

first  press

ON
Higher
GROUND

*A new dawn.
Sunrise at Château
Peyfaures, which
came under new
ownership earlier
this year.*

BORDEAUX SUPERIEUR GEM
CHÂTEAU PEYFAURES IS PREPARED
TO SHINE EVEN BRIGHTER UNDER
NEW OWNERSHIP

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by Jiles Halling



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JILES HALLING

A panoramic view of Château Peyfaures.

AS you drive toward the hamlet of Genissac, just south of Libourne, you probably don't even notice the road gradually rising until you arrive at the top of the slope and turn into the tree-lined drive that leads to Château Peyfaures, just 70 meters (230 feet) above sea level. The shade of the trees and the slight breeze that rustles the vines in front of the château provide a welcome haven as the sun beats down and the thermometer nudges 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

Only 70 meters—not much of a rise, but it was enough to protect the château's 15 hectares of vineyards from damage by the severe frost that hit most of the lower-lying and more frost-prone estates in April. A stroke of luck? Perhaps, but 2017 looks like a landmark year for Château Peyfaures, and luck has very little to do with it. It's



Complexity is added through aging in barrels from various cooperages.



The 2015 Château Peyfaures, with the recently re-designed label.

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more about the skill, ambition, hard work and investment that are driving Château Peyfaures onward and upward.

As my host, Director of Wine Making Laurent Godeau, explains, the story of the château goes back to 1830. For most of its history, it was a family business, but Godeau is the latest and the last representative of the family, which in April sold the business to the U.S.-based Moraes family.

No doubt they were impressed by Godeau's skill in producing a string of superb wines in 2014, 2015 and 2016, a feat that led to his being retained as Director of Wine Making. And now they are setting about bringing Château Peyfaures to a much wider audience, especially in the U.S., where a new distribution company has been created. The already impressive winery is being upgraded, the château itself

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is due to be refurbished and some striking new packaging and a website aim to propel Peyfaures to new heights.

The vineyards are planted principally with Merlot, with a few plots of Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon, in soil that is a mixture of limestone and clay with the occasional vein of sand.

Enherberbement (growing grass) occurs in every row to provide competition for the vines, but there's no deliberate policy of restricting the yields, which naturally come in at about 45 hectoliters per hectare for the majority of the estate and at 35 hectoliters per hectare for the older plots—both comfortably within the maximum of 53 for the appellation Bordeaux Supérieur. Besides, as Godeau points out, some of the best vintages come from years when nature was relatively generous: 2005, 2010 and 2016, for example.

Harvesting usually takes place in October. Grapes are sorted twice before a pre-fermentation for three days to a week in stainless steel vats at 6 degrees Celsius, dur-



Dame de Coeur comes from older vines in selected plots.

ing which time the cake is very gently agitated (remontage) a couple of times per day to extract and preserve the best of the aromas and flavors.

The temperature is then allowed to rise to around 18 degrees to start the alcoholic fermentation, followed by a pause while the temperature is increased to 28–30 degrees for up to a week, while more remontage is done to continue the extraction process. In total, the time in vat (cuvaision) can last from 30 to 35 days.

Next stop is the barrel room, where the wines will spend between 12 and 24 months aging in an impressive array of barrels of varying ages, supplied by three or four coopers, with a variety of toasts. All these possible permutations add complexity to the task of the winemaker, but Godeau embraces this multi-faceted jigsaw as an essential part of the process and another step on the road to the lofty objectives that have been set out for Château Peyfaures.

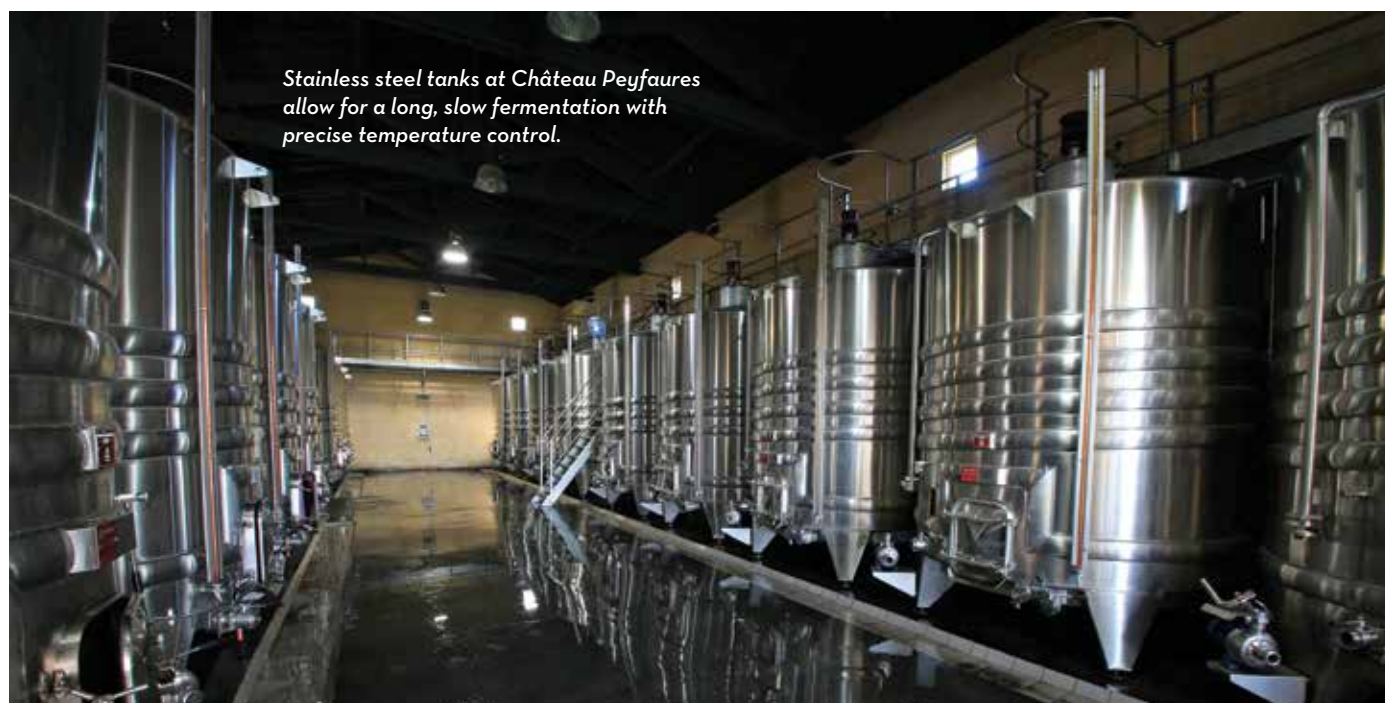
And what of the wines themselves? On such a hot day, it was hard to ensure that they were tasted at the 18 degrees he recommends as ideal, but both wines impressed.

Currently only two are produced, both reds, although a white and perhaps a rosé are under consideration.

Château Peyfaures comprises 85 percent Merlot, with roughly equal parts of Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon. The 2010 has lovely soft tannins on both the nose and palate, with a hint of menthol mingling with cherries and licorice, plus a long, smooth finish.

For Dame de Coeur—a wine from older vines in selected plots—the blend is almost all Merlot with, in some years, a little Cabernet Franc. It's aged longer in oak with a greater percentage of new oak, so the 2012 is still a relative youngster, with a deep, red color with hints of dark blue. The nose is full of cloves and vanilla to begin with, but the oaky notes soon give way to a rich fruitiness. A big, complex wine with a lot of aging potential.

If these are anything to go by, it's safe to say that Château Peyfaures is heading to even higher ground. *sj*



Stainless steel tanks at Château Peyfaures allow for a long, slow fermentation with precise temperature control.