

BURN BABY BURN

Burn Cottage Pinot Noir, a new arrival from Central Otago, is a highly anticipated New Zealand project, and a small quantity of the inaugural 2009 vintage has just landed in Australia. Otago pinot is a much hyped and rapidly moving offering and it is projects like this that will further add to the region's appeal. To establish something with such long-term vision and thorough dedication to quality has been something of an Achilles's Heel for the Otago region, but at Burn Cottage it's the cornerstone to the project's success.

US-based owner of the project, Marquis Sauvage, has diverse involvement in wine with family investment in the Rhinepfalz estate Koehler Ruprecht, a successful distribution and importation business, and this world-class operation since 2003.

The vineyard is steered along biodynamic lines (as is every other step of production) and acclaimed Sonoma County vigneron, Ted Lemon, oversees all winemaking with the team on the ground led by Claire Mulholland. The calibre of the people behind the project is telling in itself, and this first release 2009 is well worth tracking down. Just 560 cases (and a few larger format bottles) of the **2009 Burn Cottage Pinot Noir** were made, 80 dozen of which have been imported into Australia through Cellarhand. The wine retails for \$85 and is available through the Prince Wine Store, East End Cellars and Ultimo Wine Centre. **NICK STOCK**



NEW ARRIVAL
Central Otago pinot
from Burn Cottage is
right on the money.

SPANISH MILESTONE

Scott Wasley's The Spanish Acquisition celebrates its 10th anniversary this year after a decade of importing, and now representing 30 producers of Spanish and Portuguese native varietal wines, sherries and Ports. The initially small company has grown to be Australia's leading importer and distributor of Spanish and Portuguese wines, and is largely responsible for broadening Australia's knowledge of and appreciation for the Spanish wine scene, through the wines of Telmo Rodriguez, Alvaro Palacios and many more. For further information, visit www.the-spanishacquisition.com or call (03) 9495 6373.

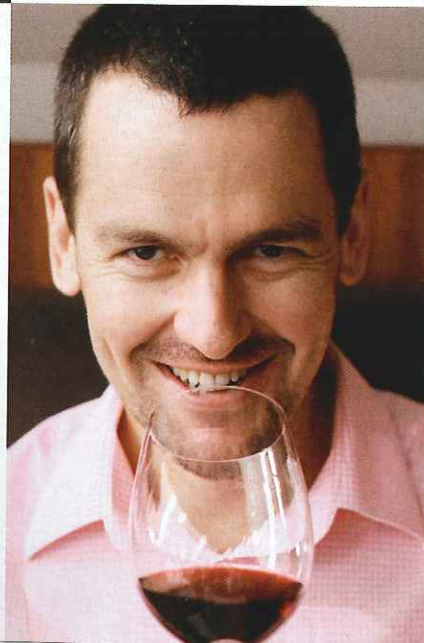
SOPHIE MCCOMAS

STAR WINE SCRIBE

Congratulations to all who entered this year's New Wine Writer Award. The entries were of an exceptional calibre. A piece entitled "Cin Cin Comrade" by Adrian Corker, was just pipped at the post by a wonderful article by Otto Ristorante's sommelier, **Patrick White** (right) from Sydney, called "Man Made? Naturally!".

Huon Hooke judged finalists selected by president of Wine Communicators of Australia, Rob Hirst and *GT WINE* editor, Judy Sarris, and made the following comments on White's work: "Patrick White's article, about the all-important human role in winemaking, is thoughtfully conceived and faultlessly executed. He writes beautifully, his use of language is fresh and apt, and his story has a textbook structure: like a fine wine, it has a tantalising start, a well-developed middle palate or theme, and a satisfying conclusion. Along the way, it challenges one or two sacred cows. I thought it best of a very strong field of contenders – perhaps the strongest ever group of entries for this award."

White, head sommelier since 2005 says, "I have always enjoyed writing and indulged an amateur interest in composition extending from self-involved poetry in my youth through to various writing competitions." This is the first he's won, he was presented with a cheque for \$1000, a \$1000 cellar, a Riedel decanter and a 12-month membership to WCA at the Sydney Royal Wine Show lunch in February. You'll find his winning article on page 52.



NEW WINE WRITER AWARD



TEXT PATRICK WHITE

Man Made? Naturally!

The winner of the 2011 *Gourmet Traveller WINE/Wine Communicators Australia New Wine Writer Award* is sommelier Patrick White. His thoughtful and informative article on the importance of a vigneron's role in expressing terroir greatly impressed the judges.

It was right at the end of my brief visit to Thierry Allemand's eponymous winery in the Northern Rhône village of Cornas when I suggested that he visit Australia. His response was singular and instantaneous. He laughed! That would never happen, he said. He could never leave Cornas. There was far too much work to do.

His response was that of a man deeply committed to his vocation and profoundly connected to the land from which his work springs. Thierry Allemand has a clear conception of what constitutes great Cornas. His every action is in the service of realising this vision. A trip to Australia, or anywhere else for that matter, serves no end. It would be nothing but a distraction from his main purpose. That is, to be a clear conduit for the unambiguous expression of a unique terroir.

Vigneron as conduit. Now there's a thought. A winemaker consciously acting as a channel through which we can experience an essential expression of a specific patch of dirt. Great wine requires a thoughtful vigneron. In fact, I would argue that it is the vigneron's role that is the strongest determining factor in a wine's quality. It is only through the conscious action of a thoughtful vigneron that great wine is possible. Allow me to elaborate.

A couple of days prior to my meeting Allemand, I had the privilege of visiting Philippe Pacalet at his winery in the town of Beaune, in the centre of Burgundy's famed Côte d'Or. Superficially, two winemakers couldn't be less alike. Allemand is lean, sinewy

and reserved, with a distinct gravitas; a deep-thinking man of the land. Pacalet, by contrast, has a rounded, cherubic face topped by a shock of curly hair, and an impish twinkle in his eye. He is a worldly man whose levity and playfulness belie his ability as a winemaker of the highest order.

Like Allemand, Pacalet is committed to producing wines that eloquently express their origins. Wines which speak of their land in their maker's distinctive accent. Their approaches to winemaking could be described as natural only insofar as they eschew any artifice that may cloud what the terroir has to say.

Allemand is both an oenologist and viticulturalist. He owns and carefully tends every plot of vines that goes into the making of his two stellar Cornas cuvées. Pacalet is more promiscuous. He does not own any of the vineyards from which he crafts his wide range of single-vineyard wines. Instead, he has taken years to develop close relationships with each of the trusted growers from which he buys his fruit. Both possess an intimate understanding of the vineyards they are working with. Though neither claims to be organic or biodynamic in their practice, they both are vigilant managers of their vineyards, and keep the use of herbicides and pesticides to an absolute minimum.

There are also striking similarities in their techniques. Both use only indigenous yeasts in fermentation. No new oak barrels are employed. There is no chaptalisation, acid or

tannin addition. Both avoid using mechanical pumps and neither fines nor filters their wines if possible. The only addition they make is a dose of sulfur at bottling.

When you see the vineyards of Cornas, you understand how unnatural vineyards are in this environment. The narrow road to Allemand's winery snakes up the precipitous hillside directly outside the village of Cornas. Countless tiny plots of vineyard cling precariously to the steep slopes, forming a complex patchwork of vertiginous viticulture. Man has had to do it tough here, carving out small niches to give the vines a foothold. You really have to want to make Cornas. The landscape is tough, the yields are low and the backbreaking manual labour is never-ending.

The results speak for themselves. Throughout the barrel tasting of the various vineyard plots, Allemand spoke of the *gout de terroir*. Each had its own clearly discernible character and each was equally exquisite. They were all subtly nuanced riffs on a deeply earthen and somewhat hard-bitten theme. They were savoury and richly satisfying yet with a firm, unyielding edge. Much like the land from which they had sprung and the man who had given them life.

Pacalet's exquisite Burgundies by contrast had a rare delicacy and finesse. Vines do not have as hard a time of it in Burgundy. Still, more so than any other wine region in France, vineyard location and appellation are paramount. To be able to source fruit from

BARE FACTS

The Beaune vineyards where Philippe Pacalet crafts eloquent wines.

the most prestigious appellations requires mastery of the arts of negotiation and persuasion. Pacalet possesses such gifts and it shows in his wines. They were highly refined yet light on their feet. They are the wines of a well-travelled and urbane man.

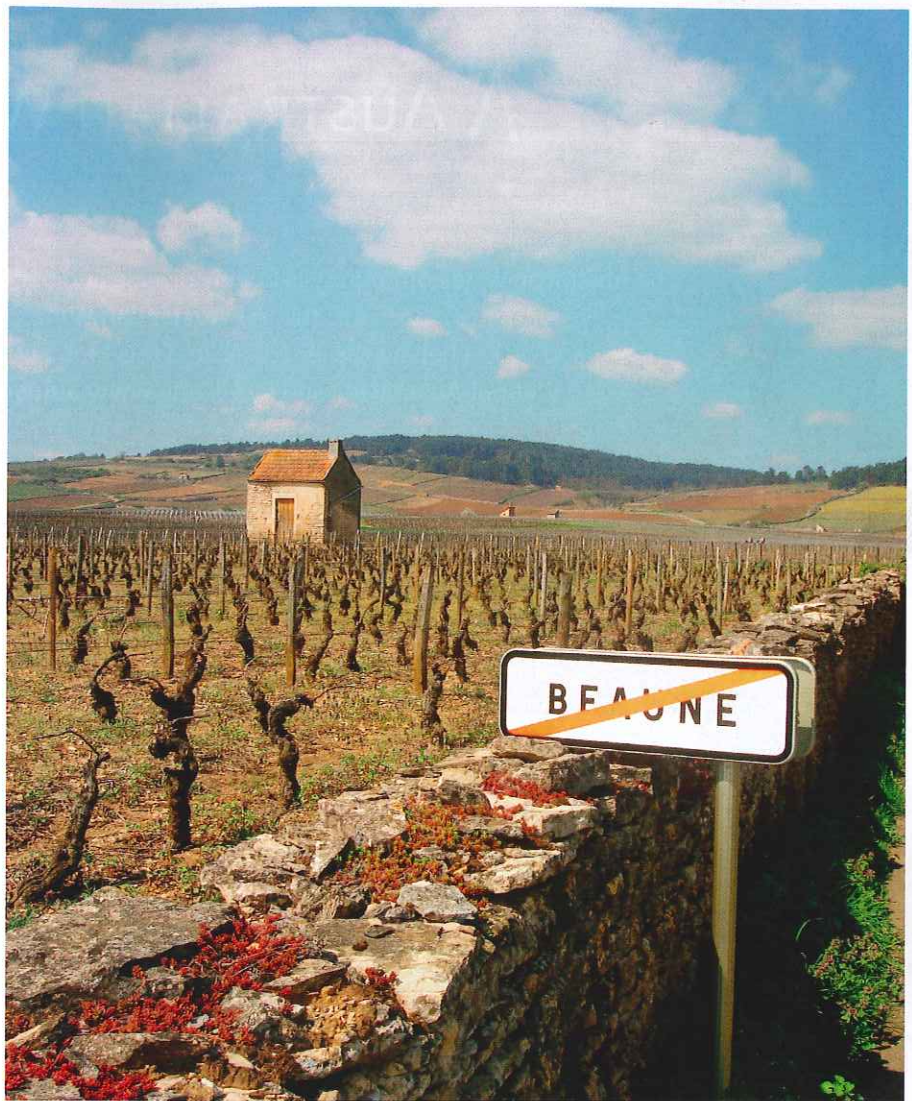
Neither man claimed to be natural in his winemaking practice. Each acknowledged the importance of the vineyards with which they worked, yet each already had a clear idea of what constituted great wine. The thoughtful vigneron is pivotal. That was the great lesson I took from meeting these two men.

Having written these words, I can already hear the howls of heresy. "Great wine is made in the vineyard, you fool! Terroir is king!" Well, yes... and, no. As I understand it, terroir encompasses not only the vines, the soil in which they are planted and the particular micro-climate they enjoy, but also – to paraphrase renowned English wine writer Tom Stevenson – the joker in the pack, the winemaker. It is, after all, the winemaker who brings all these elements together and into the bottle.

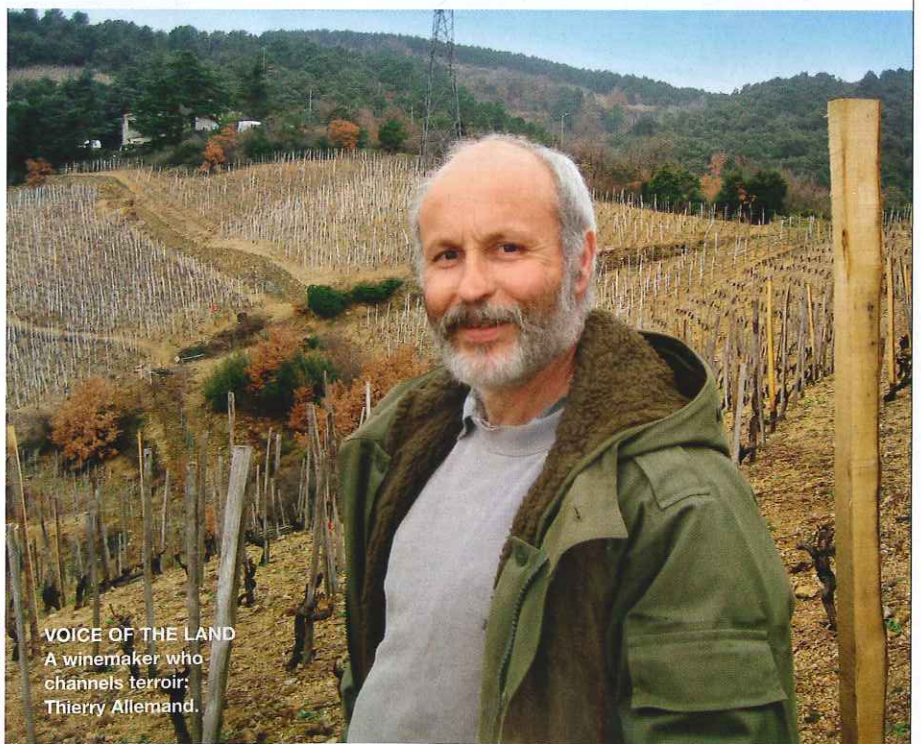
Wines at the pointy end of the market are now proudly touted for the natural techniques that were employed in their making. It is part of the zeitgeist. We live in a time of ever increasing fabrication where much of the wine commercially available has become an industrial rather than an artisanal beverage. As such we have come to fetishise those which are seen to be pure, unadulterated, natural and organic. It is as if you can taste the wine's moral and ethical superiority. We didn't make the wine, the wine made itself.

Oh, really? Every step of the winemaking process from where to first plant the vines through to when to finally bottle, involves conscious human intervention. To tout a wine as natural is, well, a fabrication. The vigneron is the conduit.

Next time you pull the cork on a great wine that transports you to the place from whence it came, raise a glass to the vigneron who brought it into being. It would not have been possible without his first conceiving it in his mind's eye and then acting consistently in the realisation of this vision. Just don't expect him to be paying you a visit any time soon. He's perfectly happy where he is. 🍷



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VOICE OF THE LAND
A winemaker who channels terroir:
Thierry Allemand.