

France, Bordeaux: Les Vins d'Olivier Dauga

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You can tell a man by his shirt. Even before shaking a stranger's hand you will have clocked his shirt and drawn conclusions. Plain or patterned? Lapels long or short? Buttoned to the collar or showing a bit of chest hair? Plain white, pastels or Hawaiian beach party? Your observations betray someone's personality. I remember meeting wine consultant Olivier Dauga for the first time in London. Such was the glare emitted from his shirt that I started looking for my sunglasses. Loud? It made The Who sound like a string quartet stuck on pianissimo. And I soon discovered that his personality mirrored his sartorial sense: outspoken, fun, flamboyant, brimming with life and with a sense of humor uncommon in Bordeaux. He's also an intelligent winemaker.



A toned-down Olivier in white shirt - though I like the velvet jacket.

Born in Libourne, Olivier worked as technical director at Châteaux Sociando Mallet, La Tour Carnet and La Tour de By/Haut-Condissas before setting up his own company, "La Faiseur de Vin." Since 2004 Olivier has been joined by his partner Cathy Socasau, who worked for a *négociant* in the Médoc. Together they make an engaging pair: serious about their work but knowing when to play. Though their clients are mainly Bordeaux, they focus less upon Cru Classé but instead on the Côtes de Bourg and Côtes de Blaye, plus a handful on the Right Bank. Their clients extend farther toward the South of France in Minervois and Corbière and even as far as the Ukraine.

Olivier's approach is quite unusual and inspired by the idea of "biotope." It essentially boils down to a holistic approach toward respecting nature. He does not pursue organic viticulture, wary of excessive use of copper in the vineyard, which counts out biodynamics as well. "As soon as something becomes difficult, I have a problem with it," he remarks on the subject, "as do most consumers."

I have tasted with Olivier a few times over the years. It is refreshing to get away from the famous names that few can afford, back to what Bordeaux does best: producing great wines at prices that most consumers are happy to pay. For a number of these wines you can get change from a 20-dollar bill. Try that in Burgundy. When I spent my solitary day at Vinexpo I tasted through Olivier's Bordeaux range and while not all the wines hit the sweet spot, as I expected, there are many that represent fantastic value. For sure, the **2014 Avant Garde** will not win my wine of the year, but for \$12.00? Count me in. Or how about the cute-sounding **2014 Château La Pirouette**, an unusual 50/50 blend of Merlot and Petit Verdot that works a treat. Here the two varieties beautifully married and carried the new oak with ease.

I will leave you to peruse the tasting notes at your discretion. Many of these wines are available in the United States through various importers.

—Neal Martin

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