



Comments and analysis by M. AUDOUZE François - wine expert, old vintages & collector of rare wines - as part of the 2024 vertical tasting of Mas de Daumas Gassac Red.

DINNER AT THE LAUZUN RESTAURANT AND VERTICAL TASTING OF 27 MAS DAUMAS GASSAC WINES

Friday, 21 June 2024

It was probably during a dinner celebrating wine in 2003 that I met Aimé Guibert, the founder of Mas de Daumas Gassac, who, with the support of Emile Peynaud, oenologist, had the idea of producing wine from Cabernet Sauvignon, something no one had done before him. **We got to talking and a friendship was born, as Aimé, who read each of my newsletters,** would send me rave letters, showering me with compliments that I probably didn't deserve. I'll quote one of them, just to give you an idea: "*Such a talent for writing, like a blend of Colette and Dumas. Your sentences jump right off the page, to our faces or mouths, but, first of all, to our minds.*"

This friendship undoubtedly led to my being invited, along with the crème de la crème of wine experts and wine journalists, to a tasting of 27 vintages of Mas de Daumas Gassac in Aniane.

I suggested I might participate in opening the bottles, having previously uncorked all the bottles of a legendary tasting of 56 vintages of Clos de Tart over a decade ago. But it turned out that Roman Guibert, one of Aimé's four children who work at the estate, decided he would rather use his own method, and during the event I understood the reasons for this choice. The bottles were first opened at 5 p.m. the day before and resealed with a special cork and a Coravin, which allows the neck to be emptied. The bottles were then reopened at 8 a.m. on the day of the tasting, poured into glasses and covered with a cardboard cap. The tasting starts at 9 a.m.

I was invited to witness the wines being open and validate the bottles, either by smelling them or tasting them if in doubt. Considering the number of tasters, three bottles per vintage will be presented, which means that the results of the tasting may vary. However, we would know to whom each bottle is attributed, which will allow us to cross-check opinions. A fourth bottle of each vintage will be held on hand, unopened, just in case.

There were five or six openers and things move very quickly. Vintages dating after 1991 are uncorked with a traditional corkscrew and vintages dating from 1991 to 1978, the date of the estate's first vintage, were opened either with a Bilame or a Durand corkscrew. I asked to be authorised to carry out an experiment, that of opening one of the wines using my method and comparing it with the official bottle on the following day. The wine in question was a 1986.

Roman and I head for the Restaurant de Lauzun in the priory of Saint-Jean de Bébian in Pézenas, run by the Michelin-starred chef Matthieu de Lauzun. As we arrived early, we enjoy a Champagne Larmandier-Bernier Vieille Vigne of Le Levant Grand Cru 2008. This is a Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut. It has an impressive personality and almost infinite length. This is a highly expressive Blanc de Blancs.

The guests arrived and **our table is very cosmopolitan**. There were some leading journalists who write about wine in the most widely read magazines, an **English wine critic**, a **Chinese Master of Wine**, a French Master of Wine who officiates in China, a **German Master of Wine**, other English professionals, a **New Zealand wine expert** and a very active French Instagrammer. **Nothing but wine experts**.

The menu prepared for the wines is: fountain salmon from the Condax fish farm, cucumber, peanut and shallot confit pulp/line caught cod from Brittany inspired by a tielle, saffron tomato and frittered squid/grilled purebred Aubrac sirloin, aubergine cake and a condiment of mint, feta, and crispy tandoori. Simple juice/local peaches and nectarines as in a tart, bitter almonds and almond paste financier.

The talented chef used only beautiful produce. It was clear that **the dishes had been designed to complement the wines**, but often an overly broad palette of ingredients makes the pairing difficult to understand, except for **the dessert, which embraces the complexities of the wine**.

We began with a **Mas de Daumas Gassac rosé Frizant 2022, sparkling and beautifully fresh, a pleasant start to the meal**. The wines were served by Matthieu Baas, an outstanding sommelier.

The Mas de Daumas Gassac white 2021 was rich and perfectly balanced. I thought to myself as I tasted it that if this wine were ever served in a restaurant on the Côte d'Azur, it would be a hit, as at this age it has a maturity that surpasses all the Côtes de Provence whites. I mentioned this to Roman, who told me that he would find it difficult to supply the quantities required to make a name for himself in this region. The salmon was beautiful and paired well with the white wine.

The **Mas de Daumas Gassac white 2004 complemented the perfect cod divinely**. While the 2004 is 20 years old when the 2021 is 2, I found very similar maturities, solid and rich wines. Both are excellent, the accomplishment of the 2021 being astonishing.

The Aubrac was dazzling and **the red Mas de Daumas Gassac Cuvée Emile Peynaud 2015 absolutely spellbinding**. Such richness. The label said that this wine is made from Cabernet Sauvignon from the poorest parcel of the Mas de Daumas Gassac, the Peyrafioc vineyard, as a tribute to Emile Peynaud. Again, the serenity and balance of this rich wine packed with flavours filled me with admiration. So far, I had nothing but positive feedback.

The Mas de Daumas Gassac vin de Laurence 2020 is one of those over-ripe liqueur wines that winemakers like to add to their collection of wines. A delightful, pleasant wine, combining bitterness and sweetness, and a perfect match for the bitters and sweets of dessert.

After a night spent in a hotel in Pézenas, we headed off to Mas de Daumas Gassac for a vertical tasting of 27 vintages of the estate's reds, from the first wine in 1978 onwards. **The set-up was impressive, each person placed in front of 27 glasses, laid out on circles drawn to the size of the glass stems, with the number of the vintage written in front of the glass, and a cardboard cap covering the glasses. Quite an impressive display**.

One of the Guibert sons explained that every ten years the Mas de Daumas Gassac wishes to check where it stands in its approach by having the red wines tasted by experts. Basically, this is a way of gaining a fresh perspective. Several of the experts attended the last vertical tasting ten years ago, and some have already participated in more than one. We have two hours to assess the wines, and deliver our five favourites at the end of the session.

The vintages tasted were:

22 21 20 18 16 15 12 11 10 09 08 07 05 03 01 98 97 95 94 91 88 86 85 84 82 81 78.

I tried the wines from the youngest to the oldest.

The way I make my judgements is very different from how the experts proceed, as I will discover when I listen to their very serious, well-documented and competent explanations. Personally, I analysed wines according to this question: "**Would I like to drink this wine now?**" So, it's a very different approach, since the experts judge on the wine's potential, whereas I look at what the wine offers me there and then. **As a result, just like when I took my Baccalauréat and Grandes Ecoles exams, I handed in my copy first. This is obviously not a sign of competence.**

Generally speaking, I found that the effect of age on the development of a wine had very little influence. The wine very quickly acquires its structure and retains it over the years. Solidity comes through very quickly, as I saw at yesterday's dinner. My answer to the question, "How would you describe these wines?" was: "Wines with character, solid, very pure, gastronomic wines." I expect that the improvements with age will come later, as the wines, even the 1978, are still in their prime.

I made a first selection of my favourites: 16 12 09 03 94 91 86 85 84 82.

Here are my comments on the top five of my vote, in order:

- 1985: intense nose, very fine wine with everything going for it. Generous, balanced, great. Very well balanced.
- 1982: very pleasant attack, a pleasing, joyful wine. Beautiful, elegant nose. Very pleasant and accomplished.
- 1991: rather rich on the nose, delightful fluidity, elegant. Balanced mouthfeel. Very pleasant wine, more original than its predecessors
- 1994: much more pleasant on the nose, welcoming, pleasant wine with a fine finish. Different wine, not typical and seductive perhaps because of small flaws.
- 2003: very green nose. Nice fluidity, fine personality. Fine finish.

When I tried the 1986, I asked for the bottle I had opened myself and left unsealed. It was much more open and expansive than the official 1986, and that's when I realised why Roman Guibert insisted on his method, because the experts judge the structure and future of each wine, not its current performance. My method wasn't suited to the objective of the day.

The many experts who presented their views on the wines were extremely complimentary. **The singularity of Mas de Daumas Gassac impressed several of them.**

Each person shared their favourites, and I think that more than twenty wines featured in the very different votes. The vintages that featured most often in the votes were 1982, 1988, 1986, 2011, 2012 and 2020. I shall receive the final results in a few days.

I was very fortunate to have a chat with Aimé's wife, the mother of five boys, four of whom work at the estate. A meal was planned along with a tour of the vineyard. I extended my apologies as my son was coming to visit us at my house in the south. I had to go and join him.

Warm welcome, perfect tasting arrangements, great wines. Every wine lover should most definitely include Mas de Daumas Gassac in their selection of fine wines.