

### Could the real Terroir please stand up?

John Saker, writing recently in "Canvas" wrote these wonderfully pertinent words on terroir: "Our Pinot has decided it likes the habitat of several regions, but simply feeling comfortable in a place is not what we're talking about."

There's so much talk around about terroir, yet I for one have just realized that I am only just beginning to develop an understanding of what it means.

In recent months New Zealand has been visited by a couple of the current great men of the French wine industry. I'm speaking of soil guru Claude Bourguignon and chief winemaker at Chateau de Beaucastel, Francois Perrin. Both of these guys had their own clear idea of the meaning of terroir and it should not go unnoticed that both were men of science **AND** committed to organic viticulture. I was lucky to spend a fair bit of one-on-one time with Francois. It's to Claude that I credit an awakening and to Francois the understanding.

It's interesting how the French always seem to be shifting the goal post on the things dear to their hearts, so that we antipodeans struggle to catch their tails, but I was particularly taken with what appears to be a new explanation of terroir. What follows seems to be the current vogue amongst our Gaelic brothers.

So what was this compelling definition of terroir?

Francois put it well when he described it like this:

"Terroir is first the soil. And it is the climate, and it is man's interaction with these both. If you like, it is man finishing the job started by nature. But it is never man changing nature." He went on to give some very pertinent examples.

Just one is sufficient here. We all understand the importance of soil micro-organisms in releasing nutrients from the fine particles of the soil, and the soil organic matter. It is widely accepted that most modern inorganic fertilizers interfere with the action of soil micro organisms (sometimes killing them outright) and they can also shift the balance and type of micro organisms in our soils. This creates an artificial soil environment. It is therefore false to claim that wines from this artificial environment express the natural terroir of the site.

If you can accept this definition of terroir, and the simple argument and logic that extends from it, you would not talk of terroir in your wines unless you practice organics in your soils.

If you're growing Sauvignon blanc under a winery contract in Marlborough or Hawkes Bay, I wouldn't be too concerned about terroir. Not for a few years anyway. But I've recently come to realize there are some amongst us who have been working on their terroir for years. These are the people who know and understand their soils and farm them **in harmony with nature** rather than **regardless of nature**. By this definition, these folk who practice organics in their soils can claim to have established the first wines expressing true terroir in New Zealand.

Understanding a concept like terroir is just the tip of the knowledge iceberg. It's vital that we continue to push the boundaries of our viticulture, winemaking and marketing in order to maintain our premium position in world markets.

### Vines available for 2007

Cabernet franc  
Cabernet sauvignon  
Chardonnay  
Flora  
Gewurztraminer  
Malbec  
Merlot  
Montepulciano  
Petit verdot  
Pinot noir  
Riesling  
Sangiovese  
Sauvignon blanc  
Syrah  
Tannat  
Uzbekistan Muscat  
Viognier

#### "What's Hot"

Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir and Viognier. We've experienced unprecedented demand for these varieties lately, particularly Pinot Gris. Our next newsletter will have some thoughts and observations on Pinot Gris - keep an eye open for it.



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VALLEY  
NURSERY

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