

direct

press

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Planting the Seeds:
Natural Wine Originators

The **thirst for something new and exciting**—it is one of the

engines of a thriving culture. The natural wine scene is fueled by curiosity and openness on all sides, which has been an immense help in making space for people not comfortable in stuffy patrician confines. This, however, makes me feel old and cranky when I feel compelled to call attention to the old guard, so to speak, of natural wine. New vintages, new winemakers, and a new generation of wine drinkers keep us all on our toes, which is a very good thing. But it can also result in a short memory, with familiar, accepted names losing their edge and novelty.

Puzelat, Mosse, Bellotti, Goyo Garcia Viadero, Cantina Giardino and others featured this month are nowadays well-known in natural wine circles, but for many years they were working in the dark, with little public acclaim. They were often disdained. Approaches like biodynamics were laughed at. Even 15 years ago ‘natural wine’ didn’t really exist as a category. The winemakers featured this month had to contend with antagonism from all sides. Neighbors who thought their vines were overgrown with weeds; consumers who thought the wines were sour and spoiled; wine critics who labeled them as flawed; even parents who thought they were ruining their family’s legacies. These were strong forces and this early generation of natural winemakers,

already in rural agricultural parts of the world, had to contend with these challenges in far more isolation than today’s hyper-connected internet computer world. Winemaking is a very long arc and those who can hang in there and survive decades of change are a special breed. This is even more true for those who chose to take a more difficult path.

Here’s a quick rundown of some of the winemakers featured this month and the timelines that made their choices both forward-thinking and unorthodox:

Clemens and Rita Busch: in 1984 they became some of the first winemakers in Germany to convert to organic viticulture. Clemens stopped using herbicides in 1976. Their steep vineyards in the Mosel are some of the most difficult in the world to work organically—probably 30% more labor is involved. After all, this is a region where it is still common for vineyard treatments to be sprayed by helicopters.

Tue Boeuf: in the 1990s Thierry and Jean-Marie Puzelat were so moved by the Beaujolais of Lapierre, Metras, and other followers of Jules Chauvet that they converted their family’s vines to organic farming and started making zero sulfur wines. The Loire Valley became a hotbed of natural wine because of the Puzelats, who were mentors to Pierre-O Bonhomme and Rene and Agnes Mosse, also featured this month.

Goyo Garcia Viadero: Goyo was apparently enthralled by the wines of Jura legend Pierre Overnoy, so he began making natural wines with zero sulfur in his home of Ribera del Duero in 2003. In a region known for massive, expensive, 100-point wines like Vega Sicilia, this was basically commercial suicide.

Barranco Oscuro: Exiled in France during Franco's reign, Manuel 'Manolo' Valenzuela has been living in the unforgiving Sierra Nevada mountains since 1979, working the highest altitude vines in Spain (second highest

in Europe) and bottling wines there since the mid-1980s. Allegedly he was the first to receive organic certification in Spain, but it was not

up to his standards of natural farming so he no longer bothers.

Old World Winery: Darek Trowbridge's uncles own the Martinelli label in Sonoma, and they basically shunned him and wouldn't sell him fruit after he started making biodynamic wines without additives in the early 2000s. He is still an undersung natural wine pioneer in California.

Cantina Giardino: Daniela and Antonio De Gruttola grew up watch-

ing as industrial farming devastated Campania. Antonio started experimenting with natural wines in 1998 and in 2003 they began buying parcels of old vines from locals before they could be snatched up by bigger operations and ripped out.

Cascina degli Ulivi: the late Stefano Bellotti converted 30 hectares of family land into a polycultural farm in the 1980s. He stopped using chemicals in the vineyards after seeing the results at a neighbor's farm, and



Clemens Busch overlooking the Mosel by J.Kemp

began working biodynamically and using the teachings of Rudolf Steiner back in 1985. This was radical then but Stefano's persistence and determination played a huge role in making biodynamic

farming a legitimate pursuit. He was an easy target for many who wanted to dismiss his funky wines or scoff at woo-woo concepts of farming, but he felt it was a return to common sense in the face of the fanatical pursuit of money and opportunism at the expense of everything else. He is truly one of the most important figures in the history of natural wine.

In the passing decades, these winemakers have found a vibrant community who celebrates them. But

wine does not allow for resting on one's laurels. Unlike aging rock stars who can tour entirely on 40 year-old material, older winemakers can't just go around selling an endless supply of old vintages. It takes an immense physical toll, and requires support from the whole supply chain in good and bad years to stay afloat. They have to be out there in the vineyards, reckoning with the indifference of nature and the chaos of climate change. That's another reason I don't want these names to be relegated to some kind of retro, natty, dad wine of the aughts. These are as relevant as ever and the winemakers are still hustling to sell their wines to a market that is more and more saturated with wines that are trying to flaunt their natural wine bona fides.

What the (ahem) kids today sometimes miss in this first generation of natural winemakers is that the wines may not taste as funky as other natural wines, so they are sometimes slower to accept them as such. However, this is just a surface level misunderstanding; often they are tasting the result of years of experience and extra work required to make clean wines without the aid of modern chemistry. I've had some wildly funky wines from all of the producers featured this month, but I've seen less of them than I used to. And, ironically many of this month's less-funky wines are actually made by the kids. Zoe Puzelat, still in her twenties, is responsible for making some of my favorite vintages of Tue Boeuf, and they are a touch more

reigned-in than her dad's and maybe even more thrilling as such. Joseph and Sylvestre Mosse (featured in Press 4) have taken up a lot of work from their parents Rene and Agnes, and have been making their family's wines for the better part of a decade. Lorenzo Valenzuela has been working alongside his father Manolo at Barranco Oscuro for many years now. Ilaria Bellotti took over after her father Stefano passed away in 2018.

It's hard to overstate how important this is. Passing on these legacies is very difficult and often one of the most fraught obstacles facing an aging winemaker. The job is back-breaking manual labor and farming at its core, and it is not easy to keep the kids on the farm after they've seen Paris, as they say. Even harder when Paris is two hours away. But this means all the more that instead of being 'legacy' producers or fading into the history books, many of the pioneering natural wine names are being made by fresh faces and youthful energy that are harnessing the experience of their parents and taking the wines to even greater heights.

I feel very lucky to be working in a field where there has been such an exciting influx of new wine drinkers interested in the wild, raw wines that I used to enjoy before there were as many people to share them with. Even better is that the natural wines I first experienced are still being made in the same way, with many of the values of the first wave being not only preserved but taken even further.

A younger generation is finding a welcoming community and a market for their wines that didn't exist before. New regions and new countries are finding meaning, power, and sustenance in natural wine. All that is because an earlier generation of misfits stuck their necks out and said, 'This is how we want to do it. We are redefining and reclaiming the way wine is made because this is what is better for our families, our community, the planet, and our heritage.'

Cheers,
Jonathan

Mosse Magic of Juju

Loire • France

Press 4 Mix/White

At the beginning of their wine career, Agnès and René Mosse owned a retail shop/wine bar hybrid in Tours, France. Before long they were beginning their



winemaking journey, studying viticulture and oenology at the agricultural lycée in Amboise. (One of their teachers, Christian Chaussard, was the owner and winemaker at one of our faves, Domaine Le Briseau!) After graduation, they honed their skills working in Côte de Beaune for two years before buying their own estate in the Anjou region of the Loire Valley circa 1999. They were practicing organic from the get-go, even going above and beyond to treat their vines and soil with biodynamic preparations. These days, René is retired, his sons Sylvestre and Joseph having taken the helm alongside Agnès. The duo came on board in the early 2010s and have been leading the winemaking process since 2014.

In the best possible way, Magic of Ju-Ju wasn't what I was expecting when I tried to estimate what a Chenin Blanc x Sauvignon Blanc blend would be like. From its almost-hazy pale gold color to the up-front potpourri and slate notes. This wine has a nice lilt to it, with meyer lemon, lemongrass, and a hint of apricot all appearing on the palate. Most surprising is the mouthfeel—for two grapes that pack a wallop on acidity, there's a surprising roundness. The faint creaminess owed to malolactic fermentation tops off the complex nature of this bottle. Extremely fun to sip! *Demi Elder*

Clemens Busch Riesling Trocken

Mosel • Germany

Press 4 Mix/White

Clemens and Rita Busch are in many ways the ecological conscience of the Mosel. They became some of the first to become organic certified in Germany back in 1984, though herbicides had been stopped back in 1976. They began incorporating biodynamic practices in 2005. Those choices placed them at the forefront of the growing cadre of Mosel winemakers moving towards more natural, ecological methods. It's still a small group today: working this way in the Mosel requires far more work than in other regions given the steep terrain. The wines have a mysterious, seeking, haunting nature that resounds with brilliant echoes of slate-ridden vineyards at nerve-racking heights.

The essential expression of slate is remains and the cerebral soul still forms the core of these wines as in years past. The aroma of pungent, wet river rocks is matched with underripe stone fruit, lemon salt, and a big mineral punch of chewy texture on the finish. A vivid expression of dry Mosel Riesling that is often the gateway to the region for those used to sweeter styles. *Jonathan Kemp*

Bera Dolcetto d'Alba

Piedmont • Italy

Press 4 Mix/Red

Bera is in the part of Piemonte that is famous for Moscato d'Asti, a famously bulk-produced, sweet wine. They wouldn't be the most obvious place to look for some of the most progressive, natural winemaking and farming in Europe, but that is in fact the case. They are a true outlier in the Canelli area, where Moscato has been planted since the 1300s and their estate dates to 1785 when the Bera's ancestors bought the property from the Knights of Malta. As Alessandra Bera says, "My father took over the estate from my grandfather in 1964 and continued working the exact same way. He once told me 'Why should I poison myself? My father was able to work without chemicals so why can't I?'" The Bera wines were some of the first natural wines to be exported from Italy, back in the 1990s.

Though Bera makes far and away the best Moscato d’Asti, in my humble opinion, the Sarvanet Dolcetto shows off their wild side. From 40 year old vines on clay/limestone soil, it’s a thick, rustic, textural red with sumac, sage, medicinal cherry, and some barnyardy Brett. Fermented and aged in concrete with a mere 10ppm of sulfur added. *Jonathan Kemp*

PO Bonhomme Telquel

Loire • France

Press 4 Mix/Red

Pierre-Olivier Bonhomme is continuing the work he and Thierry Puzelat began many years ago. It was Thierry’s idea to expand beyond his family’s Tue-Boeuf wines and purchase fruit from neighbors and other growers, allowing him to make more of the easy-drinking natural wine he loved while encouraging others to farm their vines organically, paying them more than they would get for selling conventionally-farmed fruit to others. Looking back after a decade plus, this has been crucially transformative for the region and many vigneron. When Thierry picked Pierre-O to partner with, he was a high-school dropout who had just been working harvests at Tue-Boeuf. Yet Pierre-O has kept this project at the forefront of Loire natural wines since 2013, when Thierry went back to Tue-Boeuf full-time. Thierry knew what he was doing when teaming up with Pierre-O.”

The name Telquel is, surprise surprise, a pun. It’s a riff on teckel

(the French for Dachshund) spun to sound like the phrase for “as is”. The idea here to make a simple table wine that reflects the vintage. The blend changes every year but is always Gamay dominant and sulfur is typically not added. The wine’s “Un Poil Dur...” tag line extends the canine pun. It literally translates to “A hard hair” but is slang for “rough around the edges.”

This wine is a tad rough around the edges but in the best way. It’s always a tad rustic, nervy, full of energy and complexity. It has enough fruit and acid to be refreshing and enough savory and tannin to stand up to complex meals. I get floral berry aromatics mixed in with bright spring herb garden on the nose. On the palate I get a bit of underripe currant, menthol, anise, and white pepper.

Jeremy Hernandez



Pierre Olivier Bonhomme

Goyo Garcia Viaderos Joven

Ribera del Duero • Spain

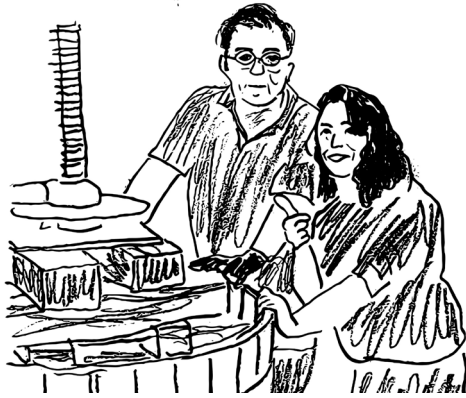
Press 4 Red

Goyo Garcia Viadero and wife Diana Semova Georgieva are making some of Spain's most revered natural wines by expressing the extreme climate of Ribera del Duero with finesse instead of power. They are of the earliest generation of natural winemakers. As natural wine

continues to grow in popularity it makes me respect some of the pioneers of the movement even more. They had few peers, a lot of resistance to their methods, and little

critical support. These were people so captivated by their first brushes with raw, unadulterated wines that they changed the course of their careers and lives to pursue this new direction. Goyo Garcia Viadero, unlike natural winemakers in fringe appellations, embarked on his adventure in a region known around the world for big, powerful (and often very expensive), red wines—for instance, Vega Sicilia. This makes his journey and wines all the more intriguing. To this day, he uses zero sulfur and makes wines that feature individual vineyard parcels, some interplanted with white grapes, a very old local practice.

This so-called “young wine from old vines” is the only Goyo Garcia wine not aged in old French oak, but in steel tank. The juicy and grape-y aromas of the wine are met on the palate with the brambly blackberry you'd expect from ripe Tempranillo, but also tart cranberry and crabapple notes. These add texture and herbal crunch to the soft, easy fruit. It's so irresistible you can't be blamed for enjoying it in thirst-quenching gulps,



Goyo and Diana illustration by Jonathan Kemp

but it has a coy complexity that belies its youthful energy. Despite zero added sulfur, they aren't too funky and barnyard-y, either. The wines manage a brilliant balance between edgy rawness and heady ripeness. Some wines hit you more in the intellectual center of the brain, some more in the heart, some more in the gut. Goyo and Diana's wines are for the soul — and they are wines that can be shared by everyone.

Jonathan Kemp

Old World Winery Impulse

Sonoma County, CA • USA

Press 4 Red

Darek Trowbridge began his viticultural training in 1987 under the wing of his uncle, Lee Martinelli—yes, the owner of Martinelli Winery. By 1993, he'd earned a Bachelor's Degree in Viticulture from Cal Poly, followed by a Master's in Enology from Fresno State in 1997. But what he learned was that there's quite the difference between the natural practices his own grandfather (Lino Martinelli) had employed and the manufacturing practices the schools were teaching. So he went forth and established the aptly-named Old World Winery 25 years ago, with the intention of reestablishing those natural winemaking processes. OWW has been employing ambient yeast/wild fermentation, utilizing biodynamic practices, and thwarting chemical applications ever since. Using 120 year old field blends and rare varietals, Darek has mastered the art of letting his wines shine naturally.

Old World Winery truly perfected this blend of Merlot, Petite Sirah, and Chardonnay. I like to think the Merlot carries the blend, and the little bit of Chardonnay lifts it. The end result is a complex medium-bodied beauty with red floral elements, blackberry tart, mulling spices, cola, and a hint of blue cheese on the nose. Vinified with whole clusters and foot-stomped in the process, Impulse was treated with a rustic, laissez-faire approach, the palate adding an appropriate

touch of barnyard and old barrel notes to the profile. This wine is perfect for bringing to a friend's house or serving with pasta or a burger.

Impulse can do it all! with red floral elements, blackberry tart, mulling spices, cola, and a hint of blue cheese on the nose. Vinified with whole clusters and foot-stomped in the process, Impulse was treated with a rustic, laissez-faire approach, the palate adding an appropriate touch of barnyard and old barrel notes to the profile.

This wine is perfect for bringing to a friend's house or serving with pasta or a burger. Impulse can do it all!

Demi Elder

Barranco Oscuro V de Valenzuela

Andalucia • Spain

Press 4 White

Manuel 'Manolo' Valenzuela of Barranco Oscuro was exiled in France during Franco's reign, but he has been living in the unforgiving Sierra Nevada mountains since 1979, working the highest altitude vines in Spain (second highest in Europe) and bottling wines there since the mid-1980s. Allegedly he was the first to receive organic certification in Spain, but it was not up to his standards of natural farming so he no longer bothers. His son Lorenzo is helping to continue the work, and Manolo has been a mentor and influence on many natural winemakers over the years.

V de Valenzuela is named for the Vijiriega grape that makes up this cuvée (it's also known as Diego in

the Canary Islands). Pear and apple notes with lemon peel, celeriac, a little oxidative yeasty nuttiness, and a dash of salt. High acid, good length, with a deliciously round and creamy finish. Spring water and stony, mountain stream vibes mean this is refreshing, restorative, and dangerously gulpable. And you may want to slug it down quickly, since with zero sulfur added it gets funkier the longer it's open.

Jonathan Kemp & Nico Haunold

Giardino NA Bianco

Campania • Italy

Press 4 White

Cantina Giardino begun in 2003 in the Irpinia area of Campania. Today it has grown to steward about 7 hectares of vineyards planted to Fiano, Greco, Aglianico and Coda di Volpe. All the vines (some that are up to 100 years old) are farmed adhering to organic viticulture practices. In the vineyards all the soils and are managed directly by Antonio di Gruttola and his wife Daniela. In the cellar all wines are spontaneously fermented with skin-macerations of varying length (from a few days, to a month or more) that differ based on the cuvée. The goal is to produce a line of wines made in the most natural way possible that is a pure expression of this territory.

The “Na” White wine is part of the NATURE line launched in 2019. It's made from three grapes: Falanghina, Coda di Volpe, Greco. All grown on clay-limestone soils. Each

variety spent four days on skins and were fermented separately using only wild yeasts. After fermentation, they were blended and matured in old chestnut casks for 9 months. Bottled without fining, filtration or SO2 additions (“zero-zero” wine).

It's best to think about this energetic white as a wine that has the texture of an orange wine. It is a mouth-filling white wine that is gently aromatic, blossom/pollen hinted, garden fresh, herbal and spiced. The palate is stone-fruited with a lemon pithy, salty, slightly phenolic texture, and intense acidity. The wild/fresh aromas and flavors will immediately transport you into your own dreamy cottagecore fantasy. *Alex Alan*

Ulivi Nibio 2007

Piedmont • Italy

Press 2

This wine contains everything that embodies the spirit and approach of the late, legendary Stefano Bellotti, who made this wine a few years before his passing in 2018. Embracing Biodynamics as far back as 1984, he was a huge figure in the push for natural wine and better farming in Europe. Cascina degli Ulivi is still a lush, mixed farm with livestock, cereals, beehives, pastures, and of course grapevines, and the wines and the farm are safely in the hands of Stefano's daughter Ilaria. The agriturismo attached to the farm is a beautiful place that is not to miss if you're in the area, with wines from the estate that are not found else-

where; plus some friendly dogs and cats.

Dolcetto was the main grape of this part of the Piedmont before the phylloxera scourge of the late 1800s, and it's clear why. This is age-worthy and complex wine with an abundance of character. Made with zero sulfur from roughly 60 year-old vines and aged in huge old botti for two years before bottling. Because the vines are from a less sunny, northeast facing site, it is a nervy, rustic wine. Iron and umami dominate, with rhubarb, horehound, and feral notes. Crunchy grape skin, tangy tension, and complex aromatic potpourri make this unique. It's an energetic wine with both finesse and power that will continue to soften with time in the bottle. Drink it now with a good decant and a plate full of roast beef or risotto with wild mushrooms and chicken livers. *Jonathan Kemp*

Tue Boeuf La Guerrierie **Loire • France** *Press 2*

The wines of Tue-Boeuf have been part of the conversation around natural wine for many years—in the early 90s Thierry and Jean-Marie Puzelat brothers were pushing the boundaries of zero sulfur winemaking and organic farming when few others dared. Thierry says, “The first time I drank a natural wine, it put me in the same state as Bernadette Soubirous in front of the Virgin Mary. A year later, I was attempting my first 100% grape vinification.

Working organically became an evidence to me a few months later. Ever since, I visit Ville-Morgon [in Beaujolais] every year the way some go to Lourdes; there aren't any miracles, but there's certainly joy for me!”

Thierry kept the faith and spread it like an apostle burning with the spirit. When his older brother was weary of taking on more work and purchasing more land, Thierry began a negociant project that was a huge influence in Cheverny, as he paid growers more to convert to or continue working organically. Many of them saw that they could start bottling their own wines, too, leading to a groundswell of newly christened growers in Cheverny like Herve Villemade, Christian Venier, Philippe Tessier, and others.

La Guerrierie is 2/3 Côt and 1/3 Gamay from a vineyard that was the site of some Hundred Years' War skirmishes back in the 14th century. Though the vines are in the Cheverny AOC, they see this



Thierry checking the wine's song

as closer to a more robust Touraine wine in style, something Thierry has been arguing about with the AOC for some years now. Whole cluster, semi carbonic maceration in old barrels with little to no sulfur added. It smells amazing. Red plum and basil with some subtle, crunchy earth and a cranberry-like lift on the finish. Ethereal but precise, dangerously delicious but complex. We are lucky to procure these wines for our Direct Press members as the demand has made them more difficult to get than ever. It's not hard to understand why.

Jonathan Kemp

