

Domaine de Pallus

A Young Superstar Returns to His Roots

In 2004, France's most respected critic, Michel Bettane, got together with Spain's legendary journalist, José Penin, to taste the two countries' thirty-one best wines blind.

Tastings like this often contain a shocker; this time it was that an obscure wine from Ribera del Duero—made by a little-known French winemaker—tied 1994 Vega Sicilia for Bettane's top red wine, edging out 2000 Ch. Latour.

The upstart was 2002 Dominio de Atauta "Llanos del Almendro," made by the then 25-year-old Bertrand Sourdais, a native of Chinon in the Loire Valley. The Atauta post was Bertrand's first as winemaker, having worked as an understudy at Mouton-Rothschild, Santa Rita in Chile, and for Alvaro Palacios in Priorat.

Trained at the University of Bordeaux, Bertrand had been drawn to Atauta by its ancient, ungrafted vines of unique local Tempranillo clones. In developing the estate from scratch, Bertrand was forced to think critically about each aspect of the wine's creation, and the results of his efforts have been a string of utterly profound and critically acclaimed wines.

The Return

While achieving stardom in Spain, Bertrand remained passionate for his native Chinon, and for its emblematic variety, Cabernet Franc. And so it was inevitable that he would someday apply his gifts at his family's estate, Domaine de Pallus in the appellation's heart in Cravant-les-Côteaux.

Four years ago, with his father's retirement nearing, Bertrand took up the challenge of creating something *great* at Pallus. At Atauta, he had learned to question orthodoxy, and at Pallus he believed he could chart a new course. His goal, ultimately, was to honor Chinon's soil



Bertrand Sourdais

and its ancient traditions. But he knew that to do so, he would need to both correct the flaws that persisted in the region's traditional methods, while avoiding the mistakes typically made by modernists.

The Start

Bertrand began his quest in the summer of 2003. From the start, he has worked in the vineyards to create harmony and balance. As at Atauta, he is working tirelessly to find the potential of each vine. And while biodynamics are an important tool for many Loire Valley growers, they are merely a starting point for Bertrand to set his vineyards on the right path.

Of course, he has completely rethought the winemaking process. He is employing an extended maceration—up to an astonishing thirty days—to capture the "true" personality of Chinon. *Élevage* is similarly long and gentle—primarily in 2nd passage barrels from Haut Brion. With each succeeding vintage, we expect to see more striking and individualistic wines from this iconoclastic winemaker.

Les Pensées de Pallus

Bertrand's top cuvée is Les Pensées de Pallus. While making less expensive wines for the French market, he selects his oldest and best vines to produce Les Pensées.

The first vintage to be offered in the United States, the 2004, was shipped at the end of 2006. It reveals classic Loire Valley Cabernet Franc aromas and flavors, but with remarkable precision and the kind of textural depth that is rarely seen in Chinon.

The 2005 vintage—which will reflect not only a great year but Bertrand's ongoing quest for perfection in both vineyard and cellar—will arrive in the fall of 2007.

DOMAINE DE PALLUS

Chinon, France

OVERVIEW

Established: 1883

Proprietor/Winemaker: Bertrand Sourdais

Bertrand's First Vintage: 2003

While achieving stardom at Spain's Dominio de Atauta, Bertrand remained passionate for his native Chinon, and for its emblematic variety, Cabernet Franc.

In 2003, with his father's retirement nearing, Bertrand took up the challenge of creating something great at the family estate, Domaine de Pallus. Bertrand has brought to the project an insider's sense of tradition combined with an outsider's eye for change. He aspires to test the limits of possibility for the vineyards that 5 generations of his family have worked.

BERTRAND'S CONCEPT

Soils: The estate holds almost 30 small parcels located in Chinon's heart at Cravant-lès-Coteaux. Soils range from heavy, limestone-rich clay, to sand.

The Cuvée: Bertrand selects from the estate's best parcels to work in "his way," and those form the basis for his Les Pensées. He likes a blend of limestone clay (for aromatics), heavier clay (for power), and sand (for finesse).

Farming: Bertrand employs a thoughtful adaptation of biodynamics – listening to the vines instead of listening to rote dogma.

Vines: The vines for Pensées have an average age of over 30 years old. Bertrand will gradually incorporate more of the estate's vineyards into his Pensées cuvée, but only after each parcel proves its worth.

WINEMAKING NOTES

Bertrand utilizes an extremely long, gentle maceration (over 30 days) to capture the "soul" of his Cabernet Franc. *Élevage* is similarly unhurried, with a gentle 18 months in 2nd passage barrels purchased from Haut-Brion.

VINTAGE NOTES

2006 – A difficult vintage, but one with the potential for excellence. Careful growers made beautiful, aromatically-intense wines.

2005 – This is an undeniably great vintage for Chinon. Like 1989 or 1990, there is ample ripeness couple with uncommon structure.

2004 – A textbook Chinon vintage that yielded delicious, mid-size wines.

LES PENSEES DE PALLUS

Fruit Source: Several parcels with an average ~30 years old.

Yields: ~30 hl/hA

Blend: 100% Cabernet Franc

Oak Aging: 18 months in 2nd passage barriques

Production: 3,500 cases.