerality and finesse, so two opposites combine to make something great. We just need to balance the power with the freshness."

The **2009 Cornas Gore** is basically a single-parcel selection, using fruit from parcels that feature the crumbled, pebbly granite known locally as "gore." The wine shows violet, cassis and cherry confiture notes, with a gorgeously racy spine that won't quit. It should rival the Billes Noires cuvée for quality.

In 2008, Barret made the difficult decision to produce just one cuvée, the **2008 Cornas Brise Cailloux**.

"2008 is a very acidic vintage, so I worked the wine more like a Burgundy than a Rhône," said Barret.

"The wine is an admirable effort, and among the best '08 Cornas I've tried so far, featuring brisk but balanced red currant and pomegranate fruit flavors that quickly open and expand in the glass.

A late release from the domaine will be the **2007 Cornas Gore**, bottled in magnums. It's very intense, with a racy beam of currant, iron, lilac and white pepper notes that manages to maintain freshness and precision despite its depth. The long, pebbly feel on the finish is invigorating and the wine could potentially merit a classic rating when released.

"I adore 2007 as a vintage," said Barret, It's a serious vintage, but it's fresh and drinkable now too."