

IRISH RHONE

New releases from Atelier des Sources & Les Deux Cols



Ireland in The Rhone...

WRITTEN BY STSWINE

"We've got Irish wine for you to sell mate". My boss in Melbourne announced to me one morning after he had returned from ProVine in Germany, one of Europe's premier meeting points for merchants and distributors to catch up and get sloshed...and try wines. He seemed to think 'Irish wine' was hilarious as a concept. I started to explain that in fact Ireland had a rich history in winemaking and..."Whatever mate. The wines are grouse, he's a mate of Stephane, we got a couple of palates, they'll be here in a couple of weeks".

Grouse means good, and the Stephane was famous Rhone producer Stephane Ogier with whom we had a long relationship. The Irish wine was the first vintage of Les Deux Cols Cuvée Alize, made by Simon Tyrell. Apart from the terrific wine, a Syrah-led blend of Rhone varieties from near Estezargues in France, my boss had been charmed by the wine maker whom he reported as being *as nice a guy as you can meet* (though I have cleaned up that sentence significantly for publication).

When I moved back to Ireland it came as little surprise that the wine had been well established and in fact Simon Tyrell was as prominent a figure in the wine industry as you can get.

Dreaming of the Rhone

I'd like to have been a fly on the wall when Simon announced to his wife and business partner Emma that he wanted to become a wine maker. I am sure she wished he would just buy a sports car or something.

Emma and Simon had established Tyrell & Co. in 2003 and had grown it to become Ireland's leading specialist family run wine importer. The company focused on French wine and in particular the wines of the Rhone. It was rare to find a decent shop shelf or wine list that didn't stock their wares. Apart from being savvy operators, Tyrell's boasted some of the most prominent names in French wine making. To suggest that this whole wine making idea was a risk would be a great understatement, and that is before one considers the commitment and sacrifice required by the business and the family to study in Brighton while living in Ireland.

In truth this was a less rash decision and idea than it may have seemed on the surface. Simon was worried about the long term viability of fine wine from the vantage point of 2007 and a possible recession, and he was right.

Two years of late night and early morning flights to and from Brighton followed as Simon eventually emerged with a distinction in Viticulture & Oenology from Plumpton College. Eager to ferment something, Simon established a cider brand in 2011 called Craigies Cider (very successful, it was eventually acquired by O'Hara's Brewry) before getting his hands on some vineyard space and making the first vintage of his wine Les Duex Cols Cuvee Alize 2012. What has followed has been an exciting journey and evolution of ideas that, 10 years on, is only really in it's infancy.

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The Other Cols

Les Deux Cols means, the two colts. The other colt in the equation is Charles Derain. Charles is a French native who lives in Dublin and operates his own fine wine distributor, Nomad Wines. Like Tyrell's before it, it is rare to find a serious wine list devoid of some Charles' French classics. He counts giants such as Pousse d'Or, Roumier and Ponsot in his stable amongst others.

Les Deux Cols were concerned with freshness, elegance and balance, but they also wanted to showcase the raw power of the South [of the Rhone] and express its unique terroir. The pair were interested in organic wine making and minimal intervention. Using their significant industry clout they managed to secure space and resources at La Cave des Vignerons d'Estézargues, the famous progressive co-operative in Avignon.

This time and experience, working alongside some of the Rhone's best wine makers, as well as experience with industry totems achieved thanks to long standing industry links provided Les Deux Cols with a supercharged period of education and development. They began to scout locations for their own vineyard, to make their very own wine.

A third Col was added in 2017. Gerard Maguire, owner of Ireland's best destination wine store 64 Wine and creator of legions of wine geeks (including this one) came on board. The 3 cols expanded the sites and wine making facilities. Maguire was able to offer unique insight into the production of a wine that would sell as well as the viability and feasibility of something the 3 were interested in: natural wines.

We do not need another STSWine rant about the fallacy of so called natural wine and its much abused meaning. Simon and Charles had from the start aimed to make their wines with minimal chemicals and intervention. This was at the time rather unusual. Their focus was to make a wine of the land, a wine that sings of its time and place, etc etc. Oak must be in the background if used at all, and soil type is the key focus when it comes to harvesting.

The upward trajectory in the wines has been astonishing since 2017. Chemins du Font was added to the range, as well as Zephr, a white. Suroir, a 100% Syrah (now discontinued) and the Ateliers des Sources range. Along the way the labels had a make over to bring them into line with modern wine ranges and make them appealing on first glance.

The excitement starts now. Experimenting with atypical varieties and bucking the traditional norms, the sense of freedom and belief amongst the winemakers is palpable and it is an exciting label to drink.

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Oak, Climate Change, Life & Covid

2020 obviously threw up significant challenges for the team. Producing a wine with 'minimal intervention' paradoxically requires the upmost attention and focus. While you are trying to let the vine and wine do it's thing, that requires that you are with it every inch of the way. Travel was difficult as was labour, not to mention an unrelated health issue predating Covid from which Simon thankfully made a full recovery. Perhaps a blessing in disguise for operations in the Rhone, new winemaking projects in Spain were halted.

Along with the minimum intervention and maximum effort paradox, another exists with regards to use of oak. As mentioned already, LDC wanted to minimise the oak in their wine. One can always make a bright wine matured in stainless steel for young drinking that shows no oak. The shelves are peppered with them. The real trick to fine wine making is achieving the textural and oxidative qualities of oak ageing without actually showing any of the oak. This is one of the new frontiers of modern fine wine making: achieving a wine that is made without chemicals and intervention, that utilises the best oak and achieves the resulting texture with balance, elegance and purity. In short: natural wine that does not smell like a fucking pet store.

Keen STSWine readers will tire of me saying that *nobody that drinks, knows or appreciates wine can deny the existence of climate change*. Burgundy used to regularly fail to ripen Pinot. Tasmania was once so marginal it could do little other than sparkling wine. The results are undeniable. I was surprised when Simon told me that the specter of climate change has not really changed wine making, it has just moved dates of harvests, altered pruning methods and added and canopy management.

Climate change is more profound than simply adding or altering jobs. To hear a Rhone wine maker saying "I would never plant Syrah again, not in the South" is incredibly jarring. The group have been moved to try different blends and varieties, and this is where the strength of the operation lies. There is no wine producing country in the world that shuns invention and innovation more than France. A slave to their incredibly rich wine tradition, methods and approaches will change very, very slowly. Ateliers 'Le Retour' demonstrates their *heads up wine making*. Unusually, a 100% Cinsault, it was produced and raised in stainless steel for its first vintage, before being produced in (very) used oak in 2019. Putting weight on the wine in all the right places.

They are still a couple of years from enjoying, or more appropriately 'discovering' the fruits of their labour in terms of planting on the new sites, but one suspects they will be at the forefront of a chapter in the book of Rhone.



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Ateliers des Sources 'La Traversee' Cotes du Rhone Villages 2017

Named 'La Traversee' as the fruit comes from the other side of the Rhone valley from the talented Vigneron Pascal Chalon. Chalon is a stalwart of the region who's wines have had their ups and downs, one minute garnering huge reviews, the next vanishing from the conversation. The Les Deux Cols boys Simon Tyrell, Charles Derain and Gerald Maguire have crafted this gorgeously elegant Rhone wine which matches the satisfying and meaty red fruit of there Rhone valley, with freshness and acidity. This is better than any Chalon release I have tried and it feels like the fruit and the terroir has gone up several gears and is approaching its true potential.

STSWine

The grapes are vinified together in cement tanks. 100% destemming. Daily, gentle pump overs and cap submersion. Maceration lasted 15 days. 22 months maturation in tank. The wine was bottled unfiltered and unfinned. Produced from grapes bought from Pascal Chalon, of 'Grand Ourse' fame, this is a big, dark, meaty red, full of fresh acidity, with savoury black fruits on the finish. Only 3400 produced. **LDC**



*Full-bodied, rich in smooth blackcurrant fruits with a little spice and a nice tannic kick on the finish. A warming, herb-infused southern French stew sounds perfect. **JOHN WILSON, IRISH TIMES***



Ateliers des Sources 'La Lumiere' 2019

DRINK MORE SERIOUS WHITE WINE WITH FOOD! We constantly roar. This is a perfect case in point. Beautifully textural and expansive on the palate without being in any way flabby, there is a great backbone of acidity. I love a white wine that could do with a decant, and this is it. The majority of the wine is Rousanne with little bit of Bourboulenc, a variety who's potential the group are excited about.

I am surprised to hear that this wine is from a broken home. In the middle of its elevage, it had to move winery, which is not as simple as putting on the back of a truck and moving. It was transferred and jostled around to the extent that Simon says it will not forgive him. The wine tastes fabulous, but they are even more excited about the next vintage which has not been subjected to such upheaval. **STSWine**

Côtes du Rhône La Lumière shows a refined expression of white flowers, pear, lemon, and hints of honey on the nose. Elegant, Rich and lively attack, with notes of white flowers, stone fruits and spices. Really good structure and richness in the mid-palate and a good acidity in the finish. **LDC**



This has delicious, succulent peaches and apricot. Textured & rich with plenty of structure & acidity. It works perfectly with richer starters such as scallops or prawns, or turkey with all the trimmings.

JOHN WILSON, IRISH TIMES



Ateliers des Sources 'Le Retour' 2019

This personifies the approach of Atelier des Sources more than any wine they make. The wine is born from a love of Cinsault from the wine makers that is to say the least, unusual. Cinsault is of course one of the permitted varieties of Chateauneuf but is very much a bit player in it and the wines of the Rhone in general. A different strain is found in the wines of Priorat, and it has found moderate success in South Africa (somewhat ignominiously Cinsault is a parent to South Africa's Frankenstein variety Pinotage). Cinsault is full of red fruits and delicate flowers, with a slight tinge of bitterness. The crew made this wine and elevated it in stainless steel. If I remember correctly it was in an extraordinarily heavy bottle which really mismatched the light touch of the wine.

This time around, fanatical barrel selection led them to the uber-famous Domaine Pichat in Cote Rotie. This has led to an extra bit of heft in the wine without affecting its elegance or its buzzy energy. This is an absolute cracker that goes down far too quick. **STSWine**



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Les Deux Cols 'Le Trois Terroirs' 2019

Using grapes that have been hand harvested from vineyards within the commune of Signargues and Rochefort du Gard, to the south west of Avignon, they make three separate cuvées, each of which is made in significantly different ways. 'Alizé', which makes up 85% of the production, is a blend of Grenache, Syrah and Cinsault. The Grenache and Cinsault come from the slopes of the commune on lighter, sandier soils whilst the Syrah comes from the plateau of clay over limestone and a surface covering of quartz stones. After harvest they prepare a millefeuille in stainless steel tanks of layers of crushed and de-stemmed fruit, interspersed with layers of whole bunches. **LDC**

Cut the crap! This wine is a result of one of those delightful strokes of luck that often come along in winemaking. The top wine, Les Chemins du Font was not looking up the the groups high standards. The Cuvee Alize was looking very good, and they felt the wines were compatible so they blended them together. The result was fantastic and it is now a wine that they intend to produce every vintage. *Trois Terroirs* means three terroirs and some of it's used oak comes from the maestro of the Northern Rhone Maxime Graillot. **STSWine**



Elegant, with floral aromas, medium to full-bodied plum fruits, an attractive savoury note and concentrated tannins on the finish. This would sit nicely with grilled duck breast or hard cheeses.

**JOHN WILSON, IRISH
TIMES**



Les Deux Cols 'Chemins du Font' 2018

Unquestionably the stand out wine of the tasting, Chemins has been kicking around the traps for a few months and is in an especially good place at the moment. It seems to have just folded into itself and settled in the last few months as the trademark elegance and refinement of the house comes to the fore.

Grenache is sometimes pissed off to be bottled and can seem a little unruly at first. This energy was welcome and it was a terrific wine but with the extra little bit of time it is now looking very swish and stylish.

Spring lamb would be the ultimate match. **STSWine**



A very refined glass of wine, with lifted aromas of spice, dark fruits and liquorice; the palate is silky-smooth, with plum fruits, black olives and a lingering finish. An excellent all-rounder that would be perfect with turkey, beef or duck.

**JOHN WILSON, IRISH
TIMES**



Oludeo 'La Sonadora' 2016

FROM YECLA, SPAIN

I tell Simon before we pour this "I hate Monastrell, when I tried this a couple of years ago it was good though". There are not many wine makers that would not deservedly give me a slap for that, Simon just chuckles and says something diplomatic about Monastrell.

I have only hated it until now because of the amount of over extracted and chemically laden slop that is out there. With a few years of age now, this is delightful. There is a welcome edge of savouriness that will match up with anything off the grill. Interestingly, 15% wholebunch was used when he made this wine, a practice that is more common in Burgundy than Yecla. I ask him does he reckon anyone has used whole bunch in Monastrell. He says no.

Delish! I'm converted!

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A rounded medium to full-bodied wine with a certain elegance, combined with abundant dense dark fruits, a touch of liquorice and smooth tannins on the finish. Enjoy now with red meats, or keep a year or two.

**JOHN WILSON, IRISH
TIMES**

