

STEPHAN AND MARIE PODOR (France, Burgundy, Irancy)

BACKGROUND: This domaine, now into its 8th generation, consists of 10 hectares of vines and it is owned by Stephan and Marie Podor (this surname presents an evident Hungarian root). Edmond Justin Podor was the first wine producer in the family. Since 1854, seven generations of wine producers from the Podor family have followed suit, up until 1990 when Stephan took over the estate helped by his partner Marie.



He started to cultivate only 4,5 hectares and in 2000 he purchased the vineyards of his cousins Antoinette and Jean Podor, increasing the surface to 10 hectares. The village of Irancy is situated 15 km south of Auxerre and nestles in a valley forming a natural amphitheatre around which the slopes are planted with vineyards and cherry orchards. Harsh northern winds are totally shielded and therefore this is a much drier district compared to nearby Chablis which is only 20 km far. Local wine experts would compare Irancy more to Alsace climate wise.

There's a little Cremant and Rosè in Stephan's offering, but otherwise it's Irancy - Pinot Noir and there's about 5% of Cesar in those vines. More specifically 7,50 hectares of AOC Irancy are available plus 0,50 hectare of Bourgogne Rosé and 2 hectares producing Crémant de Bourgogne. Production levels oscillate from 35.000 to 40.000 bottles yearly but weather conditions here are always tricky and affect crop levels.

It is curious to learn that in April 2014 the new city council of Irancy, elected Stephan as the Mayor of this little village.

KEEPING TRADITION ALIVE: From the vineyard management to bottling, the Podors limit to the utmost all treatments by adhering to 'lutte raisonnée' production protocol and method in order to help and preserve the environment and local terroir.

All the grapes destined for bottling are hand-picked and Stephan keeps working with local traditional fermentation methods like whole grape bunches (no destemming) and using only natural yeasts. He prefers to vinify with the stems, but only for about 12 days of cuvaion - the fermentation is only about 5 of those days - so the stems are hard to spot in the finished wines.

His basic Irancy gathers many assembled plots and usually undergoes one full year elevage in steel vats. The estate's 'named' cuvées of Les Mazelots (1.2 hectare) from 80 year-old vines) and to top tier Palotte (0.5 hectare) may have up to two years (according to vintage peculiar characteristic) - in used barrels sourced from Domaine Rossignol-Trapet, a producer in Gevrey-Chambertin.

According to Sephan's tradition and technique, the César is not grown, harvested or vinified separately. In the vineyard the César vines are planted among the pinot noir vines, automatically creating a 5%-95% blend. The monks brought this variety here for the tannins and the color.

Part of the production at Domaine Podor is destined for the cooperative in nearby Bailly, a hamlet to Saint-Bris-le-Vineux. Part ends up at Domaine Jean-Louis & Jean-Christophe

Bersan, who buys grapes for their Irancy. The rest is bottled and sold by Stéphane Podor and the majority of his sales are in France - most in the area of Paris - only 5% is exported.

SKILLS AND VINTAGES: How can we describe Stephan's wines? Well ... let's start saying that he perfectly knows how to manage Pinot Noir at this latitude which is definitely complex as vintages vary and time to make quick and relevant decisions is always tight.

Weather is always a key element to evaluate. Stephan considers 2005 as the reference vintage and, in the more recent years, 2012 can proudly share some main features including overall complexity, although a damp summer across northern Burgundy made conditions hard for vignerons, with mildew a particular problem. The weather was erratic and bizarre, with heat waves, hail, a cold spring, thunderstorms and all manner of meteorological mischief. The net results are very low volumes of variable quality - but overall the growers were surprised and delighted by what resulted. One hallmark of 2012 looks to be soft tannins.

2013 was marked by a frigid spring delayed flowering and led to uneven ripening, but benefit on the other hand of a drier September allowing a small crop of balanced fruit with good potential. Compared to 2012, this one was a piece of cake to manage both in the vineyard and in the cellar. Quality standards are lower than 2012, of course, presenting however lovely crunchy fruit and slightly less structure.

2014 has been a very difficult year due to the lack of sun and the unusual low temperatures during the flowering and ripening. Crops were terribly down compared to the usual. On the opposite, 2015 is a pretty good vintage where lot of sun hours kissed the vineyards allowing more phenolic ripeness and fruit richness.

IRANCY AOC: This is a pretty rural and small village boasting a majestic church, as well as the house where G. Soufflot, architect of the Paris Panthéon, was born. The amphitheatre shaped valley protects the vineyards from the northern winds. Altogether the Irancy appellation hosts roughly 20 producers and covers 315 hectares, but only 156 hectares are planted (2007 figures). Irancy took its first steps towards an appellation of its own back in the 1930's. The Yonne civil court ruled that the winegrowers of the village had the right to add Irancy to the label. In 1977 the INAO put forward a more detailed description of the appellation: it was still a regional appellation, but the labels would read Bourgogne Irancy.

In 1991 the appellation was extended to cover some of the vines in the neighboring communes of Cravant and Vincelottes. Then from the 1998 vintage Irancy became one of the very few villages in the Yonne department with an appellation of their own. In this northwestern part of Burgundy there are only three villages - Saint-Bris le Vineux, Irancy and Chablis - that have the right to put just the village name on the label. When Irancy was promoted to village appellation the total surface area was reduced by 50 hectares and the maximum yield set to 45 hl/ha.

The hill-slopes hereabouts form a bowl surrounding the beginnings of a plateau below which runs the river Yonne. The slopes are for the most part composed of Kimmeridgian marls with an admixture of brown limestone soils and here the Pinot Noir grape flourishes at altitudes of 130-250 meters. Exposures vary, mostly southerly or South-westerly. Some terroirs have long been recognized as being of unusual merit and overall this area is one of the most northerly for red wine grape growing. There are no Premier cru or Grand cru vineyards here.

Our tip: essentially an intriguing Irancy can be, and usually is, cheaper than a so-so Bourgogne rouge from a Côte d'Or producer and very often will show more character. Irancy produces feminine but ageable red from Pinot Noir, surprisingly good considering how far north its appellation is.

THE CESAR VARIETAL: Irancy is the only village appellation in Burgundy where the César grape is allowed (up to 10% and the rest obviously is Pinot Noir) and as you might assume from the name, folklore would have us believe that César arrived with the Roman legions. It is a vigorous variety which produces largish bunches of spherical blackberries. On its own (unblended) it yields a highly colored wine with red-fruit aromas and rich tannins. Growers will tell you that Cesar 'adds a little punch' to Irancy wine, perhaps some rusticity too.

Planted only on 5 hectares, the César grape is a productive, late ripening variety that adds both colour and tannins to the Pinot Noir, but this combination between the two grapes is not so easy to achieve as Cesar flowers a little earlier, therefore being more sensitive to frost, and it reaches maturity later too.

According to Stephan Podor: *“Modern winemaking techniques, like long maceration, does not work with the César. I vinify the way many did 50 years ago. The young growers are not very fond of the César because it is an unpredictable variety. It lowers the alcohol level. The grapes are big, which means lots of juice and not so much sugar. It produces big bunches, not exactly what you are looking for in Burgundy”.*

The Palotte is often cited as the best *climat* of the appellation, followed by the likes of Les Mazelots and Les Cailles. Not all producers use César in their Irancy wines, and among those who do this, percentages can vary according to the vintage characteristic whereas the wine involved is a basic Irancy or a single vineyard.

By now we know that Cesar can be added to Irancy wines, but what about Bourgogne Rouge? Yes, César is allowed as well. But only if it is growing in the Yonne, and only if it represents a maximum of 10% of the vines in the vineyards which feed your Bourgogne rouge. If this primary condition is satisfied, according to 2011 renewed body of rules, Cesar can peak at 49% of the blend with the remaining part obviously made of Pinot Noir. Before 2011 changes, local AOC admitted even 100% Cesar wines labeled as Bourgogne Rouge.



PRESENT DAYS: Steep Hill imports the 2015 single vineyard Les Mazelots (1,2 hectares) planted in 1936 and marked by low yields of 35 - 36 hl/ha making annually about 4.000 bottles only. Les Mazelots is the slope to the immediate northeast of the village and this climat has been vinified separately for the first time by Jean Podor (Stephan's cousin) in 1985. This is an authentic field blend with 5% of César adding the tannins to the Pinot Noir in order to give more structure and depth to a wine capable of ageing 10 to 15 years. It spends one year in used oak barrels (sourced from Domaine Rossignol-Trapet, a producer in Gevrey-Chambertin) and bottles without fining or filtering. Generally speaking this wine needs 2 to 3 years of bottle ageing to soften the tannins.