

CONTENTS JUNE/JULY 2008



p. 28

2 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Bruce Cole

4 EDIBLE CHATTER

- *Open: Part restaurant, part performance art*
- *Bon Appétit wants to shrink your carbon footprint*
- *Pairings: What to serve with salad?*
- *Deviled extras*
- *Nate Appelman's roasted corn recipe*
- *Books in brief*
- *SF SuperFoods: Seaweed*
- *Eating by the numbers*

14 GARLIC: A LOVE STORY

Falling at last for my family's cherished fiery bulb.
Samin Nosrat

20 WITH BOLD KNIFE AND FORK

On meeting MFK Fisher, the grandest dame of gastronomical memoir.
Heidi Yorkshire

25 CABBAGE-PATCH KIDS

Modern Cooks takes Hayes Valley grade schoolers on a garden-to-table culinary adventure.
Andrea Arria-Devoe

28 MADE IN THE VINEYARD, NOT IN THE LAB

At Terroir Natural Wine Merchant, natural wines are the (only) order of the day.
Wayne Garcia

32 DISCO INFERNO

Rugby girls, rogues, and running through wildflowers in the employ of agribusiness.
Andy Griffin

36 EDIBLE EVENTS

38 SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA FARMERS MARKETS

39 SUSTAINABLE DIRECTORY

40 DIGESTIF

On the cover: Creole Red garlic
Photo by Winni Wintermeyer

This page: Luc Ertoran, Dagan Ministro, and Guillaume Gerard of Terroir
Photo by Lucy Goodhart



Terroir Natural Wine Merchant is open from 10 a.m. until midnight, Sunday through Thursday, and until 2 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

Approximately 80% of the dozen tasting selections are switched out on a daily basis, and wines are available by the glass, half-bottle, and bottle. Plates of artisan cheese and charcuterie from local producers such as The Fatted Calf, Fra' Mani, Chez Spencer, and Fish & Farm are available. 1116 Folsom Street, San Francisco, (415) 558-9946, www.terroirsf.com.

MADE IN THE VINEYARD, NOT IN THE LAB

**At Terroir Natural Wine Merchant, natural wines are the
(only) order of the day** BY WAYNE GARCIA PHOTOS BY LUCY GOODHART

You know a place has a touch of sass when, after the first sip of a wine you've probably never heard of, you glance up to see a campaign poster featuring a photo of French President Nicolas Sarkozy with the words "*Votez Le Pen*" pinned to the wall with a knife. (See page 1).

It is this very sense of screw-the-establishment humor, combined with a strong sense of purpose, that makes Terroir one of San Francisco's most intriguing, even fun places to buy and taste wine. And it's meant as a compliment to say that Terroir is one of those spots that will either immediately resonate with you, or not at all. Like I said, it's got attitude. Not in a snobbish way, just a passionate belief that the world's finest wines are not only free of pesticides and added sulfur, but are made with as little human intervention as possible.

Located on Folsom Street, just east of City Beer Store and the BrainWash Café, Terroir opened in October 2007 as a combination retail store and wine bar. Suggesting New York or Paris more than San Francisco, the sparse yet inviting interior is lined with exposed brick walls and forested with huge vertical support beams. Periphery-hugging shelves and freestanding racks display a selection of more than 450 wines from around the world, and a small tasting bar is situated along the middle left, with the day's selections scrawled on a large and frequently erased chalkboard. Stairs on the right ascend to a loft with a couch, tables, and a few cushy chairs.

The brainchild of two rail-thin and perpetually scruffy Frenchmen, Guillaume Gerard and Luc Ertoran, and their American partner, Dagan Minestro, Terroir was inspired by the wine bars of Paris, where a big zero-sulfur movement has taken hold. But as important as the idea of natural wines is to Terroir's *raison d'être*, the wine list is driven first and foremost by quality and taste.

"Look, we believe completely in these practices, and absolutely in using no sulfur, but that alone doesn't make a good wine. A lot of zero-sulfur wines are crap," says Ertoran.

Beyond organic

But what exactly does zero-sulfur mean? Sulfur dioxide is a natural byproduct of the fermentation process, meaning no wine is entirely sulfite free. And to prevent spoilage, wine-makers for the past few hundred years have added small amounts of sulfur dioxide to their wines. The USDA allows up to 350 parts per million, though that standard drops to zero for wines that are certified organic, and to 100 ppm for wines that are "made with organic grapes."

Terroir prefers the word "natural" to the more common "organic" and "biodynamic." Explains Ertoran, "You can't suddenly switch to organic farming and expect the same result as guys who have been doing it for six generations. To make exceptional wine, you must respect your land as well as your

Tasting notes from the Terroirists

Terroir's three proprietors—Dagan Minestro, Guillaume Gerard, and Luc Ertoran (*left to right*)—choose six of their favorite wines and provide notes.

2006 Coenobium vino di tavola di lazio (\$23) Winemaker Giampero Bea is making this brilliant white in conjunction with an Umbrian monastery. A blend of Verdicchio, Grechetto, Trebbiano, and Malvasia, the wine is vinified using no temperature control and very little *élevage* [maturing before bottling]. This vintage has bright yet subtle acidity, with a very clean initial push on the palate, and beautiful floral characteristics as it opens, often reaching its peak the day after opening. A testament to natural winemaking, as well as an example of what intact biology can produce in an ancient, undisturbed location.

—D.M.

2002 Triacca, Valtellina Superiore (\$36) Nebbiolo from northern Italy, grown at a 2,600-foot elevation along the Swiss border. This has to be my favorite wine from a "bad year," one that

delivered erratic weather throughout most of Italy, with extensive rain, hail, and sleet followed by a very warm summer. But those above the snow line saw a different year altogether. Here the Nebbiolo ripened beautifully, with great acidity and a solid, sustaining tannic structure. This varietal speaks to me with a Pinot-like acidity, but it also has the capacity to develop into a bigger wine, depending on ripeness and region. If you love Pinot Noir, it's time for you to meet its Italian cousin, Nebbiolo.

—D.M.

2004 Jacques Puffeney, Arbois "Poulsard" (\$26.50) Jacques Puffeney, son of a vineyard worker, started making wine at just 17 years old. Considered the "pope" of Arbois, a small appellation close to the Swiss border in France, his "Poulsard" is



one of my favorite reds—light, lean, and amazingly mineral, with beautiful notes of red fruits and perfect acidity. This, along with some Beaujolais we carry, is the perfect

summer wine. What I would be drinking on a sunny Sunday in Dolores Park...if I had a Sunday off! —G.G.

2006 Catherine et Pierre Breton, Bourgueil "La Dilettante" (\$22.50) Catherine and Pierre Breton are making some of the most exciting Cabernet Franc in the Loire these days, working their vineyards biodynamically, and not adding any sulfur during either vinification or bottling. "La Dilettante" is Catherine's wine. She uses carbonic maceration on whole clusters to start the fermentation, and releases the wine relatively early to be drunk "on the fruit." Light (for a Cab Franc), fruity, with a great sense of terroir, this wine is to be served at cellar temperature and enjoyed on a sunny day with a BBQ or some charcuterie. —G.G.

2002 Radikon "Oslavje," Friuli (\$52)

One of those "weird wines" that we love so much at Terroir. Long maceration on the skins, no temperature control, no sulfur—the wine is made in the vineyard, not in a lab. "Oslavje" is a blend of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Gris. It's an orange-colored, tannic white wine, with loads of spices, white flowers, and apples on the nose: a perfect match for aged cheese or any rich, hearty traditional Friulian dish such as a creamy chicken with potatoes. —L.E.

2006 Jean Foillard, Morgon "Côte du Py" (\$29) The vineyard is located in Villie-Morgon (Beaujolais). Jean started in the early '80s as an employee, eventually renting and then buying this vineyard. I like all the wines at the shop, but Foillard's "Côte du Py" delights me with its capacity to match any situation: meat, fish, lunch, brunch, dinner, breakfast. It is a light, refreshing wine with red fruit accents and low tannins but still showing a great structure and aging capability. This wine would turn any Zinfandel drinker—well, *almost any*—into a Beaujolais fanatic. —L.E.

'We take risks because we're wine geeks, not businessmen.'

customers. But using organic grapes is not enough. What about the additions of sulfur and enzymes? If you add three chemicals to a wine it becomes a cocktail. And we don't have a license to sell cocktails."


When asked if that means all of Terroir's wines are free of added sulfites, Gerard responds, "We certainly have the largest list of wines in the States with no added sulfur, but not all our wines are sulfur free. When they are not, we allow for only very small amounts"—10 to 35 milligrams per liter.

Striving for poetry

"We try to give exposure to wines people have never had before," says Gerard. "Everybody's selling a Napa Cab or Sonoma Chardonnay. We're trying to do something different."

To that end, Terroir admittedly offers "some weird stuff," such as an oxidized but delicious Arbois from France's Jura region. "We take risks because we're wine geeks, not businessmen," he jokes. In another perhaps risk-taking move, Terroir, unlike the majority of wine outlets, shuns the numbers game, and never uses scorecards from publications as sales tools. "It would be like putting numbers on people," Gerard laughs. "Oh, by the way, I met your friend today—he was an 82. What exactly does that *mean*?"

This kind of personal touch and outspoken honesty are what makes a visit to Terroir, or Biondivino on Green Street (see *Edible San Francisco's* Winter 2008 issue), Kermit Lynch in Berkeley, or any other neighborhood wine shop so much more rewarding, informative, perhaps even palate-changing than shopping online or at some large and impersonal dis-counter or grocery store.

As Ertoran puts it, "What makes me happy is a customer who comes in saying he likes Zinfandel. We pour him a Beaujolais-Villages, and he goes crazy for the wine. Of course, he likes it: it's got zero added sulfur, no enzymes, and tastes real, not factory made. We believe 100% in every wine we sell. Some of these wines have flaws, but that's what makes them what they are. We're not striving for perfection like UC Davis is—we're striving for poetry, for a wine that has a story to tell." 

Wayne Garcia is a freelance writer and illustrator. He and his wife Sher live in San Francisco, where his idea of a perfect weekend involves a trip to the Ferry Plaza farmers market followed by an afternoon in the kitchen preparing dinner for friends.

NO PESTS WERE *HARMED* in the MAKING OF THIS AD.



Photo by Curtis Myers

MEET JIM ELDON, OF FIDDLER'S GREEN FARM THURSDAYS & SUNDAYS AT THE MARIN CIVIC CENTER

The only thing we killed during this photo shoot were a few hunger pains. Once you've tasted salad greens fresh from the field, you can never go back.

Want to learn more? Start at one of the places where Bay Area organic farming got its start. In 1982, Fiddler's Green became the first certified organic farm in the Capay Valley. Come meet farmer Jim Eldon at the Marin Farmers Market and hear stories of organic farming's past, where it is now, and what its future holds. Just be sure to try some of Jim's various exotic greens. They're as fresh as you can get. No pesticides. No middlemen. And no worries.

Jim Eldon has been bringing odd-ball varieties of leafy greens, vegetables, and fruits to the Marin Farmers Markets since 1991.

For the full interview visit marinfarmersmarket.org.



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MARIN CIVIC CENTER (SUN & THURS. 8-1, YEAR ROUND)

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