

THE BUYER

CONNECTING THE PREMIUM ON-TRADE

The Buyer's Case: Cave de Vignerons de Saint-Chinian

What role Languedoc-Roussillon wines from Saint-Chinian have to play in the premium on-trade?

With participating buyers:

James Davy, Davy's Wine Merchants

Guillaume Mahaut, ETM Group

Rebecca Palmer, Corney & Barrow

Ted Sandbach, Oxford Wine Company



The Opportunity

As we have established in our first ten months of publishing, one of the primary reasons for launching The Buyer was to look at innovative and commercially practical ways of bringing drinks producers closer to the key decision makers and buyers across the premium on-trade.

To pull together projects that allow busy buyers in drinks importers, distributors and suppliers, as well as those on the front end in independent wine merchants, bars, restaurants, pubs and hotels, the chance to discover new products in a more effective, efficient, yet independent way.

Lessons learnt

One of the key successes to date has been The Buyer's Case, where we work with a drinks producer or supplier to present new wines and products to key buyers in their target markets.

Our first project, with Les Vignobles Foncalieu, resulted in three quarters of the buyers in leading London and regional restaurants, wine bars and pubs groups, going on to buy wines carefully pre-selected for them.

Which was clearly good news for Les Vignobles Foncalieu and the buyers involved, but it also provided invaluable insights in to the decision making process that leading buyers go through in order to select the wines they want to buy.

It also revealed the reasons why certain wines were deemed unsuitable for the individual buyers' outlets and what steps they would like to see the producer making in order to make the wines more commercially viable for their business.

Therefore providing wider advice for other producers to take on board so that they better understand the needs of the buyers they are hoping to impress with their products.

The first Buyer's Case project also confirmed what a complex sector the premium on-trade is. For whilst some wines were suitable for some buyers, they were not for others due to a series of factors, from the style of the wine, to not being able to fit in to their individual pricing structure.

To really understand the UK premium on-trade it is important to have a different strategy that is relevant to each of the specific on-trade channels and customer target groups.

What is The Buyer's Case?

The Buyer's Case sets out to:

- Allow drinks producers and suppliers to target their products at key buyers in the channels they want to work with.
- The Buyer will work with producers, or suppliers, to identify the outlets where they would like to see their beers, wines or spirits listed.
- We will recruit buyers in different operators and send them a case each of the products in question to be tasted and assessed.
- Providing direct feedback from the buyers about whether their product would, or would not be suitable for that outlet and why.



The Cave de Vignerons de Saint-Chinian project

Whilst the Cave de Vignerons de Saint-Chinian has built up a strong reputation for producing quality wines from this key region of the Languedoc-Roussillon, with good sales both domestically in France and in many key exports markets, it has been unable to gain as much traction in the UK as it would like. Particularly in the premium on-trade.

It teamed up with The Buyer to look at ways it could better understand the needs of key buyers across different channels of the UK on-trade.

Its ultimate goal is to gain a stronger foothold and widen its distribution base in the UK, but it saw The Buyer's Case as an ideal opportunity to test the waters, get honest and clear feedback from influential buyers and be able to plan a more effective UK strategy as a result.

Ideas in to action

Over the coming pages this report sets out:

- How the Cave de Vignerons de Saint-Chinian project was put together.
- Which buyers and outlets agreed to take part.
- The Cave de Vignerons de Saint-Chinian wines that were selected for each buyer and channel of the market.
- The direct feedback from each of the on-trade buyers involved.

Background to Cave de Vignerons de Saint-Chinian

The cellar was founded in 1937, long before the AOC of Saint Chinian was created. In the 1960s the cellar produced over 100,000 hectolitres, but its production has been scaled back over the years due to local AOC laws that only allow for 45 hectolitres per hectare. It, therefore, today produces 35,000hl, with a total of 179 growers and 800 hectares of vines spread over five villages.



Its focus is now very much on producing quality wine which, in turn, helps the growers gain a reasonable living, but that also offer good value for money for buyers.

To help achieve its goal, two years ago it brought in a young winemaker, Benoit Macia, who has done 17 harvests in three different countries. Including one in California, for the Laird family Estate, also in Argentina, where he worked for Tapiz, and Freixenet, with whom he won best Malbec in Argentina in 2013 and 2014.

In France he has worked in Margaux, Tavel, Costieres de Nimes, Lirac, Bandol, and now the Languedoc, where he was born.

His approach to creating what he calls “sexy”, or “disco” wines has brought a new dimension to the winery's winemaking and blending.

Its strategy has worked well in the French market, where it believes it has got the quality to value balance right, selling over 500,000 bottles per year to the French restaurant trade. It still, however, has to make inroads in to the UK on-trade, which is why it has linked up to do The Buyer's Case.

How

In order to establish the right buyers and outlets to work with, The Buyer and Cave de Vignerons de Saint-Chinian first identified which channels of the premium on-trade were the most important and relevant for its wines.

The selected wines

Its selected wine ranges for the project included:

- Renaud de Valon, Terrasses de Schistes du Cambrien 2013
- L'Eternel Secret
- Le Chant des Garrigues 2014
- Les Mille Secrets, Blanc
- Les Mille Secrets, Rosé
- Les Mille Secrets, Rouge

The key on-trade outlets

It was decided the project would focus on outlets in the following key areas:

- Major wine supplier to the premium on-trade, with a particular stronghold in London.
- London wine bar chain.
- Gastro and premium pub group.
- Restaurant group offering varied cuisines.
- Major independent wine merchant and wholesaler.

A shortlist of targeted outlets and businesses was agreed and The Buyer then approached the main wine buyer to see if they would like to take part in the initiative.



The Buyers

The final panel of buyers and outlets selected were:



James Davy, chairman and chief executive of Davy's

Fifth generation member of the famous Davy's wine merchants family.



Guillaume Mahaut, ETM Group

Guillaume Mahaut is wine buyer for the ETM Group of pubs and restaurants across and around London.



Ted Sandbach, managing director, Oxford Wine Company

Runs three independent shops and successful wholesale business across the south of the UK.



Rebecca Palmer, head wine buyer for Corney & Barrow

Is responsible for buying French wines for this respected and traditional wine and drinks supplier.

The process

Cave de Vignerons de Saint-Chinian selected the most appropriate wines from its range best suited for each buyer.

Individual cases were then sent to each of the buyers for them to taste.

The Questions

Each buyer was asked to assess the wines and answer the following questions.

- What do you think of the wine and the style?
- Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing (note there is no obligation to do so if yes)?
- If yes please explain why.
- What do you think of the price point?
- What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements.
- If you did list a wine would you put it on by the glass or the bottle or both? Explain why.
- Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

ETM Group

Wines tasted by Guillaume Mahaut, wine buyer and trainer



Renaud de Valon, Terrasses de Schistes du Cambrien 2013

What do you think of the wine and the style?

A very light style of Saint Chinian. Woody on the nose with light delicate red fruits. The palate is light, but also a little simple. Was expecting more concentration and structure coming from this appellation.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing (note there is no obligation to do so if you say yes)?

Not really.

What do you think of the price point? And why?

A little expensive, especially compared to the Chant des Garrigues.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

It looks very much like a supermarket brand, or more suited for the off-trade. The label needs to be made simpler and more modern to appeal to a younger crowd. This look is a bit too old fashioned.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

Small entry-level restaurant or pub chain.

L'Eternal Secret

What do you think of the wine and the style?

I thought initially the wine might be a little faulty on the nose, with a little VA showing. It has lots of wood, sweet vanilla and a lot of ripeness. However, the palate does not reflect the nose. Again, very light and soft with fine tannin structure.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing (note there is no obligation to do so if you say yes)?

No.



What do you think of the price point?

It's a well priced wine.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

The packaging look good. Very masculine. It suggests the wine is big and muscular and very rich which is not how the wine tastes.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

Small restaurant/bistro.

Le Chant des Garrigues 2014

What do you think of the wine and the style?

Promising nose, concentrated, ripe and rich with an underline of minerality. The palate is soft and velvety. Good fruit quality and bright acidity. The finish is delicate and the fruits

come through. It has well balanced oak.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

Yes, the wine displays good quality and concentration and is also well balanced. It is very digestible. It would also go very well with the food we have on offer.

What do you think of the price point?

It's a very good price. It even slightly over delivers for the price, I would be happy to pay more.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

It is very smart and elegant and would appeal to do both men and women. Modern, simple, but it displays quality.

Would you list this by the glass or bottle or both?

I would definitely offer this by the glass. It would be very good to accompany food. It is very well balanced and the alcohol is in check You could also easily drink a few glasses of it on its own.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

Gastro pub.

Les Mille Secrets, Blanc

What do you think of the wine and the style?

It's very pleasant. Fresh and fruity with very enjoyable peach and apricot fruits on the palate. The nose is perfumed and floral. Very nice with a good fruity finish.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

I think I would. For a summer listing this wine will be perfect.

What do you think of the price point?

It's a fair price for the quality. It's a good price point on a restaurant wine list.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

I am not a big fan of the packaging. The wine is fruity and very soft. The label is quite masculine and intimidating. I would rather have a label lighter in colour to appeal to both female and male customers.

Would you list this by the glass, by the bottle or both?

Yes, I would list the wine by the glass. Particularly in the summer when it would be perfect. Light and fresh. Great to enjoy on a terrace of a café.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

Restaurant, and wine bar.

Les Mille Secrets Rosé

What do you think of the wine and the style?

Light, fresh, perfumed and fruity with lovely notes of red berries and red currant. It's very enjoyable.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

Yes, maybe.

What do you think of the price point?

It's a fair price for the quality. Good price point on a restaurant wine list.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

Same as for the white, Les Mille Secrets.



Would you list it by the glass, by bottle or both?

By the glass would work very well.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

Wine bar.

Les Mille Secrets, Rouge

What do you think of the wine and the style?

Ripe black fruits, fresh on the palate with a good acidity, balance and with a good concentration and a fair amount oak. Spicy and chocolate on finish.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

Yes.

What do you think of the price point? And why?

It is also a fair price for the quality on offer and offer a good price point for a restaurant wine list.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

Same as for the white Les Mille Secrets. Unfortunately I think it does look too much like it is aimed at the off-trade.

Would you list by the glass, by bottle or both?

By the glass would work well.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

Pub.



Davy's Wine Merchants

Wines reviewed by James Davy, the senior wine buying team



Summary

Overall, the wines were fine, without being exciting. Packaging was mostly fine, but could perhaps benefit from some tweaks, in particular lightening the label colour of the entry level Mille Secrets range. The bottle quality was perhaps higher than it needed to be and we felt that savings could be made there which could go into the wine itself.

It would be interesting to see the details of the producer on the label. There's no real provenance currently so the wines look "created", as if someone has created a brand and filled a bottle - it's a bit back to front. [We understand that the back labels have not been done yet.]

We would struggle to list the wines in our bars or within our wholesale division, down mainly to the lack of awareness of the region. The Mille Secrets range looks best suited for a supermarket or large mail-order wine specialist. The upper-end may have a place in retail or some restaurants.

Renaud de Valon, Terrasses de Schistes du Cambrien 2013

What do you think of the wine and the style?

It's full bodied and has lots of oak. It would be a nice match with rich stews and hearty game dishes.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

It's a good wine, but it's not enough of a show-stopper for us to really want to list it.

What do you think of the price point? If not the right price could you suggest a price?

It's at a fair price.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

It's a bit bland in comparison with Le Chant des Garrigues.

If you did list the wine would you put it on by the glass or the bottle or both? Explain why.

By the bottle only. It wouldn't get enough through-put to justify putting it on by the glass.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

It would work well in a regional French restaurant.

L'Eternel Secret

What do you think of the wine and the style?

Fairly well balanced but a little disappointing after the previous red. Not a huge step up from Mille Secrets.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing (note there is no obligation to do so if yes)?

We don't think it is suitable for the on-trade, but it could work in retail.

What do you think of the price point?

It's at a fair-ish price, but not sure that the increase in price over the previous red is worth it.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

It's fine and a nice step up in the hierarchy from Mille Secrets. The "S" looks a little like a cross between a dollar sign and a Chinese snake. The packaging is better suited to off-trade rather than on-trade.

Les Chants de Garrigues

What do you think of the wine and the style?

Earthy and rustic, but without some of the concentration that we expected from the more premium packaging.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

Yes, in terms of the kind of wine, but we didn't feel that this delivered particularly well on our expectations. It seemed a bit disjointed.

What do you think of the price point?

The wine felt slightly un-balanced. Perhaps with further time in bottle it would improve, in which case the price point would be fine. You would pay £8.95 retail for it in a shop, but not any more.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

We like the packaging, it stands out. It's attractive and has a premium feel.



If you did list the wine would you put it on by the glass or the bottle or both?

Bottle only. We don't think it would hit the right price-point for by-the-glass in the on-trade.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

Anywhere where game features strongly on the menu.

Les Milles Secrets, Blanc

What do you think of the wine and the style?

It shows good typicity for the region.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

Not at this price and with this packaging. We would expect to find better wines within this category from more established regions which would sell better.

What do you think of the price point? If not the right price could you suggest a price?

See above.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

The label and the quality of the bottle promise more than the interior. For that quality of bottle, it disappoints. They could reduce the quality of the bottle and put the money saved into the wine itself.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

As before, we feel it works best with large-scale mail-order. In the on-trade, they may work with a pub chain.

Les Milles Secrets, Rosé

What do you think of the wine and the style?

Attractive on the nose with strawberry and cherry aromas and some presence on the palate. Bone dry and food friendly which bucks the trend a bit in terms of the type of rosé which is normally consumed in the UK. We preferred the rosé to the white.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

The current rosé market is still fairly narrow and this would be a difficult sell to our wholesale customers. There is too much good value competition.

What do you think of the price point?

As per other comments, the price is a little on the high side.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements.

Rosé needs to look fresh and vibrant and the dark label doesn't do it any favours, especially in a retail setting. We recognise that the back labels weren't finished; but when they do go on, they need to communicate effectively about St. Chinian.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

Again we think this would work for a pub chain or a large-scale mail-order business.

Les Milles Secrets, Rouge

What do you think of the wine and the style?

Quite attractive on the nose, red berry fruits, some violets and floral notes, hint of sweet spice. It's got some complexity to it, but retains the primary fruit and softness.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing ?

There are really good wines at €1.50 to €2 from other regions of France which stack up better. This kind of wine is at too high a price.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements.

The colour works better on the red.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

This would also work better for a pub chain or a mail-order business.

Corney & Barrow

Wines tasted by Rebecca Palmer, wine buyer



Renaud de Valon, Terrasses de Schistes du Cambrien 2013

What do you think of the wine and the style?

It has dark fruit and smoky bacon characters with some appeal. It is medium-full on the palate with attractive underlying freshness to the texture balancing the fruit. This, for me, is where the potential for Saint-Chinian is, but here it is sabotaged by oak which is too much for the wine and mars its potential.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

I think it has potential but would need some work to have a chance of success.

What do you think of the price point?

It's too high for the wine in its current form (£12.50-95 inc vat, just over £10 ex cellar). At this price point you would really need to do something special in terms of wine style, quality and the pack. It falls into classic no-man's land as it is.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

As an ironic, retro-brand it could tick all the boxes. It looks absolutely authentic with its beautiful mess of conflicting cues, messages and fonts which give the impression that this may even be a back-label. There is a sense of classicism with its white portrait label. For once, Saint-Chinian stands out, which is a good thing, even if it still plays second fiddle to Renaud de Valon, whoever he may be.

If you did list a wine would you put on by the glass or the bottle or both?

It would need some improvement (it currently has too much clunky oak), but could be a successful by-the-bottle sell in a more aspirational gastro pub, casual dining or even fine dining sector friendly to the hand-sell. If the wine were improved, this could deliver good value for money for a consumer and margin for the operator.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

As above.

L'Eternal Secret Red

What do you think of the wine and the style?

Some smoky and spicy fruit with some odd VA note. I suspect Brett and possibly lower-level TCA in the mix here. The palate is a little disjointed, but in its favour, there is a sense of freshness on the palate that is quite appealing.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

With its current characters, no. It would need to be cleaned up. There is something here, but at this price point (£8 ex-vat, equivalent to £10 off-trade) you would need more depth of fruit, better structure, more definition. Both the wine and pack would need to demonstrate added value to the consumer.

Surely the USP here - and the rationale for the wine and the producer - is the appellation Saint-Chinian and therefore the features and characteristics that make it special and unique should be on display. I do not feel that the wine does this cohesively.

What do you think of the price point?

On paper, an AOP at this price point ought to smash the market, and there is a massive opportunity for this producer to 'own' Saint-Chinian by bringing wines to market that sing of their origin. This wine does not do that in its current format.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

On the face of it, the packaging looks smart; dark and - if I dare say it - masculine; delivering with the quality cues we expect of brands that have had a whirl with a decent packaging designer and are sufficiently shelf-aware. Matt black, copper foils, high build etc. But it is also quite a jumble. There appear to be at least five different fonts here, which creates confusion, diluting identity and leading the eye all over the place.

Why the S logo in a gothic script? What is the 'secret' and why is it 'eternal'? It would help if this, and the brand, communicated a sense of story more clearly and what Saint-Chinian has got to do with it. The branded capsule also slightly pigeonholes the pack as a supermarket wine, but this view may not be universal.

If you did list the wine would you put on by the glass or the bottle?

It ought to be a great on-trade, brasserie, indie up-sell from house level by the glass, an ambassador for Saint-Chinian. But it looks more corporate and like a supermarket wine.

Chant des Garrigues Red

What do you think of the wine and the style?

Dark fruit, earthy, farmyard characters - some volatility and Brett aromas. The palate is full and structured, with sense of palate crunch and chalky tannins that are attractive. Some astringency on the finish.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

There is something here of the chalky palate freshness and upbeat red and dark fruit I think of as Saint-Chinian. As it is the wine is slightly Brett and while I'm not averse to low-level Brett as a complexer, it just sticks out here, and sits awkwardly with the texture. But there is potential. It would be great to see it cleaned up, and project the characters the Saint-Chinian appellation.

What do you think of the price point?

This would come in at around £9.50 ex-VAT, just sub-£12 including. This sits the wine firmly in an AOP category where it really needs to deliver more than just simple fruit. It needs more character and definition to justify the higher price point. If the wine and pack were to over-deliver at this price point there are opportunities.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

The pack looks better on-screen or on a shelf rather than up close. The concept is quite sweet in a 'Bonne Maman' kind of way. There is some romance and character to the whirly script and motifs which are still simple enough. These, together with the Burgundy bottle, aspire to projecting a sense of quality.

Perhaps it is the execution of the design that seems to lack finish as if at a first design stage. Either way, we thought there is a need for greater refinement somehow, also to mirror the potential quality/style/elegance of the wine inside the bottle.

If you did list the wine would you put on by the glass or the bottle or both?

Glass or bottle in a restaurant or gastropub. By the glass as an up-sell to encourage promotion of the Saint-Chinian name, via a supported programme.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

Food wine-friendly gastropub/indie restaurant (or even casual fine dining) with ability to hand-sell. At this price point the wine could be priced to deliver quality and value for the consumer at a decent operator margin.

Mille Secret range – White/Rosé/Red

What do you think of the wines and the style?

This is a 'fighting price' range. The Mille Secret white has some vague citrus/apple character, but is essentially neutral with no obvious varietal definition and a short, slightly hot finish.

The Mille Secret rosé has appealing red fruit and boiled sweet characters, quite bold attack and flavours, but the palate feels hot and in need of freshening up, though would work better chilled (we tasted at a coolish room temperature). Colour is anti-category as it stands now; consumers want pale ballet shoe pink, whereas this is full-on with a suspicious orange tinge (ageing Grenache component?).

The Mille Secret red is medium-bodied with plenty of simple dark fruit characters, together with grippy tannins that could work with food. Decent wine, with a broad sense of geography. The most successful of the three at this level.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

This is a key fighting price point with considerable saturation and competition. The white would need more primary fruit and freshness, the rosé – while showing pretty, lifted bonbon aromatics on the nose - would need to be better balanced on the palate, and paler in colour. The red is the most successful of the trio in terms of commercial viability. Tannins a little fiery and could do with smoothing down a bit, but there is plenty of easy-going, juicy dark fruit to give appeal.

All in all, I question whether these wines are worthy ambassadors for the AOP. In my view they would sit more comfortably at IGP level. As they are, the wines do not really do enough to merit the status. If I were the brand-owner would I advertise brand Saint-Chinian on the back of them?

What do you think of the price point?

These wines would come out at the equivalent of £6.80/£7.20 ex-vat (£8.50/£9 inc VAT retail). This is one or two points above entry-level. This can be a very successful price point in on and off-trades, but the wines really need to sing for their supper.

The white perhaps needs to go down a varietal route and if so have more zip and fruit definition. This, however, might not be easy to master in this part of the world.

The rosé would need to be paler and fresher, though the boiled sweet aromas are quite attractive.



The red is the most successful wine, delivering some soft, ripe fruit character and just enough structure to play in a bistro.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?

Smart enough. Black paper, hot copper foil, matching capsule. Ticks boxes. Sense that it is trying to outsmart its intended price point. It over-delivers relative to the contents, which is standard practice these days. I feel the pack works best for the red. The white and rosé might work better if the colour was changed to give them more freshness.

It would be great to understand why the wine is called Mille Secrets – is there a story? If so, tell it. There was no back-label on our bottles (perhaps to follow?) and perhaps those would shed light; as it is – with zero obvious link between the wine, name and the pack, the proposition seems disjointed and faceless. The branded capsule tends to pigeonhole the wine as for a supermarket.

If you did list a wine would you put on by the glass or the bottle or both?

If I listed anything, and the wine would need work, then it would be the red, which is decent and offers a little Languedoc character. Could be glass or bottle, though by the glass it does not really offer more of a trade up than an IGP at a lower price point, so could risk falling into no-man's land.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

A pub, brasserie or chain.

Oxford Wine Company

Wines tasted by Ted Sandwich, group managing director



Summary

Overall the wines are well priced. The two more expensive wines we would consider listing for our French regional range. But on some occasions, particularly with the cheaper wines, the quality in the bottle does not always match up to the price point given which perhaps needs to be looked at.

But I liked the packaging of the wines that were put forward for the tasting a lot. Especially for the Les Chants de Garrigues wine.

In terms of listing any of the wines then I would be interested in considering the two more expensive wines for our range. The Renaud de Valon, Terrasses de Schistes du Cambrien 2013 and the Les Chants de Garrigues. They have the right combination of value and quality that we are looking for. But I think they need to look at the €2.5 price point, as they are not as good as other wines available at the same sort of price point and a little lower.

Renaud de Valon, Terrasses de Schistes du Cambrien 2013

What did you think of the wine and the style?

Of the tasting this was one of two wines that we would consider and understanding more about.

What do you think of the price point?

They have the right combination of value and quality that we are looking for. But I think they need to look at the €2.5 price point, as they are not as good as other wines available at the same sort of price point and a little lower.

What do you think of the packaging?

It is fine the kind of wine it is but nothing outstanding. To stand out it would need a little more character.

Which channel of the trade do you think the wine is suited for?

It would be suitable for a restaurant with a good range of regional wines from France. A good



boutique restaurant.

L'Eternel Secret

What did you think of the wine style?

It was fine but nothing to make it truly stand.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider listing?

I am not sure. There are a lot of similar wines at this level.

What do you think of the price point?

I think it is fairly priced.

What do you think of the packaging?

Overall it is fine, but again not too exciting.

Which channel of the trade do you think the wine is suited for?

Brasserie and medium priced restaurants upwards.

Le Chant des Garrigues 2014

What did you think of the wine style?

It is a good combination of value and quality.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider listing?

Again it has the right credentials for us to consider it.

What do you think of the price point?

We would need to look at the price point to see where we can get a competitive edge.

What do you think of the packaging?

I liked it. It has an attractive looking label that also matches the overall quality of the wine.

Which channel of the trade do you think this is suited for?

It would work well in boutique restaurants.

Les Mille Secrets, Blanc, Rosé and Rouge

What did you think of the wines and the style?

They do not come through as fruity or fresh as I would like.

Is the kind of wine you would consider listing?

It would need to be better balanced to justify a listing.

What do you think of the price point?

The Les Milles Secrets entry level range are again well priced, but perhaps lack the quality to justify listing them.

What do you think of the packaging?

The packaging is fine but does not match the quality of the wine or the price point.

Which channel of the trade do you think this is suited for?

It is clearly for the mainstream market but again need to look at the pricing and value.

Producer's view

Simon Whittle of Vignerons de Saint Chinian assesses the buyers' feedback and sets out its plans for its wines.



First of all I would like to start by thanking those that have participated in this programme. I fully understand that you are all very busy, and that to take time out for extra curricular activities is very difficult. I would also like to extend my thanks to The Buyer for organising this initiative, which I believe is very useful to both sides.

I have to admit that I cheated a little with the labels that I used for a number of the samples. The Mille Secrets and Eternel Secret are new labels for us. I wanted to see the reaction of the different buyers to these new labels. It was nearly unanimous that these labels were better suited to supermarkets. Thank you, it was designed for the French supermarkets. You have confirmed our choice. For the on-trade we have a different selection of labels, that work well in France (no guarantee that they will work in the UK)

One of the things that I found very interesting in the different comments, was the difference between the restaurant buyers and wholesale buyers. It may be that the restaurant buyers were just kinder to us, however, I don't think so. I have to ask if there is really a cohesion between what restaurants want and what they are being offered ?

It was also very useful for us to have such in depth tasting notes and comments about the individual wines, which is not always the case.

Les Mille Secret, Blanc

The production of white Saint Chinian only began in 2003, so we have only had a few years to organise and develop our style after they first came in to production five years later and we are also limited in the grape varieties we can use. Notably Grenache, white Marsanne, Roussane and Vermentino. For us 2016 was the first year that Vermentino was available, so we have tried to do the best we can with it. The buyers tasted the 2015 and I believe the 2016 already addresses the majority of comments.

Les Mille Secret, Rosé

Pale ballet shoe pink is very much the trend and that is the wine we made in 2016. Perhaps looking at the 2015 at the end of last year and into January it was beginning to be at the end

of its life. Again we have taken on board the comments and believe we have already dealt with the majority of suggestions. We have kept that bit of “Bonbon Anglais”.

Les Mille Secret, Red

This is a wine that we sell in excess of 1 million bottles a year, plus 20,000 bag-in box. We look to produce something that will work in all the markets that we operate in and is performing well in the majority of those markets. But it is very difficult to produce a wine that will please everyone and again it is interesting to note the different comments from the buyers particularly around the need for more fruit and structure.

L’Eternel Secret

This is one of the wines we hope to develop more and more. In our French markets it was the wine in 2016 that had the biggest progression. We would be very willing to work with the buyers on how we can do this in the UK for as they mention it is a style that is placed to do very well. We believe this wine (maybe with some tweaking) is a winner.

Les Chant des Garrigues 2014

This is a wine that was selected for the UK Languedoc Sud de France Top 100. Some of the comments thought the wine was a little “bretty”, but I can assure them it was not brett, but we do produce a large quantity of carbonic maceration, which in excess can have similar notes. One of the question that we are currently asking ourselves is do we do too much of this. From the replies, I think the answer is yes.

Renaud de Valon

Terasses de Schistes du Cambrien 2013 This is perhaps a wine that is too young in the sense the wood is a bit too much, however it will settle down with time. It certainly benefits from being opened a little bit in advance. As a footnote, we are working on changing the label.

Summary

We did the inverse of Les Vignerons Foncalieu with this project, in so far as we went from the bottom price points going up, they went from the top going down. We are very much aware that all markets are changing fast, and taste preferences are constantly moving. Just the talk about millennials how they have different expectations from their wines means we need to try and understand these changes more. It is also clear that what may work in the UK may not

work in the US, and Germans, for example, have different expectations than the French. We are therefore constantly trying to understand our customers ever changing tastes.

Our desire for this project was about learning, and not primarily sales (if that happens so much the better). My personal conclusions are that we need to work with the buyers to meet their criteria to be able to produce the wines that work for their markets. We are also very open to do bespoke blends and labels to meet individual demands.

Please note that the prices quoted are list prices for mixed palettes, and volume discounts are also available.

We will be exhibiting at Prowein on stand 11H85 if anyone would like to come and taste the wines and talk more about what we are doing and potential opportunities in the UK.

To contact Simon for any more information about these wines or any others in the range then email him at production@vin-saintchinian.com



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