



Saint Pourçain, an appellation in the Allier department, in the eastern part of the Loire, was once a flourishing wine region that rivaled Burgundy as the favorite of kings and clergy of the Middle Ages. Today Saint Pourçain's vineyards are a fraction of their former size, with fewer than 600 ha of vines in production, down from 8,000 ha at its prime. Yet St. Pourcain is experiencing a renaissance: having received AOC status in 2009, the appellation's winemakers are working cooperatively in a shared effort to revitalize and expand its vineyards.

At the heart of this group of winegrowers is Denis Barbara. He is a major contributor to the revitalization and future of the Saint Pourçain vignoble through what he calls his work ethic of total engagement: respect for terroir, intensive work in the vines, focused harvest of the fruit, a passion for the craft and a philosophy of cooperation.



Please tell us the origins of Domaine Grosbot-Barbara, what was your vision and how did you create the Domaine that it is today?

I am the grand-son of a winemaker in Saint Pourçain, but circumstances did not allow me to assume responsibilities at his domain. After finishing my studies in Burgundy, then an additional training in Beaujolais, followed by a year in Macon, I still didn't know what I was going to do, what my next job would be or even where. Having a companion and a child, I didn't want to be far away from them. By luck one evening I received a call from M Grosbot, a winemaker (of a family domain passed on from father to son since 1910) in the commune of Bransat in the appellation Saint Pourçain, He was soon to retire and did not want to sell his domain, or his vines. We were mutual acquaintances, it was an easy decision for both of us to agree to work together.

We partnered in 1996, thus the domain name Grosbot-Barbara (the elder with years of wine making experience and the *savoir-faire* passed along by generations, and the younger with a scientific knowledge of plant cultivation and methods of work in the vines to achieve better quality with more precise and pointed technologies.) The goal was to continue work and insure the future production of the domain, to create a plan to work better and more efficiently, and to create a newfound recognition and appreciation for the appellation St Pourçain beyond its region of origin, to make wines that express from where they come (their terroir and the Bourbon region), and to differentiate among parcels and thus offer a wider and more distinctive selection of wines.

Today, we have achieved these objectives, however each day it is essential to continue this work, this qualitative approach in order to preserve the history and continue the life of these vineyards. With the help of three commercial agents, covering a large part of France, and with the exporting of our wines to the USA (thanks to Wine Traditions, Ltd.) and in Canada (thanks to Vini-Vins) we are very happy with the recognition of our work, permitting the discovery of our vineyards and our wines.



St Pourçain is a wine growing region with an important history; what inspires you about Saint Pourçain, its history, its terroir, its local culture?

The vineyards of St Pourçain are situated geographically in the *department* of the Allier, in central France. Saint Pourçain has some of the oldest vineyards in France, and also the famous Tronçais forest, known nationally (and internationally) for the quality of its wood, established in 1669 by Colbert, minister to Louis XIV.

Historically, in our region of the *Bourbonnais*, so named because it was the place of origin of the Bourbon family, the wine of Saint Pourçain had its time of glory. In the era of the Bourbon Kings of France, connoisseurs drank St Pourçain as they did Burgundy! But while Burgundy continued to expand in vineyards as well as reputation, St Pourçain lost a considerable part of its planted surface (from 8000 ha to 598 ha) and thus, slowly, over a long period of time, lost its fame and importance as a wine producing region.

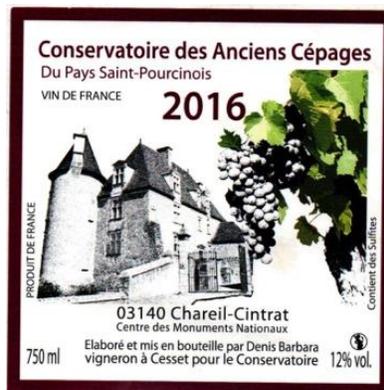
For too long in our region, the commercialization and professionalization of wine was not an economic priority. This resulted in great damage to the vineyards. And although for several years now Saint Pourçain's notoriety has seen considerable development, it is absolutely necessary for us to continue to envision and believe in its future. We must work diligently to maintain our vines at standards that allow us to produce wines of quality and then be prepared and able to pass on the properties to the next generation so that we continue to strengthen the reputation of the appellation.

Geologically the vines are grown on 3 types of soil situated along the Allier river: sandy, clay-limestone and granite. As far as grape varieties, we grow gamay and pinot noir for the reds and for whites we have chardonnay and tresallier, a cousin of SACY found in the vineyards of CHABLIS, used mostly for making sparkling wines.



You are a guardian of patrimony. In fact you are the winemaker at Le Conservatoire des Anciens Cépages, a vineyard planted to the historic grapes of the region. Can you tell us a about that?

I am neither the initiator, nor the creator nor the guardian of the *Conservatoire des Anciens Cépages*. However, it seemed unthinkable to me not to produce wine from the grapes grown there, this patrimony of old varieties that were collected from vineyards and garden plots throughout the appellation. After many meetings, year after year, approaching different winemakers, proposing to share this desire to make a wine from these heritage grapes, without finding any willing partners, I finally committed to vinifying by myself a white wine which belongs to the conservatory. The production ranges between 1,000 and 2,000 bottles according to the climactic vagaries of the year. The wine is made from several white varieties and matured in Tronçais barrels, making it a wine that is quite special and unique. The wine is sold only at the CAC and at a wine shop in St Pourçain, *Qui l'Eut Cru*





At Domaine Grosbot-Barbara, you have a single vineyard, "Quarteron", that you planted along with your friends as a cooperative project. Please describe the vineyard and your ideas that inspired it?

Ahhh, yes, le Quarteron!..... passionate about my profession, I wanted to share my experiences with interested wine lovers, both novice and sophisticated. Having many such acquaintances, I chose a group of willing participants and proposed that we plant a vineyard together on a parcel of land at the Domaine called "Le Quarteron". This was for them to see how much easier it is to discover a wine than it is to carry out the work in the vines and the cellar throughout the year in order to produce a wine and then to be able to savor it.

Le Quarteron was planted in 2006. Of course all those original participants in the planting of it were not, and often are not able to be present to work in the vineyard. The calendar of work in Nature is difficult to program, and does not align with the schedules of those who do not work in professions related to her. Yet, this vineyard exists and thrives, giving each year a new vintage for all participants to share. Members of many varied professions have become ambassadors, and through their own words speak to those around them of this vineyard, of the wine and of the winemaking region of St Pourçain.

This wine can be found on the table of J. DECORET, the sole Michelin starred restaurant of the Allier and is sold at our Domaine with a label that changes each year, chosen by the members of Quarteron. It is a blend of chardonnay and tresallier grown on granite soil, also with a bit of Sauvignon, fermented and matured in barrels, always of oak from the Tronçais forest.





How do you see the future of winemaking in Saint Pouçain?

Saint Pourçain could have a great future if we make available the means required and if we believe in it. Wine consumption has decreased in France over recent years, while globally people are drinking more wines. In France, increasingly, consumers have grown tired of the standardized styles of certain appellations and are unwilling to pay the prices for those wines

when they cannot be sure of their quality. As a result they are turning toward smaller, lesser known appellations and producers, seeking out contact with the winemakers and discovery of their wines.

Certain *restaurateurs* are taking the same approach, seeking to discover wines from vineyards that are less or little known, and making them part of the attraction to their tables. This is a great advantage for us. It is in our interest to be present and stand up for our vineyards, our production, and so in doing refine our own *savoir-faire*.

Enotourism is a recent concept, but we must not think that it takes a lot of means; it is enough to be present, to understand how to welcome guests warmly and how to share our knowledge, expertise and to offer the keys, the the pathways to discovering what is a region, a *terroir*, what man brings to it. This requires a lot of personal investment, presence and time, but this is the only way that we can renew interest and make our wines desirable once again. It's necessary that every winemaker understands that we must all be actors in maintaining our vineyards and making them prosper. And we must act as ambassadors of our region. It is equally necessary that there be more winemakers in the future to ensure the long life of our vineyards.

We must not confuse « *savoir-faire* » and « *faire-savoir* ». « *Savoir-faire* » is , above all, the responsibility of the winemaker. The « *faire-savoir* » requires that the vineyard work be authentic and constant in order to advance the vineyard. Uniformization and standardization must be banned in order to honestly propose to wine consumers and future clients an approach that many of them expect and want. That is to say a reasoning and philosophy of the craft, along with a conscious production which favors quality and the criteria of belonging to a place, a plant, a person, in order to reveal St Pourçain's unique qualities.



