

Rosemary George, MW, tasted Domaine de Cébène wines a few days ago at the occasion of the **FAUGÈRES' 30TH BIRTHDAY**

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The appellation of Faugères is celebrating its 30th birthday this year, so over the last couple of weeks or so there have been various festivities, tastings and dinners. ....



.....Another friend suggested a *balade vigneronne* with Pierre Roque and Brigitte Chevalier from **Domaine de Cebene**, with the idea of looking at the schist in Brigitte's vineyards and then tasting the wines back in her cellar, to see whether

we could discern the impact of the schist on the flavours. It was an interesting idea and Pierre talked very knowledgeably and enthusiastically. We looked at Brigitte's recently purchased vineyard of old Carignan – she doesn't know exactly how old – the papers said 'planted before 1950' and there were some wonderfully gnarled twisted vines. The birdsong was almost deafening and there were wild flowers galore and brilliant yellow broom brightened up the vegetation of the *garrigues*. Pierre explained that the schist of Faugères is 350 million years old, squeezed between the Pyrenees and the



Massif Central. It is metamorphic rock, originally clay, which is hard and compact. The layers between the schist are important, but that is where the roots, water and organic matter filter between the layers. Usually they are in vertical or sloping layers, allowing for the roots to travel down deep. There is also a patch of limestone in Faugères, where there are no vines. And then we looked at a second vineyard, les Bancelles, which means terraces in Occitan, with the vines facing north and north west and north east, but not south, planted in terraces around a rocky outcrop. Brigitte's tiny cellar is in the village of Caussiniojuls, which means *la petite montagne qui*

*dansent dans les nuages* –and there we adjourned for some tasting.

Apparently schist accounts for 10% of the world's vineyards and is one of the most distinctive of soils.

We started with a wine that does not come from schist – **2010 Ex Arena** – made mainly from old Grenache, grown on villevieilles soil in the nearby village of Corneilhan, which is outside the appellation of Faugères. It was delicious, with very perfumed spice on the palate and nose, reminiscent of fresh cherries. A lovely balance. With red fruit, freshness and elegance. The **2011 Ex Arena** was a vat sample with ripe spice, and lots of fruit, but still the edges of a young wine.



Next we went on to Brigitte's first vintage from the Carignan vineyard, **2011 Belle Lurette**. The expression *il y a une belle lurette*, means 'a long time ago'. Very ripe nose with red fruit and a certain stony minerality with some quite tight tannins. This was grown on schist and it had a minerality that the Ex Arena did not have – was this a result of the different terroir, or the different grape variety, or both? Carignan is a more structured grape variety than Grenache. Pierre described Carignan as having ripe cherry fruit, but with an *acidulé* note.

Next we looked at **Les Bancelles**, a blend of Syrah and Grenache. The 2011 was fresh and stony, with peppery spicy notes from the Syrah, and some red fruit. Note this Syrah is grown on cooler slopes. It too had a firm minerality. The 2010 les Bancelles was richer and riper, a touch alcoholic on the finish, and again a comparable stony mineral note, and 2009 les Bancelles from a hotter year, was broader and riper and more mouth filling,

with quite firm tannins Brigitte called 2011 *une année féérique*.

Her third *cuvée* is **Felgaria**, 2010, a selection of the best plots. Mourvèdre dominates the blend, and Pierre said that he thought Mourvèdre on schist was *le couple de l'avenir*, the pairing with a great future. Stony fruit on the nose, with firm

DOMAINE DE  
**CÉBÈNE**  
BRIGITTE CHEVALIER

tannins on the palate, as well as acidity giving freshness, and some lovely fruit. Pierre observed that Mourvèdre is quite virile and the schist brings out the flavours of the Mourvèdre, while the Mourvèdre gives tannin to the wine. **2011 Felgaria** in barrel, just the Syrah component, was peppery on ripe with perfumed fruit and supple tannins. It promises very well. And with the wines came a selection of local charcuterie, including a bougnette de Lacaune, which was new to me, It comes from pork, both meat and fat, bread crumbs and some herbs.

We could have gone on to another birthday party in Laurens, where various growers were showing their wines, with food and music, but I am sorry to admit that our energy levels failed.

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