

In the following text we would like to explain our approach, and the philosophy behind our work. This reflection is shaped by our experience, and has evolved during the past 17 years towards an increased respect for the environment.

This progressive conversion started from an allergy to a chemical product I got during the summer of 1998.

From that year on, we have little by little set up healthier practices, which led to the official conversion into organic viticulture. Today, all of our wines have the AB label (Organic Agriculture), and some are even bottled without any added sulphites.

We look to work in line with nature and our planet's health. To move towards organic farming requires reflection : indeed, we must make sure both the environment and the consumer truly benefit from these changes ! We do not consider obtaining the AB label since our 2012 vintage as a goal in itself ; on the contrary, it is a starting point towards a more relaxed viticulture, better and healthier wines, a bigger pleasure in terms of work and tasting !

The grass grown vineyard, ploughed every second row:

Since the sixties, many vineyards are 100% chemically weeded. Grass is watered with herbicides that destroy it and pollute the runoff water. Unfortunately, this is still a widespread practice.

In the Autumn of 1998, we wished to counter erosion by starting to grow grass between our vine rows.

We refined our method in 2005. Now every second row is grass grown and the other is ploughed, so as to let the rainwater better penetrate the soil.

Lately, we have started ploughing 2 out of 3 rows. Finally, we have invested in machines that plough the soil under the vine rows, thus allowing us to stop using herbicides altogether.



Fertilizing the vines :

The changes brought to the soil are the foundation of everything. A soil that is healthier and better balanced renders the vine more resistant, and requires less phytosanitary treatments. We use organic amendments such as composted grape pomace. In this way, leftovers from the wine production return to the earth...



Phytosanitary treatments:

Since 2007, we have been investing in modern devices that allow us to treat our vines with precision and respect of the environment throughout the growing season. These treatments are obviously made with organic products, especially from sulphur and copper. However, copper is a heavy metal which sets in the soil. To limit its use, we try to alternate with plant-based products since 2014.



We pay attention first to the grapes, then to the wine

For weeks before we decide to harvest, we regularly analyze samples and taste our grapes. We know exactly when and why each parcel should be harvested.

In this way, the grape produces a natural wine which keeps the balance it had on the day of its harvest. It is then not necessary to correct the acidity of the wines, or to add sugar.

Smaller yields and ripe, concentrated, and balanced grapes improve the quality of the wine and account for a high sugar level, which sometimes means very high alcoholic contents after fermentation. We prefer that to a lower alcoholic content... on de-acidified wines, harvested too early !

We use as little sulphites as possible. Since 2014, we offer a range of wines with "no added sulphites". Sulphites are theoretically essential to a wine's conservation. We aim to gradually reduce the sulphites added in our wines, and have noticed in 2009 that a clean and thorough job allows for stable yet non-sulphated wine.

In 1999 we also decided not to use metatartric Acid, Ascorbic Acid, Gum-Arabic, Citric Acid, which are commonly added at the bottling. In order to preserve the gustatory qualities of our red wines, we rarely use fining or filtering, therefore they may present some natural deposit. For all of these reasons and beyond our conversion to organic farming, our wine stays true to itself. Being officially certified as an organic winery has not changed much how we work in the cellar, which has already been adapted to human and environmental respect for over 15 years.



How do we define organic wine ?

Up until 2012, the French "AB" label did not guarantee any precise framework for wines : it simply had to be made from grapes picked from organically grown vines. In 2012, new regulations have finally been approved which expand the organic certification to vinification practices. Following on this, the French "AB" label must be replaced or completed with the European logo (a green leaf with stars), that certifies the application of these new rules.



Of course, respecting the environment is not restricted to the use –or not- of synthesised chemical products. In my opinion, it is important for the vine grower to have a consistent philosophy on his entire production chain in terms of quality, health, landscape maintenance, employment,...

Only a consumer that knows his vine grower can be assured of his true philosophy, from the plot to the bottling... and give him the trust he deserves.

What else can we do?

Having a responsible behaviour towards the environment is a matter of observation, reflection and conscience. We should change our habits whenever we can. It is impossible to change everything at once, so let's move forward by taking baby steps in the right direction, according to the resources available.

Amongst others we fight against fracking, but also set to other projects.



In 2015 we have eco-renovated our guest houses, heated by thermal solar energy and wood chips.

Our hamlet and our cellar are equipped with a common sewage treatment by reed phyto-purification.

In 2016, we are preparing the eco-renovation of our offices and a part of the cellar for 2017.



Sun heated tanks!



When September is cold, the grapes must be slightly heated before the fermentation. As for the malo-lactic fermentation (the wine's 2nd fermentation, after the pressing of the grapes), the temperature of the wine must stay close to 20°C. This demands a considerable use of energy from October through January.

In 2003 we made a connection between the cellar and our house's thermal solar panels. This enabled us to throw out our gas-consuming heater as well as our electric elements, which consumed a total of 4500 Watts. Now, the sun gives us all the energy needed for this colossal energetic work with the help, if needed, of wood.

The use of "evolution" bottles:

We use bottles that only weigh 400g, instead of 550g or 600g for a "traditional" bottle. The current trend is to use heavier bottles, when technological evolutions enable the production of 400g bottles that are strong enough.



For a small family business like ours, this represents an economy of over 20 tons of glass annually !!! Imagine the quantity of energy required to produce these useless 20 tons of glass, to transport them, and finally to recycle them !

At a time when we are fighting against fracking which directly threatens our lands, this choice makes sense in terms of low energy consumption.

Reusing bottles:

In theory we could reuse our bottles... but that means that all those empty bottles must be gathered and transported back to Intrás from the place where the wine was consumed. Then, we would need to sterilize them with boiling water, which consumes a lot of energy. We think it is best for the environment to use this energy to locally collect the bottles and recycle them in the regions where they have been consumed. The high temperatures necessary to making new bottles from recycled glass is the only security that the bottle is sterile.

We are not against the idea of coming back to a reusable bottle with a normalised format, but it must be reusable in the region in which it has been consumed... So normalised

on a larger scale. The future will tell us if this could be a solution for economies of energy...?

The use of natural corks

We use natural corks. These are expensive but respect the philosophy of wine, and also support the essential maintenance of the Portuguese woods. Moreover, it avoids the pollution caused by plastic corks.

The WWF (World Wildlife Fund) made a plea to vine growers in 2002 and 2006, asking them to privilege the use of natural corks. Through the massive use of plastic corks, natural cork production zones are disappearing, and with them their biodiversity and employment.



Reuse of wine boxes:

Our wine boxes are made from 100% recycled cardboard. However, they can still have another life. Thank you for returning empty boxes to us, clean and opened without damage. We reuse them !

Public transportation and water transport

Our wine delivery rounds take us as far as Denmark and are quite costly in terms of diesel oil. Little by little, we manage to reduce our CO2 emissions. My van often stays in Paris or in Brussels, and I get back to it by train. The wine is sent to me by means of bulk transportations, which require less energy.



Since January 2015, we transport our wine from Montélimar to Paris or Brussels on the barge "Alizarine". Water transport consumes 5 times less fuel than a truck, and driving without acceleration or braking divides air pollution by 40. Finally, we have taken a "Utilib" subscription to deliver with electrical vehicles in Paris. Follow the barge on Facebook : "Bateau Alizarine".



Would you like to share your opinion? You don't agree or maybe you have suggestions? Then please write me. I'm looking forward to every reaction, to which I'll respond personally. Denis ROBERT

RESPECTING NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

mas d'intras
Vallis
Vinaria



The philosophy behind our work



What are our concrete actions for a better environment?

Why did we convert to a certified organic winery?

Does this influence the quality of our wines?

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