

## Andrea Franchetti to make Episode 3 in Bordeaux

You may have read about the fascinating experiment currently being conducted at Ch d'Arsac on the slightly contentious border of the Margaux appellation. A different high-profile winemaker is being invited each year to transform a particular plot on this extensive property into a special Winemakers' Collection cuvée – the idea being to show the influence of man versus terroir.

D'Arsac is owned by the ambitious wine merchant Philippe Raoux, who has completely renovated the property, installing his spectacular sculpture collection there, and is also busy constructing La Winery nearby, a ground-breaking, wine-related tourist destination that will be unusually welcoming of visitors to the Médoc.

The Winemakers' Collection scheme is operated in partnership with Jean-François Moueix's négociant company Bordeaux Millésimes, whose director Dominique Renard told me about the experiment, "It's a little bit like asking the best chefs in the world to come in your kitchen to cook the same recipe with the same ingredients but each of them *à leur façon...*"

The winemaker chosen to make the debut vintage or 'Episode 1', 2005, was – who else? – Michel Rolland; and Episode 2 in 2006, by another, rather more academic Bordeaux luminary, Denis Dubourdieu. The difficult 2007 vintage has been consigned to a foreigner, Andrea Franchetti of Tenuta di Trinoro, for the first time.

Earlier this month in Tuscany Franchetti confessed, "I agreed to do it out of sheer vanity. When I was invited to be the third winemaker, I experienced a mix of fear and vanity and I had to make vanity win."

I have not tasted the first two cuvées but of course Franchetti has. "The Michel Rolland and Denis Dubourdieu wines are very different and are getting even more different as time goes on. The Rolland wine is very Rolland and the Dubourdieu wine stands out very definitely." Since the late 1990s Franchetti has managed to produce some very fine, long-lived though lush Bordeaux blends on his Tenuta di Trinoro estate in the Val d'Orcia.

Franchetti has chosen a larger area to work with than his predecessors - 20 rather than 15 ha – because he is asking for even more dramatic crop-thinning (which may well be necessary anyway in such a damp and disease-prone growing season as 2007) and no fertilisation of the soil. He says he is particularly impressed by the professionalism of the team looking after his plot of vines, shared equally between Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

Each visiting winemaker is free to ask for exactly what they want in vineyard and cellar. He has requested barrels with extra-large bungs so that he can put some skins into the barrels eventually. He says he is looking for a rather harder, slower-maturing style of wine.

"I like the sandy soils here," says Franchetti, who will be stretched during the summer and autumn between Margaux and his vines in southern Tuscany and those on the slopes of Etna in Sicily, where he makes Passopisciaro – although at least the harvests are very unlikely to coincide. The harvest at Arsac should be over by mid September whereas the

grapes are usually left on the vine until November at both his Italian high-altitude properties. “It’s incredibly helpful not to have autumn rain,” is how Franchetti puts it with some understatement.

Franchetti is no stranger to Bordeaux. He has shown his Tenuta di Trinoro wines en primeur there for years and is a good friend of the likes of Alain Vauthier of Ausone. “I ended up knowing the right bank better but now I’m learning more about the left bank. It’s fantastic to make wine in the Médoc.”

Reading the runes it looks as though the team behind the Winemakers' Collection are particularly anxious to recruit a California winemaker, having dropped heavy hints that the third winemaker would be American. Perhaps the delay was down to the detail of the prenup agreement. Obvious candidates might be Manfred Krankl of Sine Qua Non, no stranger to international partnerships, or even a cosmopolitan Spaniard such as Alvaro Palacios of L’Ermita.

Says Dominique Renard, who has been overseeing the project with his son, “We wanted to see if the human influence, through different winemakers, was directly having an effect on the style of the wine or if the terroir was able to keep a sort of predominance. The difference in style between the first wines is enormous.”

About 5,000 cases are made each year of this AC Haut-Médoc, which doesn’t mention Arsac on the label but features a moody black and white, rather cinematic image of the winemaker. They are sold on the Bordeaux place and are aimed primarily at the UK and US markets. Winesearcher lists two US retailers offering the Rolland wine at \$40 a bottle.

*Jancis Robinson*